

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

CAMPAIGN SUPPLEMENT

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

# POWER OF FAERÛN™



Ed Greenwood and Eric L. Boyd

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# INTRODUCTION

**B**y all the Watching Gods, this is *too much!*" The armored fist of the Lord of Storm Tower crashed down on the council table. No, *into* the council table.

The Steward of Storm Vale neither flinched nor changed expression, though the Throne Lord's gleaming gauntlet left a deep depression in the polished duskwood. Such marring was nothing compared to what had already been done to the once-prosperous vale all around them. *In another two summers we'll be just one more unknown backwater of Tethyr, he thought. I wonder where Lord Aviatharr's bones will be then.*

"Steward!" Aviatharr roared, as if Braegrel was at the far end of the Tower rather than seated right across the table, "where's that sneering high-nose of a herald? Bring him here at once—and those fool priests, too!"

The steward assumed his best expression of politely puzzled interest. "Which *particular* 'fool priests,' my lord?"

"*All* of—the *high* priests, you idiot!" Aviatharr spat, slamming his other fist down. It held his usual heavy goblet, but was bare—and as Braegrel rose and bowed with precise correctness, he took some satisfaction in watching that goblet ring off the floor, and the Throne Lord wince and wring his numbed hand.

Three familiar faces were waiting in the gloomy passage outside. The steward never slowed, but muttered as he brushed past, "Strike soon, or Storm Vale will be part of the Golden Marches before summer's done."

The Master of the Hunt arched a knowing eyebrow, but the Master of the Dungeons and the Sword of the Gates kept their

faces as still as stone. The Sword casually turned aside his cloak to reveal a long dagger gleaming ready in his hand.

Ah. It seemed that summer might end this very day in Stormsword Castle, and thus it was time for a certain Steward—seen as the Throne Lord's friend, confidant, and eager instrument, despite a far different truth—to disappear from the Vale forever. Before someone decided stewards might have ambitions best served with the blade of a handy dagger.

Braegrel whirled, but the Sword of the Gates hadn't moved a boot. The wry smile on the guardcaptain's face told Braegrel he knew exactly what had been going through the steward's mind. The Master of the Hunt was striding into the council chamber, saying something Braegrel was too far away to hear.

The steward hurried to the swiftest stair down, hurrying now—and froze.

There were voices below, where there should have been only silence. The door at the foot of this stair was kept locked, and . . .

"The duke has been apprised of Her Majesty's will in this matter and stands in full agreement, My Lords Most Holy. The ducal forces await your signal."

The steward drew back. He knew those unhurried, cultured tones: Rhaurabbyn, the envoy of Tethyr. Which meant . . .

"The Lord Herald here has perused our agreement. You confirm the royal seal, gallant Summerthorn?"

"Lord Speaker, I do. The bond between you is clear. I accompany you now to bear stern witness to Throne Lord Aviatharr's response."

"Good, good," two voices murmured—the very high priests Braegrel had been sent to fetch.

Ascending toward him swiftly: the herald, the envoy, and the two holy lords. Braegrel ducked back out into the passage, hastening toward a certain tapestry.

A bright, soundless flash of magic burst from the council chamber, and a body—or rather, various pieces of what had been

*Weary of this land? There's another yonder that hasn't felt the heavy scourge of your triumphal might yet. A lifetime only holds so many conquests. . . .*

Vervaen Namlarkant  
Master Merchant of Sheirtalar  
*My Utterances to Important Folk*  
Year of the Turret

a body—bounced and thudded out the council chamber doorway. Braegrel winced and ducked behind the tapestry.

It took but a moment to open the secret door and step through. Whatever magic Aviatharr had used to slay the three courtiers, his doom was sealed. The priests had made a pact with Tethyr—and neither the Duke of the Golden Marches nor those priests needed the snarling tirades of a throneless ex-lord. Or his servile steward.

The coins, the clothes, the ring of spells—all had been prepared long ago. He must move quickly, and spend an unpleasant night fleeing this life, but at least Braegrel still had a neck to call his own.

He dressed hastily, thrusting his robes into the stone-weighted sack that would soon greet the moat. The heavy purse jingled, but . . . no, that sound was coming from someone *else!*

He clawed for his dagger. “Who’s there?”

“Steward, d’you think you’re the only one who prepared for this day?” Aviatharr’s rough whisper was right by his ear. “If I unhood my lantern, will you put away that silly knife and help me with this wig?”

## using this book

This book gives players suggested tactics, and descriptions of possible pitfalls and opportunities, for guiding their characters into dominance in a campaign set in Faerûn. Its lore and mechanics can readily be used in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games that use other settings.

Dungeon Masters will find a treasure trove of adventure ideas in these pages as well as guidelines for detailing ruling courts and other institutions and power groups as well as handling political struggles, crises, and daily situations in play.

**Chapter 1: Order in the Court.** Rulers might sit on thrones and thunder decrees, but courtiers do the work of turning royal decisions into daily rulership. This chapter isn’t about playing king or queen, but about how to rise through the ranks of a ruling court, dealing with intrigues and other political matters. Common court ranks and “the way things work” in the formal rulership of a realm or city-state are explored, and a sample court hierarchy is provided.

**Chapter 2: Win the Battlefield.** Disputes in Faerûn all too often erupt into open armed conflict. This chapter deals with the many facets of military leadership, from battlefield command to logistics and the daily diplomacy of making various ranks work together.

**Chapter 3: Keep the Faith.** Deities are very real in Faerûn and their priesthoods wield tremendous power. This chapter describes how holy authority “works” and is used as well as how to rise in rank and influence within a priesthood. Conflicts both inside a faith and between faiths are explored.

**Chapter 4: Play the Market.** Faerûn of today is shaped by its mercantile trade, which literally makes it possible for populations in particular locations to exist (by providing food and goods from afar). Successful merchants and business magnates have been gaining ever more importance over the last thousand years in Faerûn until, in many cases, they are more wealthy and powerful than rulers who have crowns and thrones. This chapter describes trade

routes, costers, trade consortiums, and methods for controlling them or rising to dominance within or over them. Coins can be sharper than swords.

**Chapter 5: Tame the Frontier.** The everchanging political landscape of Faerûn has its so-called “civilized” areas and its wilderlands, and wherever the two meet is a frontier area. Whether civilization is expanding or shrinking, such transitional locales are rich in adventure—and offer great opportunities for enrichment and rulership to ambitious adventurers. This chapter describes the challenges facing a frontier leader as well as how officials in a rural domain deal with perils such as bandits and marauding monsters.

**Chapter 6: King of the Road.** Between rugged frontiers and glittering cities are the rural areas, where farms that feed those cities lie and outlaws (even local “robber barons”) might lurk. This chapter explores the lives and campaign use of marshals and heralds, two very different arms of authority, who can be PCs, opponents to PCs, or officials who serve PC rulers.

**Chapter 7: High-Level Challenges.** Powerful PCs need powerful adversaries. The D&D game has seen a long line of published adventures featuring formidable villains, and this chapter explores how to use deities, great dragons, rival adventurers, and invading armies as PC challenges in a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign.

**Chapter 8: The Border Kingdoms.** A legendary region of tiny, ever-changing kingdoms ruled by adventurers, outcasts, and misfits, this lush coastal area is “the” battleground for carefree adventuring mayhem. This chapter describes current conditions there and explores opportunities for PC heroes.

**Chapter 9: How To Rule.** This section of the book explores the game mechanics that govern the situations explored in the preceding chapters of the book, notably Leadership and Influence. The modifiers and tables herein can readily be used in any DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game.

## what you need to play

To use this supplement, you need the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *Player’s Handbook*, *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, and *Monster Manual*, plus the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting*.

Finally, several other D&D and FORGOTTEN REALMS supplements are referenced herein. In many cases, this reference is in the form of a superscript abbreviation of the book’s title, which is tacked onto the end of the name of a spell, prestige class, or some other game element. The books and their abbreviations are as follows: *Book of Exalted Deeds* (BE), *Book of Vile Darkness* (BV), *Champions of Ruin* (CR), *City of Splendors: Waterdeep* (CS), *Champions of Valor* (CV), *Complete Adventurer* (CA), *Complete Arcane* (CAr), *Complete Divine* (CD), *Complete Warrior* (CW), *Dungeon Master’s Guide II* (DM2), *Draconomicon* (Dra), *Epic Level Handbook* (EL), *Faiths and Pantheons* (FP), *Heroes of Battle* (HB), *Lords of Darkness* (LD), *Lost Empires of Faerûn* (LE), *Libris Mortis* (LM), *Magic of Faerûn* (Mag), *Miniatures Handbook* (MH), *Monstrous Compendium: Monsters of Faerûn* (Mon), *Manual of the Planes* (MP), *Player’s Guide to Faerûn* (PG), *Planar Handbook* (Pla), *Races of Faerûn* (Rac), *Races of the Wild* (RW), *Shining South* (SS), *Unapproachable East* (Una), and *Underdark* (Und).

# ORDER IN THE COURT

The grand, glittering center of pomp, circumstance, and daily power in any realm of Faerûn is its central court (seat of government). This power is echoed in every local lord's audience or law-hearing, from bustling cities to impromptu gatherings in tiny wilderland taverns or at a roadside gallows.

The person at the top—the queen, empress, or Grand High Sceptanar—won the right to rule by force (though invasion and conquest, usurping the throne, murder and manipulation, or public single combat) or inherited it, usually, from someone or the descendant of someone who took power by force.

A PC adventurer can rise to such lofty heights, too, but in any court there are a lot of powerful people to be bested on the way up the ladders of power. It's a sages' truism that no king rules for long without the support of the strongest nobles, high priests, or other personages of influence in the realm. In the long-ago land of Raerithra, in what's now the eastern Border Kingdoms, the dominant "personage" was an ancient dragon who slept most of the time, but considered the realm his personal domain.

When an outlander seizes a crown by force, all powerful individuals in the realm will measure the usurper's strength and usually support her only if she's clearly superior to home-grown, familiar claimants and aspirants to the throne ("the devils we know"). Many an usurper has ruled for mere days before being slain by a cabal of nobles who had been waiting for someone to do away with the old king so they could put their "preferred claimant" (puppet) on the throne.

Even for those whose ambition isn't as lofty as a crown, the endless intrigues of any court offer a rich (and sometimes bewildering) life of political maneuvering, detecting or forming

temporary alliances or long-term cabals and conspiracies, and building contacts and loyalties.

PC "heroes" who come to court (either on their own or summoned by a ruler who desires their support, service, or to keep an eye on them) will be swept up in court intrigues whether they want to be or not, serving as unwitting dupes, resentful pawns, or diving right in and trying to win power, influence, and titled, salaried offices.

The paths to success in any court consist of always being judged more useful than expendable by the "right people" (usually whoever is "the power behind the throne," as the wizard Vangerdahast was for decades in Cormyr), and in having talents or strengths that benefit the realm without openly threatening the current balance of power at court (and therefore being considered a "danger to be swiftly disposed of" by most courtiers).

Bards and others who live by their wits, if they are accomplished actors with strong self-control, often fare well in the ever-shifting, uncertain landscape of a court. Fighters of prowess and demonstrated accomplishment are clear assets to the realm—though susceptible to being sent away into danger if the realm is threatened by armed foes. Sorcerers and wizards whose personal abilities aren't too paltry or too easily measured with precision (unless they're so mighty in Art that knowing their powers doesn't much help most courtiers) are so potentially formidable that any courtier will think twice about making enemies of them or trying to directly blame them for anything. However, making others mistrust a wielder of strong arcane spells might be all too easy.

A newcomer at court—and especially any noble ascending to a title—should beware of being seen to "fall in with the wrong crowd" or even "a particular crowd." Those who try to befriend you and involve you in their revels, private discussions, and diversions will have their own reasons for doing so. Spread yourself around so no one can "taint" you by making other factions think you've allied yourself firmly with their aims or circle of friends. It's fine to choose your friends, as long as you're making the choice. Those who drift tend to have their choices made for them.

## The Temporal Leader

Every individual in a court hierarchy has some power, from a queen on her throne to the scullery-maid who empties kitchen scraps onto the middens. In some courts, elaborate systems of bribes and power-plays unfold constantly among servants, largely hidden from commoners and the high-and-mighty alike. As Auldre Lethleaf, the most junior scribe at the Royal Court of Suzail, put it: “When I write a contract, the realm’s fate is in my hands, no matter what Alaphondar or the highnose envoys *think* they’ve agreed upon with some merchant of Sembia or Dale lordling. So sneer at me at your peril.”

However, most citizens in any realm believe true daily power and authority rests in leaders: the rulers on thrones and the stewards or most senior courtiers who guard access to those thrones.

### What Do Rulers and Stewards Do?

Scores of servants and courtiers—sometimes hundreds or even thousands of such functionaries—enact laws, policies, and royal decrees, from putting a new coin into circulation to requiring that a certain hue of gown or tunic be worn on a particular feast-day. However, those laws, policies, and decrees are decided upon by rulers or their stewards even if the wording, details, and enforcement of such things are left to others—sometimes resulting in a complete subversion of the decision-maker’s intent.

Thus, rulers and their stewards make decisions. Some rulers try to decide *everything*, right down to the prices charged by shoemakers in distant villages. Others spend their days hunting, dallying with folk who interest them, eating and drinking, or pursuing unusual whims and hobbies (such as whittling caricatures of other rulers, or breeding prize snakes, or joining—or even founding—strange cults), and leave all decisions to their stewards. Most rulers leave the small daily details to courtiers, but want to make all of the major decisions (such as anything to do with wars, alliances, major trade agreements, and treatment of their kin or control over who they or their kin marries) themselves. If their courtiers dislike a ruler’s judgment, they tend to try to keep as much of what’s going on secret from the ruler as they can, so that they (rather than the ruler) can quietly make most of the decisions.

Regardless of how much they delegate, rulers tend to become very angry if they learn or believe they’ve been kept ignorant

of important events so others can make decisions without them. They regard this as a disloyal betrayal of trust—because they must trust stewards (just as stewards must either run huge spy networks or in turn trust lower-ranking courtiers reporting up the hierarchy to them) to keep them informed of everything important happening in the realm. Few rulers survive for long in deliberate ignorance of who might rebel in their realm, who’s rising in wealth and power, who’s falling, and who feels restless or disaffected or ready for a change in rulership.

In many a court in Faerûn, various courtiers claim to “speak for the King,” either verbally or by writing letters and decrees.

Various citizens (particularly nobles and lower-ranked courtiers) invariably suspect that some courtiers purporting to speak for the ruler are making decisions in his name without the King even knowing about the matters at hand, let alone realizing a decision has been made by anyone. Most rulers would be outraged (often far enough to literally demand the courtier’s head) if they learn that a courtier has been keeping them ignorant of matters and making decisions *in their name* (forging their signature, for instance).

### Stewards and Titles

These most powerful courtiers of a realm might not actually be called “stewards” in every land. Sometimes that specific title is formally used for minor courtiers (the head of a royal or noble household, for example, although “seneschal” and “castellan” are employed

in some lands for the officials who run a castle, and “steward” sometimes just means the official in charge of the domestic servants). In Waterdeep, the only sort of steward is a personal servant to male nobles; every noble “lord,” from graybeards to young toddlers, has a personal steward who pays his bills for him and delivers important messages on his behalf. Thus, in some realms, the steward is the Lord High Chamberlain, Chancellor, the Grand Vizier, the First Lord of the Court, or another grand and fanciful title.

Titles often change with local fashion or when rulers change: If the last Lord High Steward of the Realm was a tyrant or evil debauched wizard who did horrible things to servants—or if he was just too close a friend to the last king, now deposed—it’s unlikely his successor in the post will want to be called “Lord High Steward” when a moment’s creativity can create a “Lord Advisor Most Loyal.”



*The dwarf steward arrives, with escort*



Moreover, titles tend to be defined as offices with specific powers, and a person trying to acquire new powers will often find it easier to assume a new title, rather than forcing courtiers relying on decades or centuries of tradition to change their definitions of what authority a “Master of the Back Gate” or a “Lord Steward Most Dreadful of the Realm Entire” has.

## playing the political game

If the point made by Underscribe of the Understairs Auldre—that every courtier holds some measure of power—is dismissed in favor of considering only courtiers who make decisions that govern the actions of many other courtiers, and not just affect the realm in very small ways, it becomes clear that some decisions, unintentionally or otherwise, can easily contradict or work against other decisions. Any perceptive outlander who examines the true organization and daily functioning of many courts will conclude that this is the norm rather than the exception, and that some courts seem to have been—or even can be proven to have been—deliberately set up that way, with rival departments, cabals, or allied offices struggling against others to “get their way.”

Who wins, on a daily basis, is occasionally a matter of outside influences (the weather, crop failures, wars, or plagues), but more often the result of daily politics: trading favors for support (or at least lack of opposition), making alliances, and bribing other courtiers—usually by relinquishing power or transferring some budget or agreeing on some matter of contention, rather than actually transferring coins—to go along with something. The wise newcomer says little (remember: “A word said cannot be unsaid”) and observes much, seeking to learn how a court or court department or household “works” before seeking to change things or energetically “play the game.”

## YOU ARE A DOMAIN LEADER OR STEWARD—NOW WHAT?

Stewards and “regional head” officials (the Local Lords of Cormyr, for example) are supposedly above most of the horse-trading engaged in by lower-ranking courtiers because they have enough power to dismiss courtiers who refuse to follow their wishes. The truth is that they must constantly do the same sort of horse-trading with officials who outrank them, or the ruler, or wealthy nobles or merchants who have the coins the ruler needs to accomplish anything or to stay in power.

Thus, any senior courtier (just like all of his underlings) needs to know his rivals (those competing for the same funds or jurisdiction) and enemies (persons who for reasons of hatred or policy will oppose everything he does). To be effective, this doesn’t just mean identifying them—it means learning their aims, likes, dislikes, opinions, and habits. Therefore, spies are often vitally necessary to a courtier.

It has been said that diplomacy is the art of saying “Nice doggie!” until you can find a large enough stick to deal with that doggie another way. Your public image—and the perception

people have of what you might do in reaction to certain things, not just “who you are” right now—is a large part of your success or failure as a courtier. It’s not just what you do that’s important, it’s the manner in which you do it.

If you must order the slaughter of all oxen in a valley to get rid of a dangerous shapeshifting monster, do you do so sadly, or with offers of compensation, or do you try to have it done swiftly, without warning or explanation? Is the safety of the entire realm more important than being understood, and being seen to “do the right thing,” by folk in that valley?

Do you play the “I’m everyone’s friend, friend, and I’d like to be yours!” game in public, or is that attitude really yours all the time? If it’s not, how swiftly do you let the mask slip? Word will get around swiftly if you offer outlaws or malcontents a friendly parley—and then have them slain when they arrive for it. Servants will whisper very energetically if you fly into rages or dress up in funny costumes and run around singing on certain nights. In any court, eyes are always watching—and some of them are connected to daggers that thirst to be buried in your back.

Rulers and stewards who have any wits at all know this and must make a constantly reevaluated decision: Should I be a feared but obeyed tyrant, or the servant of the people? Is being kind, understanding, and merciful when punishing criminals (especially rebels) going to be viewed as a weakness to be exploited, or something that makes me unfit to remain in office—or is it going to make me beloved? “The platter or the sword?” (This saying most closely translates as “The carrot or the stick?”)

It’s clear that the words you speak and the way you say them, as well as the deeds you do or order done, all send messages to the common people, rivals, and other courtiers or neighboring rulers. Ruling or being a courtier isn’t something achieved when your backside descends on the cushioned throne or the seat behind the most exalted desk—it’s something that continues, every day, until you die, make a slip, or are caught up in a misfortune that parts you from throne or seat.

## THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

Most rulers aren’t experts on anything, except perhaps survival. They rely on intelligence brought to them by others (often their own private network of spies, if they don’t trust their courtiers) and on the advice of others they trust, or deem to be experts, or (in their lonely mistrust of most people around them) just like to talk things over with.

This gives any advisor to a ruler a great amount of power. If the ruler is a tyrant or suddenly wants to appear “tough,” advisors can be in danger—because it’s all too easy for a ruler to publicly say something along the lines of: “When I want a fool to offer me advice, I’ll ask for it. Take this fool away, behead him, and find me a fresh one.” However, in general, an advisor who survives any covert tests of loyalty or honesty a ruler arranges will become ever more valued and could rise to hold far more power in a court or a realm than his or her rank might otherwise indicate.

For example, years ago in Tethyr, Duke Halorendar of Ankaram took Rhynda Orjel, an aging and common-born governess of his sons, to dwell in his personal chambers—not as a lover (though there was much scandalized talk by those who thought

that's just what she was), but because he valued her opinions and insights. Rhynda had no official title or salary, but Halorendar saw to all of her needs, and when she traveled around the duchy her words were considered personal orders from the duke, and she was correctly seen as his "eyes and ears."

## Making and Changing Laws

The real power of any ruler is measured by their ability to enact and alter laws. Weak rulers must often seek the support or even formal consent (by proclamation or vote) of powerful nobility, local religious leaders, or even guilds or city rulers to add or change a law. Strong rulers have the power to decide and enact laws. A king might awaken, see a servant dressed in a color he detests, and on the spot decree that all clothes are now illegal in the realm—but wise rulers won't misuse this power on a mere whim, particularly without considering the consequences. Yes, that king might enjoy looking at certain naked subjects, humiliating most of the citizenry in the process, but conditions of climate and daily work—consider soldiers and blacksmiths—will soon mean much injury and illness for unclad persons, lost lives, and a great loss of support from a populace who believes the ruler has gone mad, or at the very least cares nothing for their daily needs, but only about the power to change things; "tugging at our slave-leashes," as the old Calishite saying puts it.

What protects citizens in any land from the whims of rulers are the laws and procedures built up over the years and augmented by the unwritten but commonly understood traditions. In Waterdeep's harbor, for example, incoming fishing boats owned by Waterdhavians unload the moment a wharveside spot becomes vacant, taking precedence over other vessels, even those carrying wealthy—and impatient to disembark—passengers; it's not the law, but it *is* firm tradition.

In some lands a law isn't really a law until it has been proclaimed (read out in public by heralds or local lords), signed by certain senior nobles, or posted on the palace gates. In others, new laws can't take effect until the next new moon, until they've been read aloud at a particular conclave of the court (held every tenday), or until some other local ritual has been observed.

In general, the more protections citizens have from the whim of a ruler, the slower and more difficult changing laws will be. In most cases, it's faster and easier to try to get a ruler to pardon someone to exempt him or her from a law (or the usual punishment) or to redefine the situation to exclude that person from the jurisdiction of the law—either twisting or refining the law, depending on one's viewpoint. This is usually done by issuing a verbal and written decree.

### ENFORCING DECREES

Where rulers enjoy absolute power, decrees *are* laws. However, in most Faerûnian governments (where citizens, or at least some citizens, have rights a ruler can't take away except in very limited and specific circumstances), decrees are how the governing court informs commoners (especially people geographically removed from the location of the court) of new laws or interpretations of those laws.

Good decrees are blunt, clear, and incapable of being carelessly misinterpreted—or willfully "reinterpreted." Of course, most decrees are less than good, and in the resulting shady area lies a lot of the real power of most courtiers.

There are laws, and then there is how those laws are interpreted and applied (what the modern world often calls regulations). Lawkeepers decide whom to arrest and which transgressions to ignore; courtiers decide if, for example, a ruler's law banning the consuming of all grapes applies to jellies, jams, and wines containing grapes.

Courtiers might disagree on such matters, sometimes to the point of waging shouting matches or trying to discredit or have removed those who disagree with them. Furthermore, they might dispute the opinions of lawkeepers and other enforcers of such laws. In some cases this leads to a cold precision of rules-following, jurisdiction, and etiquette, and in others to constant attempts to deceive and undermine rivals.

However, a complete refusal to work together, or to do any work at all, often costs courtiers their offices (and occasionally their lives). Thus, despite dislikes or disagreements, courtiers endlessly strike deals with other courtiers.

## Making Deals

Senior courtiers negotiate treaties, pacts, and even contracts with the courtiers of other lands or cities (matters for intensive roleplaying), but all courtiers must make smaller daily deals with fellow courtiers, local guilds, craftworkers and merchants supplying the palace or other state holdings with work or goods, and so on. Although some courts operate on an ethical basis that can best be described as "anything goes, so long as the desired result is achieved," few courtiers can afford to deal endlessly in blackmail, murder, or bribery. Where "palm-warming" is practiced regularly, bribes tend to become set amounts: a scale of payments corresponding to the nature of what's being obtained.

In some cases courtiers can only offer the good will of the ruler or specific courtiers or law enforcers, but usually more is needed:

- specific promises of contracts to be awarded.
- changes in laws or definitions and applications of existing laws to particular guilds, practices, or goods.
- removal of taxes, duties, or courtiers' barriers to certain business practices.
- specific loans, grants, or secret payments of monies made to a person, business, guild, or third party.

Of course, in cases where a courtier controls a rich business opportunity, the monetary payments might flow in the other direction.

The most stable sort of deals are between parties who both stand to lose if the deal is broken. For example, two courtiers who can betray each other by revealing secrets about each other have a mutual interest in cooperation. Likewise, two courtiers might agree not to act against each other on particular matters, one courtier giving in on one case and the other courtier doing the same on another, thereby producing a mutual benefit. Of course,

the single best reason to honor a deal is that breaking one's word will make a new enemy in an already hostile environment.

A courtier newly come to court, or to her present position, is wise to learn "how things work" before attempting to make any deals. When she does start dealing, it's best to start small and observe the results. In the marketplace, large debts or mistakes can ruin a career. At court, large debts or mistakes can end your life.

## Truce and Armistice: keeping the peace

Truces are formal cessations of fighting for a limited time, agreed to because both sides in a conflict want them. Despite whatever is promised, they tend to last only as long as both sides still need or are benefiting from them. Truces often serve to allow both sides to bury dead, tend to the sick and wounded, resupply combatants with food and armaments, and redeploy troops (moving individuals around or allowing them to escape or go into hiding).

Armistices are short, informal truces, usually made on the battlefield and lacking any formal terms beyond a simple "We'll stop fighting if you let us do this" and "Then we'll stop fighting, too, if you let us do this other thing."

Attacks, including bombardments, shatter such fragile peaces in an instant—and make trust, and therefore future truces, very difficult. Unless a foe is entirely wiped out by such tricks, the leader of a truce-breaking force will swiftly acquire a hard-to-shake unsavory reputation. Some news spreads with astonishing speed across Faerûn, and this is precisely the sort of news that mercenaries make sure everyone hears about. Even forces serving under the leader will remember such incidents, and judge accordingly; many a battlefield hero has become quietly mistrusted and hated by her own side in the peace that follows her victories.

The steward or leader desiring to extend truces long enough to try to make a lasting peace—either on the battlefield or between rivals at court—must discern how the truce benefits everyone involved, and make sure these benefits continue as long as possible, for all sides (while at the same time reminding everyone involved of the less desirable alternatives). Typical deceptions of the latter sort run something like this: "No matter how much you hate Lord Arothan, goodsir, you dare not strike out at him now; he's spent this entire truce hiring outlander wizards to protect him. We've warned him that using them to lash out will mean his death—but if you strike at him, there's not a wizard in all this land who can keep you safe against those he's assembled!"

To such fears must eventually be added an element of excitement or hope, a new plan offered to the rival combatants that can only proceed if peace continues. For example, one might make a truce more permanent through a marriage, business merger, alliance, or deal in which both sides acquire wealth or titles (often by splitting up a prize such as a city or the assets of a discredited third party between them). While common folk struggling to eke out a living know that peace is its own reward, those accustomed to more wealth and power expect to get specific personal rewards from a peace settlement.

## winning favors

Favors—such as good treatment, public praise, or money—are nonpermanent rewards given by a ruler or by senior courtiers having the power to grant them. In contrast, lands, titles, and salaries are permanent or ongoing rewards reserved for very special (and rare) cases; while country bumpkins, goaded by minstrels' tales, dream of "going to court and winning a castle full of gold, a title, and the hand of a princess," actual courtiers and worldly citizens usually hold no such expectations. They know, however, that a "friend of the court" can win thousands of lesser rewards, such as government contracts, the secret right to be advised of coming changes in laws and policy that will affect business opportunities (and can win a shrewdly investing "friend" great windfall profits), or even being warned when another arm of the government is going to arrest or investigate the "friend."

Loudly and eagerly supporting the ruler or a courtier who can grant favors is one way to earn them—but being overly eager could be seen as a sign of insincerity, and for every person you support at court, you make at least one enemy. This truism leads some to prefer a quieter, less savory means of winning favors. Every court holds courtiers who have financially overextended themselves into debt (sometimes through paying bribes while trying to win favors or influence another courtier, and sometimes through something as mundane as maintaining a fashionable court wardrobe) and desperately need money. Governing courts are also a magnet for greedy folk. Someone with coins to lend can therefore buy influence and favors—at least in the short term. In the longer term, someone might decide that the best way not to have to repay a loan is to eliminate the lender.

## Earning titles

Rulers never seem to have enough money, and they tend to hate to part with coin; however, courtiers can sometimes persuade them to gift some land and/or a title. Many a low-born merchant, grown rich but contemptuous of his "so-called betters," has been more delighted to become a titled lord, with blazons and robes and courtesies, than to receive even staggering sums of coins. As Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun put it, "One tends to want most what one does not have, and believes one can never have."

Generally, only a ruler can confer land, major offices, or noble status. There are two sorts of titles in Faerûn. The most numerous, held by most serving military and courtiers, is an office with a grand job title such as Necessary Underlady of the Queen's Purse, Royal Clerk of the Understair, Page of the Royal Presence, or Lord High Marshal of the Royal Host. You gain the title when accepting a job and lose it if dismissed from that work (something quite likely to happen to the more important offices in the event of a change of ruler). Offices almost always include a salary and the ability to call on the support of (or even command) other courtiers in specific, narrowly defined ways; thus, these powers make them ready rewards for the supporters and friends of a ruler. Offices might include a uniform and usually involve a few odd rituals or duties, inherited from earlier times (such as the duty to light the first candle in any chamber where

royalty is sleeping, or the obligation to test any bath prepared for a ruler).

The rarer (and, to most distant eyes, more glamorous) sort of title is a noble title. Although these can usually be stripped from you by a ruler just as an office can, they are in theory attached to you, not your occupation. Noble titles might be hereditary (inherited from your elder kin, and passed down by you to your descendants) or what heralds of Faerûn call extraordinary (for you only, dying with you). Some such titles even include the word "Extraordinary," as in Lord Falconblade, Baron Extraordinary of Blackpillars.

Office titles might have their own heraldic blazon (coat of arms) or badge, or might use a differenced version of the arms of the court (royalty) they are bestowed by, but all noble titles have blazons—and in Faerûn, must be "of someplace." In other words, the title refers to a region, city, town, castle, village, or even an inn, tavern or crossroads. In some cases, this place might be fanciful, might no longer exist, or you or your noble family might no longer have any connection to it—but it must be part of the grant of arms. Most noble titles began as a royal acknowledgment of the ennobled person's ownership of lands within the realm—and as landlord, renting out homes and fields

## The Bright Banner

Political successes and failures at court are best determined through roleplaying, but provided here is an abstract means of determining who wins and loses, known as "The Bright Banner" (named after an old ballad about a craven, dishonest courtier who did everything wrong yet soared from success to success). It's a numeric scale, on which 1 is success (and higher numbers mean clearer victories and additional rewards), 0 is "nothing happens," and negative numbers mean failure with—as the numerals grow larger—increasingly bad consequences. Character feats and the policies and actions of the ruler should be added to the factors outlined here.

### Matter involves key persons of:

- a primary faith other than yours: -1
- same faith as yours: +1
- a family unfriendly to yours: -2
- a friendly family: +1
- higher court rank than you: -2
- lower court rank than you: +2
- at least two seasons more court experience than you: -1
- at least two seasons less court experience than you: +1

### You currently have:

- many enemies at court: -2
- no court profile at all: -1
- strong royal favor: +3
- known royal disfavor: -4
- no usual jurisdiction in the matter: -2
- usual jurisdiction over the matter: +3
- no debt or obligation to a key courtier opposed in the matter: +0
- a debt or obligation to a key courtier opposed in the matter: -4
- at least two consecutive, immediately preceding "victories" at court: +2
- at least two consecutive, immediately preceding "failures" at court: -3
- more than four recent victories at court (usually in the last season): -2

### You:

- grant a favor or give a bribe to a key courtier involved who stands in great need of it: +4 (per courtier)
- gain at least two more high-profile courtiers as allies in the matter than are opposed to it (of roughly the same rank): +1
- gain at least two fewer high-profile courtiers as allies in the matter than are opposed to it (of roughly the same rank): -2
- have as public ally in the matter a courtier two ranks higher than the highest-ranked opponent in the matter: +3
- have as public opponent in the matter a courtier two ranks higher than the highest-ranked ally in the matter: -3

### The primary "power behind the throne" courtier:

- publicly supports your position in the matter: +4
- publicly opposes your position in the matter: -4
- is known to like you: +3
- is known to dislike you: -3
- owes you a favor: +2
- sees his lending of support in this matter as putting you solidly in his debt: +1

Using the Bright Banner isn't always a "once, right now" determination, although it should be used whenever there's an open confrontation. Most matters at courts not ruled by absolute tyrants involve negotiations, and the Bright Banner should be consulted several times as these unfold and various courtiers become involved (work it out for all of them, not just PCs, and compare the results). Most DMs won't want the Bright Banner to determine absolute success or failure, but rather to decide the attitudes of key NPCs. Are they confident of success? Do they see themselves as probably losing and, if so, would they want to avoid the damage to their reputation at court?

With tinkering, the Bright Banner can be used in most court events. Does the outlander Rauligosk win royal favor, or even get made a Lord Extraordinary of the Realm? Or does he get flogged before all the court, and driven from the kingdom? Does he get to marry the princess, or get publicly handed the troth of the ugliest scullery maid and a job as her underling?

to tenant farmers, and sharing in crop and livestock sale monies, these lands brought steady income (often great wealth) to their noble owner.

Noble offspring usually bear courtesy titles of smaller places within the lands of their titled parent's land. If Harlo Belorgan succeeds his father to become "Lord Belorgan" (that is, Earl Belorgan of Wyvernshores, the farmland along the southeastern coast of the Wyvernwater), his wife Alclaera becomes Lady Belorgan (Countess of Wyvernshores). His son Raedlar ("Red") succeeds to Harlo's title of Viscount of Juniril, and younger

sister Thaelmra takes (as "Baroness") Red's former title of Baron of Forge-market (a market crossroads in the Wyvernshores countryside). The unused courtesy titles of Baron of Lowbridge and Baron of Mossfarms (a village and the Belorgan estates, respectively) are held by Harlo, but if he and Alclaera have additional children, they will bear these titles. A noble house never runs out of titles, because local heralds always meet with the senior competent noble of the house to devise a name and grant of arms for at least one title in reserve (for the Belorgans, these are Baron of

Windkeep and Baron of Fallturret, the two Belorgan castles). The details of inheritance, courtesy, and precedence (ranking among nobles) vary slightly from place to place, but are always administered by local court heralds (see Chapter 6). In Faerûn, thanks to the High Herald, all heralds have a large measure of independence from rulers, nobles, and other courtiers, and can very rarely be corrupted or persuaded to overlook or "twist" anything heraldic.

Noble titles rarely include any sort of payment from the ruler or her court (although nobles are often chosen to fill senior-ranking offices, which have salaries and in many cases additional access to the royal treasury).

Noble titles include loyalty to a ruler, plus some sort of service (or payments in lieu of service) to the ruler, but inherited titles aren't as easy to lose as offices. This is because nobility also includes legal rights "commoners" don't have, and because a ruler might be reluctant to anger other nobles by harsh treatment of a

particular noble. Acts of disloyalty or criminal behavior usually earn a noble punishment on an ascending scale depending on the severity of the transgression: fines, banishment for a particular time, permanent exile, forfeiture of lands or properties, and death. (These are usually less severe than the fates commoners face, for the same crimes.)

Stripping a "traitor noble" and her entire kin of nobility is considered an even more severe punishment than death, in most cases (although "extinguishing" a noble family in this way usually involves loss of properties and as many executions as possible—

because traitor nobles expelled from a realm and stripped of their lands and titles tend to become bitter, relentless foes of the ruler who return to do mischief or real harm). Usually, the only crimes that earn them the death penalty are murdering other nobles or royalty or committing an act of high treason (actively working to bring down a ruler—as opposed to the "low treason" of merely supporting traitors, by keeping silent or by financially aiding them).

## Achieving Nobility

Unless you were born noble, becoming noble tends to be a long, difficult striving. Even in the Border Kingdoms, where nobility is self-granted, you must acquire and defend a

territory, however small, for heralds to recognize your titles.

In most realms and city-states, you gain a title (either taking a vacant one or more likely receiving a newly invented one) by pleasing or aiding the ruler in a big way. As the bard Mhaerigo Whitstone once put it, "Saving the king's life ain't enough. He has to like you, too!"

Extraordinary titles are far more likely to be granted than hereditary ones, particularly if they don't involve a large land grant; in fact, many rulers bestow no more than a tavern or other building seized from a debtor to the crown, or a now-fled traitor. Sitting nobles everywhere frown on rulers adding upstarts to their ranks, and will often treat you with disdain regardless of what title you've gained. The most acceptable way to become noble is to marry into the nobility (which will merely earn you sniffs of "common, lowborn boor" behind your back for the rest of your life, whenever you displease a "real" noble, perhaps merely by your presence).



*Some nobles believe their families are destined for greatness*

Illustration by Kev Walker

The higher-ranking court titles (offices) aren't themselves any mark of nobility (although, just to confuse things, they're usually given to nobles), but they are usually accompanied by at least a knighthood if bestowed on a commoner. It's highly unlikely that the Princess Regent of Cormyr would ever name the nearest street urchin Warden of the Western Marches—but it's within her power to do so.

However, it does happen. Azoun IV of Cormyr was once fighting near Arabel, and wanted to send a private message to his queen in Suzail that wouldn't be intercepted by the ever-watchful War Wizards of his realm—he knew that the traitors who had just tried to slay him included some War Wizards, identities unknown. Azoun made a particular commoner Lord High Marshal of Cormyr for a tenday, complete with royal ring, several copies of the royal commission, a War Wizard cloak, and Azoun's own dagger. Vangerdahast was livid, and he forcefully took the commoner into custody—but he did march him to Queen Filfaeril, without examining the message he was carrying. The commoner ceased to be Lord High Marshal, but became Sir Aergult of the Forge, one of the few knighted blacksmiths in the realm, and he still receives an annual "royal gift" of 25 gp.

In Amn, Tethyr, and any land imperiled by monsters or brigandry, one can often gain nobility by offering to police a border area. One example is the barony of Hawkhill in the northeasternmost mountains of Amn. To minimize smuggling, slaving, and brigandry, the least populated fringes of Amn are a string of small "no one has ever heard of them" baronies, usually consisting of a single keep given for free to a successful adventurer. If you come to the attention of the council or senior Amnian courtiers as an adventurer of achievement who avoids brigandry and lawlessness, you might be discreetly approached by a courtier subtly warning of heavy taxes on treasure you gain, and continual surveillance upon you, unless you would like to become a baron of Amn. If you accept, you get a remote keep ("as is"), can keep all the taxes you raise and—if you help transport local goods to the rest of Amn by rebuilding roads and bridges, buying wagons, and paying for armed escorts for them—a share of monies on the sales of those goods. You will be expected to keep the peace, mainly by killing outlaws and prowling monsters—and you should expect some of your bodyguards to be spies for the authorities in Athkatla.

All "border barons" are watched to make sure they don't end up "on the take," allowing smugglers and outlaws to operate under their protection. If you boldly asked for a barony rather than demonstrating your prowess and then waiting to be asked by a courtier, authorities will be very suspicious of your motives, and will watch you constantly, using several independent spies.

From time to time senior courtiers will arrive unannounced (in large, well-armed bands) to inspect your barony. Good performance will be rewarded with gifts of funds from the realm's treasury, and often the stationing of a garrison of troops—not under your direct command—in your castle, to safeguard the loyalty of this increased investment.

Another example of a police or "shieldwall" noble is the standing offer from the Crown of Cormyr to make anyone Baron of the Stonelands who can occupy, tame, police, and patrol that

dangerous wilderland region (from a castle he or she has built in the Stonelands). No one has yet succeeded.

However, adventurer after adventurer has been invited to settle along the road in the wild, sparsely settled West Reaches of Cormyr with promises of baronial status under exactly the same terms as adventurers are offered Amnian border baronies (except that they must build their own castles). Retiring Purple Dragons are offered "crown bonuses" to settle around such a new castle. (Some of them will be paid spies for the Dragon Throne.)

Brigands, smugglers, slavers, and nobles seeking a puppet king on the Dragon Throne will all be interested in a successful shieldwall baron—so if you do manage to build your castle, not starve and freeze in it during your first winter, and establish a living and patrols against the bolder prowling monsters, expect visits from all of these groups. They might not advertise their true natures until they deem conditions right, but merely "look around" while posing as passing peddlers, pilgrims, and caravan merchants. Shrewd barons spread the reputations they want their isolating holds to have, concocting the right sort of "innocent gossip" to share with such visitors. Shrewder barons know most of these visitors are also doing the same thing to them.

Personal service to a ruler and marriage to a member of the nobility usually wins you a noble title in your own right (as opposed to something minor such as Lord Consort), but if that ruler is succeeded by someone who didn't like the former ruler, the title could go away again—and your head with it!

If a hero personally and publicly "saved" Cormyr, winning great public acclaim, the ruling Obarskyr of the day would probably reward them with a handsome title such as Lord High Protector of the Realm. The Obarskyr would not publicly say if it was hereditary, and the title wouldn't sound so (the implication of "Lord High Protector" is that it refers to the protection that particular individual has conferred on the realm; it doesn't hint at inheritance). Only the War Wizards, relevant royal clerks, and local heralds would know the true nature of the title. Public sentiment might enthusiastically support bestowal of full nobility, but the Obarskyr is counting on the passage of time to make the nature of any conferred title no longer of great public interest. If the hero turns out to be a nice, staunchly loyal, useful person, impressing the monarch enough to want his potential offspring to have a say in the future of the Forest Kingdom, an additional hereditary title can always be granted later.

Many places (independent city-states in particular, where the rulers are merchants of accomplishment) dislike hereditary titles, or the bestowal of such titles on individuals of particular races, nationalities, or families.

### BECOMING NOBLE IN WATERDEEP

Waterdeep is the epitome of "closed-gates nobility," and can serve as a model for long-established independent cities everywhere. Centuries ago, the most powerful "old money" merchant families conferred noble status on themselves (in return for supporting common laws that would bind them as well as the rabble) that their descendants are now working very hard not to allow anyone else to gain. Folks in Waterdeep respect money, not titles; if you announce yourself as the Emperor of the Shining South, the reply might be something like "Very nice, goodsir—now pay up."

The easiest way to gain power in Waterdeep without social status is to discover the identity of one of the Masked Lords, and dispose of and impersonate her. “Easiest,” please note, not “easy.” This tactic brings a high risk of discovery, even beyond the obvious need to fool family, friends, and business contacts of the supplanted Lord. Changing face and form is child’s play compared to trying to dupe the mind-magics of Watchful Order magists and certain fellow Lords.

A slower, harder way to noble status is to serve the city with distinction in exposing plots against it, legal transgressions, and the like. If you do so for long enough, and well enough, that you are noticed by the authorities and yet manage to stay alive despite angry surviving swindlers and plotters, this will get you very thoroughly investigated by the City Guard and some of the secret agents reporting to Piergeiron or to Mirt, as well as by the Watchful Order and the Watch. If you are truly clean of personal scandal (not ambitions, just shady dealings and intentions), you might be covertly approached to become an agent yourself. If and only if being a “public face” agent would be the most useful way you could serve (unlikely, as known agents are numerous already, and the Lords need more anonymous fresh blood), you’ll probably be taken on in the Palace with some sort of official position, and you can gain status thereby.

Of course, this will still mean you’re looked down on by old guard nobles, because they even look down on Piergeiron, the First Lord of Waterdeep, and Khelben, the Archmage of Waterdeep (behind their backs, of course). Courtiers are mere toadies and “jumped-up power-snatchers” in their books—but then, so are “junior” noble families. Some nobles spend their lives ranking people and playing “I’m haughtier than thou” games. Faced with any ambitious outsiders, the nobles will unite against them like a fortress wall. (“Rise sun or fall moon, the rabble must be kept at bay!”)

Thus, this path might get you elevated, with the airs to match if you want to assume them, but don’t expect to get the full cordial “you’re one of us” treatment from certain “highnose” nobles (who will cut you dead even if you marry their parents, siblings, or offspring).

The most junior Waterdhavian noble families were elevated in 1254 DR, and Waterdeep has actually lost two noble families since then: Zoar and Gildeggh, “outcast” (exiled) in 1273. Three noble families almost went extinct, and there’s evidence that nobles or Lords of Waterdeep quickly arranged some marriages to make sure no noble house disappeared. This avoided pressure from ambitious merchants clamoring “There’s now room for me, isn’t there?” and, more important, denied having dozens of impostors or earnest but deluded persons showing up for centuries to come, claiming to be the long-lost heir of this or that noble house. “So where’s my villa? What have you done with it? ’Twas worth thousands upon thousands in gold!”

Waterdhavian noble houses are considered junior or senior because certain noble families play a sneering-at-others game, more rooted in fancy than in reality, that their bloodlines are older and therefore better than those of other nobility. In truth, they’re all jumped-up wealthy merchants, and some houses have even lost most of their wealth since being ennobled. It’s akin to two ancient, toothless old villagers living in adjacent tumbledown

shacks, but one of them looking down on the other because “his family wasn’t originally from these parts.”

Personal appearance can aid entry into the nobility in two ways. If you’re very good-looking (and rich, and perceptive), this can help your chances of marrying into a noble family. If you happen to closely resemble a noble clan that has had family members of your gender and approximate age “go missing,” you can assume the role of pretender, trying to convince a particular noble family that you are a long-lost relation, come home at last.

**Pretending:** Pretenders do best when they have been coached beforehand on what family member bears which name, plus as much family history as possible. A successful pretender must be ready to withstand hired magical probings and various testings, and be pleasant to boot—if you are unpleasant, giving you a dagger in the ribs and a corner of earth in the deepest cellar is much easier than feeding, clothing, and putting up with you.

Noble families are wary of pretenders, because many impostors have appeared down the years, looking for a fine life paid for by someone else.

**Adrift on Family Coin:** Most of the immediate members (as opposed to distantly related “countryside kin”) of a Waterdhavian or Amnian noble house have their bills paid for them by the family stewards. All such expenditures are ultimately approved by the family matriarch or patriarch. Note that they might be enraged by the activities of a gambler or a wild one in the family, but they won’t dare fail to pay their bills; once word gets around, that act will imperil the family’s reputation, credit, and other mercantile activities. Some less wealthy nobles encourage their children to make investments or quietly start their own side businesses to earn their own spending money (the main family fortunes come from family mercantile activities and rents from family-owned city properties).

Defiant and unpleasant wastrel family members might be publicly disowned, quietly killed in “accidents” or shipped off in virtual slavery (drugged or coerced) to far corners of the world to make their own fortunes or to serve as hireswords (in hopes that battle will soon kill them). Some are even sent abroad on family business, and poisoned by hired agents when far from Waterdeep. Others are “paid to stay far away.”

In short, the heads of noble houses decide who gets lavish spending money and lives in family mansions. They dare not mistreat spouses or heirs in ways Waterdhavian society can detect, or their own status (and that of the family) will suffer—but inside their mansion walls, anything goes, from floggings to confinements to mind-altering or mind-controlling spells. Most nobles don’t abuse their kin, but they do have the power to do so.

**A Waterdhavian Way to Grace:** The Phull and Zulpair families were the last houses of Waterdeep to be ennobled. They managed it by identical methods:

1. Succeed enough in mercantile trade to become staggeringly wealthy.
2. Buy up great numbers of properties in Waterdeep, especially in North Ward and Sea Ward.
3. Attend all the revels hosted by nobles, acting in a quiet and subservient manner, and offer funds to help with “problems” discussed by grumbling nobles.

4. Whenever offers are accepted, very quietly loan monies to financially desperate noble houses.
5. Financially aid the stated aims of some Masked Lords of Waterdeep (such as rebuilding firetrap warehouses in Dock Ward, fixing sewers, having the harbor dredged, and helping sponsor repairs and expansions of the city walls). Do so in a way that allows the Lords to take credit, rather than yourself.
6. Tell everyone repeatedly, at revels (which you now attend dressing and speaking as identically as you can to elder nobles), that you care deeply for “the good of Waterdeep” and “we must all think of the good of Waterdeep, so it will be as great as it is now a thousand years hence.”
7. When coin-short nobles discreetly approach you for even more funds than you’ve given them before, willingly hand them coin, with friendly, polite words that say (but not bluntly), “This should be a gift, not a loan, but not being noble myself, I can’t insult you like that. If we were both nobles, all you would need do is hint at a need, and this would always be . . . just a gift.”
8. Start marrying your children (made as beautiful as cosmetics and magic can make them, and trained in noble speech and deportment by retired or fired former servants to nobles, hired by you) into noble houses, and accompany them with staggeringly large dowries.
9. Hire spies to find out who just one or two Masked Lords are, and befriend them, financially helping their businesses.
10. Through intermediaries, bribe some disaffected young wastrel nobles to verbally champion your family at revels as “acting as nobles should.”
11. Through intermediaries, bribe some of your servants to murmur the same thing to other servants.
12. Bankroll a few young, disaffected nobles to pursue their dreams, however foolish or zany such schemes might be. Befriend those young nobles.
13. Watch for financial troubles among the nobles and try to repeat step 4, aiming for a repeat of step 7.

And, all this time, don’t build a luxury villa of your own, don’t openly challenge any noble, and never openly ask to be a noble or pretend to be one.

Eventually, someone facing ruin will remember your step 7 and start whispering that you should be ennobled. At this time, do nothing (unless you have real control over a few Masked Lords, and can add their voices to the whispering). Let it happen.

This approach obviously takes coins enough to run a small kingdom (the Zulpairs stumbled upon a remote island where monsters had devoured a dwarf clan and then perished for lack of food, leaving entire caverns full of already-mined rubies ownerless) and possibly generations of work, not making a serious mistake once.

That’s why it’s never been done since. It worked for the Phulls and the Zulpairs (who are scorned by some nobles to this day) because they bought up nigh all of North Ward between them—and then gave it away, property by property, to various nobles, to win their support for the ennoblement of House Phull or House Zulpair.

The heralds (detailed in Chapter 6) will automatically recognize as noble anyone the First Lord of Waterdeep treats as a noble. They don’t mess in “shoulds” or unfolding politics, but merely enforce the rules of how people use blazons.

As the Waterdhavian sage Sulphon once put it, Waterdeep got its nobles in the first place like this. The richest merchants in Waterdeep got together in the face of Raurlor’s and then Ahghairon’s authoritarianism, and said to Ahghairon, “We’re special, right? So, look you, we get these special privileges. In return, we’ll support your rule instead of knifing all your agents and raising support against you and then fighting each other and destroying the whole city.” Ahghairon saw this as the perfect way to avoid the rise of another Raurlor, when he grew too old to stop such a thing: These self-styled nobles would help to police each other as well as the commoners under them.

## inheritance: playing the prince or princess

Noble sons and daughters might inherit notorious names, castles, wealth, and even exiled status or expectations of following parents into traditional court offices or military ranks. They also inherit a chance (however slim) of ruling a realm, with all the dangers that go with it. Many princes and princesses are kidnapped, killed, or coerced and controlled both mentally and physically, sometimes even by their parents or courtiers acting with full royal permission, intending only to make the royal heirs fit for their future duties.

Minstrels’ tales are full of indolent princes and princesses who live idle lives of bored luxury—or are raised in hiding, in simple lives of rural privation, ignorant of their true heritage, to be plucked onto a glittering royal stage when a crown falls from the head of someone they never knew was their parent or kin.

The true lives of princes and princesses are usually a mixture of hard training, bewildering intrigues, making friends and enemies early on—and then, one way or another, ending up in the heart of the cut-and-thrust of royal intrigues, perhaps hated by kin who try to discredit or slay them.

Consider the kingdom of Cormyr, ruled (at this writing) by a regent, the Princess Alusair.

*A true tomboy governed by her wild temper, Alusair rebelled against court etiquette and her father’s wishes in her youth, and ended up a popular war-leader who rode the backlands of the realm with her “blades,” a band of young male noble heirs, to the open disapproval of many elder nobles of the realm. Purple Dragons who have served with her tend to love her and support her to the death. Commoners across the Forest Kingdom aren’t quite sure what to make of her (some disapprove, some are awed or entertained, and most “just don’t know”).*

If you are a royal youngster, be aware that if you have a “wild youth,” you’ll be judged accordingly. In fact, your every hobby, faux pas, and public utterance or deed (from pranks to pratfalls) will be discussed, gossiped about, and blown up, embellished, and twisted both naturally and deliberately, into a reputation that you must wear like a cloak of thorns henceforth.

*As regent, Alusair is now guided by her mother, the diplomatic and beautiful (now Dowager) Queen Filfaeril, who kept*



*a low public profile throughout much of her husband's reign, and so is portrayed as cold and distant by some nobles who have tirelessly tried to sideline her from all power and influence since Azoun's death.*

Filfaeril is a perfect example of how nobles will try to belittle and strip away public support from a royal they dislike or fear—in this case, Filfaeril is strong and capable, and they want royal weakness instead. You will face the same attacks if you're royal, or even if you're just a potential heir (among the younger of several children) of a powerful noble house; there will always be uncles and aunts who out of boredom, spite, and a desire for more personal power will want you to seem weak or incompetent, in need of their guidance. You can ally yourself with a favorite aunt or uncle to escape much of this, but must then watch your chosen ally very carefully.

*Filfaeril and Alusair are the only living adult Obarskysrs. The royal heir Azoun V (son of the dead Crown Princess Tanalasta) is an infant, who must be protected at all times in a land full of ambitious nobles (many of whom are known to be the bastard offspring of Azoun IV, and so hold various shaky claims to the throne that could be advanced in a day if anything happened to the Obarskysrs).*

Even if you don't happen to live in a realm known for its philandering monarchs, everyone is human, and illegitimate royal offspring do happen. If that doesn't actually occur, ambitious nobles can invent a pretender out of any person they can control who has any resemblance in looks to any royal personage, train him in what he should know, and use him as a weapon that can split a realm wide open in civil war.

*Alusair knows she's facing intrigues from various cabals and factions of nobles (some of them backed by rich sponsors from the neighboring land of Sembia) that might flare into open rebellion whenever they see any substantial weakness they can exploit. Far more comfortable in the saddle with a sword in her hand than she is fencing with words and subtle actions, Alusair faces a swiftly changing Royal Court of Cormyr that has always been awash in spies and subtle intrigues—and is no longer dominated and kept in line by the all-powerful wizard Vangerdabast.*

If you as heir (to a throne or control of a noble house) rely too much on any one courtier—or your predecessor did—and that individual has grown too powerful, he is more likely than not (no matter how friendly he might act) to become your worst foe of all. Even if the courtier really is utterly kind and loyal, he's like a huge forest shadowtop: When such a mighty tree finally falls, it crushes any smaller trees in the way and leaves a huge gap or scar in the greenery—a weakness others can't miss seeing, or exploiting if they want to.

Try to establish three or four useful courtiers or servants of roughly equal power, and not let a single one rise to dominance, except within the strict boundaries of offices with clearly defined duties and powers that an ambitious or scheming person can't expand.

*Head of the War Wizards, Vangerdabast held the offices of both Royal Magician and Court Wizard (being chief advisor to Azoun IV from the king's youth until his death, as well as governing all use and teaching of magic in the realm). He was a shrewd, meddling, paranoid man who needed to know what*

*was going on everywhere in the realm, all the time—and influence it. He rejuvenated the War Wizards and made them his personal weapon and servant force, molding them to be just the way he wanted them to be: without ranks or hierarchy, but with ever-shifting "task groups," all reporting to him.*

*His successor, Caladnei, is more trusting, of far more diffident character, and far more ignorant of the true natures of most courtiers; she's feeling her way into the roles Vangerdabast held—and ambitious nobles and courtiers alike (some with Sembian backing) are seeking to gain power at her expense, and that of Alusair.*

Don't be afraid to replace someone who has grown too powerful—but be careful that the one you remove is either rewarded out of office (and given something else to do that truly interests him, and will occupy his time), or removed forever (killed in an "accident" or through legally just means), or you will have created your worst enemy—and freed him to turn on you.

*Vangerdabast was a very formidable figure; he and the popular, gallant warrior-king Azoun IV were a combination few dared challenge with anything short of a large army. With Vangey, the King, and his eldest daughter the Crown Princess Tanalasta all swept away in a short time, things are very different at court—and changing day by day.*

Change happens everywhere, all the time. Stay aware of changing political situations and public opinion, and change accordingly—or your subjects (not just a few nobles) will start to see you as a barrier that would be best swept away.

*Like everyone else in Cormyr, Alusair knows the realm has three traditional spying services.*

*The Purple Dragons (the army) have intelligence officers who try to determine what's happening "on the ground" in all territories where they're stationed, so as to prepare for unrest, bandit attacks, goblin raids out of the Stonelands, and rebellion.*

*The War Wizards spy on everyone (even themselves, by means of the alarphons, War Wizards who act as an internal police force) to protect Cormyr from military coups, corrupt courtiers, rogue mages, and the whims of any member of the royal family who shows signs of becoming insane or tyrannical.*

*The Highknights are a handful of loyal, dedicated, dangerous men who serve the royal family as personal enforcers, spies, and envoys.*

*Alusair also knows what most Cormyreans only suspect: In recent years, Harpers have not only spied on the realm, they've also spied for individual courtiers and members of the Obarskyr royal family (with the ultimate aim of keeping the realm peaceful and stable, and not letting any power group within Cormyr shift the balance of power all that much).*

*Moreover, for real "dirty work" that must be kept utterly secret (such as tracing, following, and even impersonating or kidnapping individuals), all of the adult Obarskysrs have small, very secret personal networks of spies, ranging from old men through accomplished sneak-thieves to small boys and girls. Unbeknownst to their patrons, some of these "shadows" (as Vangerdabast dubbed them) might also be Harpers or double agents for foreign powers.*

*The spies assembled by Azoun IV, Tanalasta, and Vangey now have no patrons—and Alusair needs to find out what they're up to, particularly if any of them are now working for nobles hostile to the Crown, or trying to take service with Caladnei.*

*Alusair herself has two personal intelligence services: a bumbling, overt group she has recruited from the ranks of “ber blades” (to make these young nobles feel important, please their families, and provide an unwitting distraction for, and screen against, nobles and others trying to see what the spies they know she has are really up to), and the spies who have worked for her for years, from lovers who serve only her to trusted “loyal to the realm” Highknights such as Glarasteer Rhauligan.*

*Alusair most fears War Wizards going rogue and aligning with nobles seeking to overthrow the Obarskyrs. She is seeking to subvert some alarphons into reporting to her, and trying to become a close friend to Laspeera, second-in-command of the War Wizards, not only to get some sort of handle on the War Wizards, but to better run the realm as Regent.*

It’s crucial for you as the heir to a throne or a noble house to be aware of not only the formal spying networks at work in your realm or households, but the natural (and shifting) everyday alliances, cliques, friendships, rivalries, and hatreds among your court or servants and within your kin. Two old sayings apply: “If you don’t do politics, politics will be done to you” and “Manipulating other humans is what humans do.” A leader survives and flourishes if he knows how to read people and influence what they believe and what they’ll do. Informing and misinforming people by letting them learn or overhear certain things (and see things that they’ll misinterpret, like the infamous staged lovemaking scene purportedly involving the character Hero in Shakespeare’s “Much Ado About Nothing”) is one effective tool. Courtiers and servants will use it against you, even if you never use it on them. You must make sure you have several sources for the information reaching you, so very little information can be kept secret from you, or twisted and slanted without your knowing about it.

*Thus, Alusair wades through a daily snakepit of intrigues, spies, anticipations, and deceptions—yet most folk elsewhere think of Princess Alusair as having an easy life in one of the most peaceful, prosperous, contented kingdoms in all Faerûn.*

The folk of Cormyr are right in this judg-

ment, which of course means most royalty in Faerûn have daily lives that are far worse. Princes and princesses who choose to withdraw from such cares and idle away their days in frivolities retain the danger (they are still royal heirs subject to murder, kidnapping, and coercion by folk playing politics) but are seen as lazy or foolish or unsuitable rulers, and therefore less useful and more expendable. If you are royalty, you usually have more power to choose your lifestyle than most folk—but you cannot escape your heritage. If you try to run and hide from it, it will find you. Someone who wants to use you or just make sure you’re dead will see to that.

## Ruling a Domain

Many tales are told of bright heroes hacking their ways into rulership (usually by hewing down evil, decadent monarchs), but dispassionate sages examining centuries of throne ascensions tend to conclude that any establishment of a newly ruled territory succeeds in the long run by the support of the ruled, not by brute force (which can win the day in the short run). Over time, this support drifts into regarding the ruler or her dynasty as rightful, to be supplanted only if she turns away from the people (fails in obligations and responsibilities). You as a new ruler must try to sway public opinion to accept you.

In the short run, you gain maximum support through minimum disruption: A coup that involves butchery only at court, no immediate flood of new laws or taxes, and “business as usual” or minor new benefits for commoners that aren’t large, unsettling changes will generally be supported. (“I care not who lords it up in the castle, so long as I can hunt my deer and sell my parsnips.”)

Among nobility, courtiers, or the wealthy, there will always be opposition to a new ruler who arrives through force or strife because such “power players” have their own ideas of who should rule (often puppet candidates they control). If Queen Avauree took the throne with her sword and spells, why shouldn’t she be blasted off it by the spells of your favorite, who



*The noble-born adventurer travels in good company*

has dwelt in the realm all his life and is rumored to be descended from a bastard son of old King Nelzor? What makes Avaarec so much better?

Rulers anxious to quell such intrigues should give the most dangerous potential rebels some benefits: lands, titles, an increased say in decisions, or control of money-making mercantile opportunities. For example, the members of a caravan-company-owning noble family could be installed as the masters of a new caravan guild or court department, allowing them a free hand to set the rules to their personal financial advantage.

This leads to any ruler's difficulties of weighing one power group's desires against those of others while avoiding the ire of commoners (merchants in particular) who inevitably lose power and future wealth in such deals. Every gain in power for one person inevitably means a loss in power for another. Rulers must particularly beware of angering local religious leaders, because they can quickly turn large numbers of citizens against a ruler or a new policy.

Every leader has both legal and traditional obligations and responsibilities. Some traditional duties (inspecting the first babe born in spring, or burying the first swan to die after first snowfall) might seem odd, but citizens expect domain leaders to apply laws fairly, to protect them (keeping peace and patrolling against prowling monsters and lawless brigands), and not to oppress them (slaying or beating up folk at random). Behavior that shatters these general principles leads inevitably to unrest and eventually open conflict. Performance that makes commoners feel secure and respected (with known laws and rules, fairly applied, and a lack of swift, bold changes) will win a ruler their support.

## conflicts

As has been borne out by the preceding discussions, the life of a noble is fraught with problems that must be solved and overcome if that noble is to maintain or improve his high station. Several specific issues and factors that can make a ruler's job a challenging one are covered below.

## sentencing the guilty

Some cities and lands in Faerûn have elaborate codes of justice, with written laws, specific penalties, and procedures refined through much case law or tradition. In wilderness areas or small settlements, the law of the sword (that is, might makes right) usually holds sway.

Yet even where clearly codified laws exist, sentences are often at the discretion of the ruler. For example, a king can let a guilty party go free, perform a service rather than enduring the usual punishment, pay large fines in lieu of being flogged and imprisoned, and so on. In most places, royalty and nobility have rights or privileges that common folk lack.

Levying a sentence against the guilty varies from a simple administrative task to an adventure in navigating a treacherous maze of power plays, depending on the personal prestige and influence of the guilty. A common thief faces his punishment alone. The scion of a powerful merchant house faces his sentence armed with all the economic and political power his family

chooses to bring to bear. A vengeful family might bring your realm economic ruin if you imprison its heir, but a light sentence will turn subjects against you and show the realm that you can be cowed by threats. Meting out justice is a far thornier game than matching crimes with their listed punishments.

Generally, no place that thrives on trade (such as Waterdeep, Scornubel, or Athkatla) dares allow open bribery or "flawed justice." Rigging of results must be done behind the scenes—by not bringing someone to trial or arranging a prisoner escape—rather than in public. Outside of frontier areas, places that survive on trade will have clearly codified laws, an independent judiciary (such as the Magisters of Waterdeep), and arrangements that let guilds partially punish their own members (lessening court sentences in return for guild sanctions). Belief must prevail that visiting merchants will be treated equally with residents and citizens—or the merchants will stop coming.

For this reason, trial by combat is rarely allowed in trading centers, but might occur in rural mob justice or communities dominated by a faith allowing it (for example, a hamlet around a temple of Tempus). In Sembia as well as some Tethyrian baronies and Vilhon cities, combat between hired champions or personal dueling is public entertainment, resorted to in cases where no crime has been committed because there are no laws protecting personal reputations, but a noble feels slighted by another noble, or a highborn not-yet-wed woman is accused of being less than chaste and wants to refute the slur. After all, Faerûn almost entirely lacks equivalents of real-world libel and slander laws.

In many places, magisters, guilds, and (in any case where a crime or complaint involves priests or temples as defendant, plaintiff, or witness) all priests have the right to call on magical aid to determine truth and falsehood. In cases involving offenses against clergy or temple property, priests usually are allowed to pass judgment and enact punishment only in temple-dominated communities; elsewhere, justice, including any magical aid that aggrieved priests request, must be provided by independent arcane spellcasters. Who pays for this service varies widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Faerûn does not yet have a tradition of licensed lawyers, but it does have increasing numbers of advocates (particularly in Amn and Sembia). These are paid orators who speak at trials, always in the presence of an accused, never appearing in her stead. They might or might not know details of local law in order to give useful advice to an accused (generally in Faerûn called a prisoner, even if not yet deemed guilty). Some advocates are entertaining performers who mimic the voices of people, act out events, tell jokes, and engage in furious debate in court. Since this is often considered great entertainment, such antics are seldom cut short even by angry judges or rulers because the common folk enjoy it.

## political rivals

Few rulers are free of opponents—whether they be neighboring rulers or persons within their own lands, such as powerful priests, wizards, or heads of wealthy families—who compete with them for desired trade, marriages, and control of disputed lands or even make open war on their borders or territory.

The hardest sort of rival for a ruler to thwart (aside from one so powerful that the ruler dares not attack him, and who knows the ruler's relative weakness and thus does as he pleases) is one who acts friendly or neutral, but covertly spreads rumors or uses agents to do dirty deeds that are blamed on the ruler, to blacken the ruler's reputation or that of his land. If this is done abroad (exclusively outside the ruler's domain), the ruler can often see only one way to combat such deeds: secretly hire adventurers or other noncourtiers to go to that region, hunt down the agents employed by the political rival, and deal with them. In this, bards who have a plausible cover for such travel, sorcerers whose arcane skills aren't generally known, and fighters and rogues who know the territory and have "shady contacts" there can be greatly effective.

In most conflicts with political rivals, rulers desire to get as much as they can without precipitating open war. They try to accomplish this through protracted diplomatic maneuverings, trading ploys, spying, and framing opponents with false letters or staged situations, with all sides trying to assemble allies and sway neutral rulers and powers to openly support or at least not oppose their views and initiatives. As tensions increase, border skirmishes or raids could occur—and to prevent these from escalating into open war, rulers often turn to covertly hiring adventurers rather than openly hiring mercenaries or sending in their uniformed troops.

## Advisors and Ambassadors

Wise rulers seek advice—not just to gain information needed to make the "right" or best decision, but to show their subjects they listen to citizens and value their opinions. Consulting advisors can be an effective way of delaying unpopular or controversial decisions, particularly if a rival is trying to force a decision to be made at a difficult time (such as a particular religious festival, a battle anniversary, or when a traditional foe's envoys are visiting).

Most rulers employ three sorts of advisors:

- persons whose opinions they value, with whom they discuss issues with in private;
- orators who speak in public (often at court) to subtly support the crown's views without seeming to do so, or to clearly present options or choices to disputing parties (for example, reminding guilds or nobles of considerations a ruler must keep in mind when adjudicating disputes); and
- "experts at finding the real experts" who serve the ruler by first discovering the true allegiances and competencies of persons presented at court as experts and then finding (or consulting with) real experts (for instance, the best dragonslayer in the realm, the only surviving visitor to a particular Underdark city, or someone who knew a rival before she rose to power and so can tell the ruler what said rival is really like).

A very old saying in Faerûn is "The unadvised throne-lord is a fool." However, it's also foolish for a ruler (or a lowly merchant or adventurer, operating in unfamiliar territory) to trust too deeply in advisors. Wise folk always try to get advice from several sources, thus testing the veracity of a particular source. As

Amnian and Sembian history repeatedly shows, if a king trusts an advisor completely, it's easy for that advisor to influence royal decisions for her personal gain or to shift a realm toward what she wants it to be (or deeper under the influence or control of a rival realm that covertly rewards her).

An ambassador represents the views of a foreign ruler or land at a ruler's court and, as such, is sometimes referred to as an unwanted advisor. In Faerûn, ambassadors are almost always called envoys, but embassies (permanent residences or offices owned by foreign powers, particularly when "outland" laws are deemed to apply within such buildings) are very rare. Most envoys are housed in crown-owned guest lodgings in or near the palace or court buildings. They usually enjoy immunities to local laws and harassment at least equal to local nobility, though this immunity will only be absolute if they represent a strong, aggressive, and feared power. Most rulers can easily arrange "accidents" or framings for death-sentence crimes (such as murder, rape, attempted regicide, or palace arson) for envoys they detest. All rulers spy on the doings of envoys—and most envoys spy on rulers or their courtiers.

Some rulers reward family members or supporters with envoyships. Such officeholders might be incompetent, lazy, undiplomatic, or concerned only for personal gain (usually by working shady trading deals). Some envoys visit only to bring weighty messages or to deal with emergencies. Others are instructed to build favor for their ruler or land by throwing lavish revels, showering folk with gifts, or offering attractive trade opportunities. This sort of envoy is likely to be comely and to use romantic wiles.

Most envoys, however, are veteran courtiers whose postings are rewards. They are highly competent and guard their jobs carefully. As a result, they tend to be terse, careful, quiet, well dressed, dignified, glib-tongued actors and sticklers for etiquette. This makes them very dangerous if they "go bad." As with advisors, rulers should beware the envoy subverted by a foreign power or acting for personal gain; envoyships provide great cover for such activities, if they are kept subtle. Envoys who are veteran courtiers tend to be subtle and polished and can very skillfully feed a ruler lies—and so must be watched carefully.

## Revolutionaries

Every ruler might face revolutionaries who want him gone because he's an usurper, not as good as previous rulers, or for some perceived flaw.

Every land has a past. As king, you might be hated just because you're not an Eaglecloak, your realm was once ruled by the Eaglecloaks, and someone claiming to be the long-lost Eaglecloak heir has just appeared. Many noble houses look for pretenders to put on thrones as their puppets, and their swords have just as "rightful" a claim to a throne as does the adventurer sitting on it, who proclaimed himself king by force of arms.

Other revolutionaries want changes to laws, society, and "the way things work" regardless of who's ruling. Rapid, effective change almost always seems most achievable by overthrow of the current ruler.

In some lands, revolutionaries are glorified outlaws seeking to justify their brigandry and win coin, free meals, and sanctuary

from angry citizens. In others, they're nobles, academics, or young hotheads who form secret societies (with elaborate rituals, passwords, signs, and costumes) and endlessly scheme to bring down a ruler or grumble about the ruler's performance, but never get around to doing much of anything.

In a few cases, revolutionaries arise who are determined and resourceful enough to attempt assassinations, coups, or armed rebellion against the ruler, the ruler's family, senior courtiers, or local tax collectors. Rulers need protection against traitors. Visible bodyguards, guardian monsters, and traps are all good deterrents, but it is always wise to keep some hidden: Unknown defenses tend to be more effective than defenses rebels can clearly measure and prepare against. Of course, the best defense is to know what's going on in the domain, and this means having competent and sufficiently numerous spies. A ruler must do whatever is necessary to gain and keep the loyalty of such forces: Many real-world leaders have been killed by their own bodyguards, bribed to slay by a third party. As an old Faerûnian saying puts it, "The man who goes not looking for trouble does not find it—it finds him."

## Religious Leaders

Many a ruler is frustrated by the presence of strong, meddling religious leaders active in her domain. If the tenets of their faith allow, high priests can—and inevitably do—act as rulers in their own right, following divine dictates as they issue their own decrees, preach sermons or enact holy policies that either support or denounce the ruler and the ruler's laws and aims, and generally behave in independent ways that can give rulers chronic pain of the fundament.

The gods are very real, and they defend (or at least avenge) their clergy. Thus, rulers usually have only two options: changing the priest's opinion through negotiation, gifts, cultivating friendships (which for the ruler usually means partially agreeing to the aims of the faith, or even paying personal lip service to following it), or having the priest removed, either through murder, arranged misadventure, or (preferably, because it prevents divine retribution) having the priest discredited in the eyes of her own clergy or deity, luring her astray or publicly exposing her "turnings" from the faith.

The deities of Faerûn are generally willing to tolerate backslidings and failings in their clergy so long as these aren't betrayals or don't lessen the number of worshipers (and therefore reduce the god's power). Thus, a high-ranking priest doing something sinful might be tolerated by a deity—but sinning publicly, or when news of such a stain spreads far and wide, will bring down divine punishment on the priest. Some deities are vindictive, but few are foolish, and all see that mortals are essentially flawed beings (the guidance toward perfection is how gods can benefit mortals); therefore, few will take revenge on a ruler who exposes a priest or tempts one into sin. Tricking or falsely accusing clergy is a different matter.

As a result, most rulers spend their lives uneasily negotiating with and accommodating the powerful priests in their domains (and sometimes, secretly, with foreign clergy to come in and drive out or weaken especially meddlesome resident clergy). Some

clergy are worldly and willing to work diplomatically with rulers to quietly increase the influence and true power of the faith, but a few are zealots or naive "touched-minds" who deal in absolutes and abstracts rather than daily practicalities—and a ruler can find them *very* hard to deal with.

## Rampaging Adventurers

Rulers understand (and can usually handle) adventurers in their domains far more easily than they can deal with ambitious clergy, because adventurers almost always want loot, fun (adventure), and power. However, if allowed to go too far, or if hired as paid "bloodswords" for a ruler's rival, they can become a grave danger. After all, most ruler-murdering usurpers are adventurers. Thus, rulers will usually move against rampaging adventurers swiftly and brutally, sometimes (especially if the adventurers are becoming popular with commoners) by hiring another adventuring band to eliminate them.

Even well-meaning adventurers can be a headache for a ruler. Many a human lordling of Faerûn has worked for years to reach an uneasy truce with neighboring elves (in adjacent forests) or dwarves (under the lord's domain), only to have adventurers charge in slaying monsters and seeking treasure—shattering the truce, sending the elves or dwarves into an uproar, and often slaying particular individuals who had forged agreements or friendships with the lord. Adventurers have a habit of attacking monsters first, and learning about local politics and ways of life later.

Adventurers are always a threat to authority because folk see them "getting away with it" and decide to become adventurers themselves. If they can't be killed swiftly and privately, great care must be taken in handling them to make sure they don't become heroes to the people; the untamable outlaw has a certain romantic appeal, after all. Shrewd rulers or local leaders often mount smear campaigns to either discredit the adventurers and stain their reputations or, even worse, to truthfully trumpet everything foolish, reckless, and cruel the adventurers do. Retellings always embellish such things, and can quickly give unwitting adventurers the reputations of monsters.

Many rulers secretly hire bands of adventurers (and install them in hunting lodges or city homes) to use as personal strike forces against rampaging adventurers; to act as a personal bodyguard or escort if things go very wrong for the ruler; and to act outside the law against foes of the ruler (when the ruler orders them to, they typically slip out to slay, kidnap, or engage in thefts or arson). Rampaging adventurers beware!

## Spies and Assassins

Most rulers employ spies. Some (often acting through intermediaries) use assassins, and all have guards and traps. A few are sophisticated enough to try to foil potential assassins sent against them by spreading lies and false documents; this can backfire if courtiers misinterpret this "mutter-work" (misinformation) as real. Concealment, decoys (doubles of the king, royal family, and senior courtiers that spies can be duped into following), magical disguises, bribery, and blackmail are more often used.

Assassins, like their victims, seldom live to make more than one mistake. Rulers tend to be the best-defended targets around. Effective killers only succeed in hitting those targets through extensive preparation. If a ruler is your assigned target, covertly learn all you can about his bodyguards, traps, the layouts of buildings where he dwells or spends a lot of time, his routines (where and when he dines, sleeps, and performs frequent tasks), his toilet habits (few rulers are more vulnerable than when bathing or using the privy), and his hobbies.

If he likes to collect toys, craft one with a poisoned needle. If he enjoys fine wines, poison can be introduced therein. What is he interested in (seeing plays, perhaps) that can be used to lure him out of his castle and into the range of your rooftop crossbow? Does he have magical defenses? A bodyguard wizard? An *ironguard* spell stored in something a wearer can trigger (such as a *ring of spell storing*) is a popular defense. How likely is this ruler to “stay dead”? How can such defenses be removed or foiled?

Planning and preparation are the keys to success. It is very rare for a ruler to be killed impulsively, with little or no planning, with the slayer escaping or managing to seize power. Of course, in the majority of regicides, the killer pays with his life on the spot, or very soon thereafter.

Ways to learn about rulers include romancing, bribing, or blackmailing servants or courtiers, using magic to observe unseen, joining the servants of a place or the ranks of courtiers, or posing as a rat-catcher, worker making repairs, guard, or other person with good reason to move around buildings in which the ruler can be found. Many try slaying and temporarily impersonating a real servant, courtier, or guard, sometimes with the aid of magical disguises. Disasters (such as fires) or scares (such as spell-spun illusions of skulking monsters or hurrying ghosts) can sometimes be arranged to cause confusion and draw guards away from their posts, allowing access to a ruler for crucial moments.

## Rewards

Players in a campaign dominated by court intrigue and politics could grow frustrated at the lack of juicy opportunities to hack down foes or scoop up treasure. However, the slower, less clear-cut victories at court hone negotiating skills, patience, and judging character—and successes can bring immense satisfaction. As with anything else that takes a lot of work over a long period of time, it feels worth more than something gained with a swift sword thrust or lone spell.

As player characters succeed and advance at court, their reach (influence, the number of issues and jurisdictions they are involved in, and the wealth or courtiers working with or under them whom they can throw at problems or into furthering their aims) will grow. The nature of play might become far more engrossing than dungeon-crawls or even pitched battles. There’s nothing so satisfying as becoming a real power—which is why so many tyrants and mages such as Vangerdahast, Manshoon, and Szass Tam have tried it.

To have your character succeed in tough conditions, with a great DM bringing Faerûn to life and hurling problems and

diplomatic messes at you right and left, is truly something to be proud of. You, too, can rule a kingdom—or stand behind the throne of King Thunderguts and make that kingdom worth ruling for him.

## Court Strongholds

Whenever rulers have enough time, coin, and freedom from destructive spells, dragon attacks, and earthquakes, they build grand court buildings.

Grand and impressive are the key words in court architecture. No matter how mundane (or impractical) building layouts or outbuildings are or become, the main entrances and public areas of any court will be designed to demonstrate power. Often they will also be decorated or furnished to show off wealth. Painted ceilings, tapestries, sculptures, and ornate paneling and carvings are the norm. These often celebrate the deeds and achievements (even if fanciful) of past rulers of the land; even if such predecessors were the hated foes of the current ruler, the ruler gains legitimacy and stature by portraying herself as one of a long line of wise, powerful, heroic, or gods-favored leaders.

In more than a few places in Faerûn, security and personal defense are of primary necessity to rulers, and courts are located in castles or other fortified strongholds. This is always presented as a matter of tradition, not practicality of the moment.

Names, layouts, architecture, and overall grandeur of ruling courts vary greatly across Faerûn. For example, in some orc, gnome, and dwarf kingdoms, the seat of power is often simply the largest cavern in the territory—and the orcs might do nothing to its natural stonework at all, adorning it only with rough benches and wall-paintings made with fire-soot and the blood of foes.

In general, however, courts in large realms will have the following room functions (though layout and naming will vary greatly):

- A grand entrance (centering on tall, large, impressive doors flanked by guards) from the outside into . . .
- A forehall, usually with a vaulted and/or decorated high ceiling, and minimal furnishings (an “echoing place of carved and polished stone,” as an old ballad puts it), connected to various rooms, including . . .
- Audience chambers where law courts might be held, courtiers can meet with delegations or with each other in committees, and rival guilds or citizens might be brought together for negotiations;
- Court offices where citizens go to clerks, scribes, and various bureaucrats to pay fees, obtain licenses and records, and report things;
- A promenade or great hall, usually sumptuously decorated, with trophies or statues of dead rulers as well as gilded splendor, and including a clear route for solemn processions; often this is a long, narrow room with a red carpet down the center, that in turn leads to . . .
- The throne room, the grandest—usually largest and loftiest—room in the court, where the ruler sits in state on a raised-on-a-dais seat, enacting laws and dealing with the business of the realm.

- Guardrooms opening into any or all of the above, enabling duty details of armed defenders to swiftly establish posts blocking entry or egress from various rooms of the court.
- A dining hall—usually high-vaulted, large, and lavishly furnished—used for state banquets hosting envoys or celebrating military or diplomatic victories, announcements of royal betrothals and the weddings that follow, revels, and dinners at which awards or gifts are presented, and which is inevitably connected to. . .
- Kitchens, serving-rooms, pantries, carveries, and usually cool-cellar and wine-cellar beneath, plus guardposts to prevent valuable cutlery and vessels from vanishing (and royal tasters to guard against poisonings).
- Chapels and shrines (unless there's a state religion or dominant faith, these will be simply decorated, secluded chambers "off away from the bustle," the exceptions being multifaith temples wherein a large room is used by worshippers of many faiths).
- Private chambers where rulers and courtiers can confer, dally, or chat with each other or with visitors away from the eyes and ears of most persons at court; in other words, these are audience chambers for the use of royalty and senior courtiers, and they usually open off the throne room near or behind the throne dais.
- Retiring and robing rooms where rulers and courtiers can change or rearrange clothing, partake of light refreshments, see to their hair or to toilet needs, and retrieve items left ready (swords or documents to be presented, items to be displayed as evidence or in court deliberations, and so on); such chambers usually open off the throne room, and if they are to be used by rulers, are often behind or near the throne itself.
- Guest apartments (where visiting delegations, envoys, and rulers live, usually in luxurious series of suites each connecting to the rest of the court through an audience chamber where the visitors can meet with courtiers).
- Private apartments (where rulers and certain court servants and courtiers live, away from public view).
- Dungeons (where prisoners will be held before and after facing justice in the throne room or in audience chambers).

Some courts are studded with crypts or tombs of former rulers, but others—usually out of a fear of undead—are free of such features, relegating them to other sites.

## example: The court of the high tower

Present-day Faerûn holds a relatively small number of kingdoms or large realms, but hundreds of city-states (independent, self-governing cities), most of them governing immediately surrounding lands. All of them have their own "lords" and ruling courts. These might be small and simple or large and complex,

but if they are more than an overblown household staff for the lord (in other words, if other people besides the ruling lord sit as magister judging legal disputes, and if others besides just the lord have a big say in determining those laws), they are known as Grand Courts. Every royal court is a Grand Court, but the example presented here, Iriaebor's Court of the High Tower, is typical of the smallest sort of Grand Court.

Titles, rituals, and precise powers vary from one court to another, and kingdoms will have much larger courts than this one (with household staffs for every palace, castle, royal hunting lodge, border keep, and garrison barracks, plus a sprinkling of odd hereditary offices and in most cases numerous Master Wardens, Master Foresters, huntsmen, and verderers of royal forests, marshes, and farms, as well as stud grooms—breeders and trainers—at various royal stables), but the Court of the High Tower illustrates the minimum strength and organization of a Grand Court.

Most of the titles given here either change "Lord" to "Lady" if the office holder is female, or prefix the title with "Lady" (Master of the Revels becomes Lady Master of the Revels).


### **His (Her) Supreme Highness, Lord (Lady) Most High of Iriaebor, Keeper of the High Tower, Watchwarden of the Flowing Chionthar**

The Lord of Iriaebor has a personal staff consisting of:

- Dexter Stave (confidant, senior personal representative)
- Sinister Stave (envoy, junior personal representative)
- Court Herald (see Chapter 6; in turn commands two heralds-in-training known as Masters Vigilant)
- Lord's Champion (head of the Black Blades, the dozen-strong personal bodyguard of the Lord of Iriaebor)
- Master Dresser (butler and head dresser to the lord; in turn commands six dressers)
- Lady of the Wardrobe (in charge of creating, maintaining, and storing all garments and regalia the Lord wears or presents to others, and of all uniforms and duty garb of all courtiers; in turn commands eighteen seamstresses)
- Master of Boots (in charge of all footwear—and crutches and artificial feet, too—for everyone in the High Tower; in turn commands six cobblers, one corviser, and two tanners)
- The High Armorer (in charge of making and maintaining the armor of the lord and all of his personal staff, as well as inspecting the work of the armorers who work for the Master of Arms)
- Bailiff Tasters (three men who sample all the lord's food and wine to guard against taints and poisonings)
- Lord Physic (herbalist and medicine-maker to the Lord and his staff; in turn commands two assistants and gardeners, the Lads Loyal)
- Pages of the High Tower (thirty-six house servants: errand runners, item-fetchers, and clearers-away)
- Handjacks of the Tower (eighteen male servants, usually used as doorguards and furniture arrangers)
- Maids Most Loyal (forty chambermaids, who clean, arrange items, and do the linens)

# High Tower of Iriaebor



 : 5 feet



- |                       |                            |                                   |                                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Entrance           | 11. Royal audience chamber | 21. Triad chapel                  | 31. Dragonwing audience chamber      |
| 2. Forehall           | 12. Retiring room          | 22. Fountain chamber              | 32. Staghead audience chamber        |
| 3. Great hall         | 13. Wardrobe               | 23. Trophy hall                   | 33. Royal presence chamber           |
| 4. Throne chamber     | 14. Royal robing room      | 24. Hallowed hall (chapel)        | 34. Rear guardtower                  |
| 5. High hall (revels) | 15. Royal garderobe        | 25. Storage chamber (furniture)   | 35. Guard passage                    |
| 6. Dining hall        | 16. Carvery                | 26. Storage chamber (linens)      | 36. Armory                           |
| 7. Kitchens           | 17. Blue audience chamber  | 27. Storage chamber (necessaries) | 37. Guardroom                        |
| 8. Upper pantry       | 18. Red audience chamber   | 28. Forest audience chamber       | 38. Lion tower                       |
| 9. Ready cellar       | 19. Servery                | 29. Rose audience chamber         | 39. "The Closet" (royal ring portal) |
| 10. Wine cellar       | 20. Garderobe              | 30. Rear guardroom                |                                      |



**Master Clerk of Iriaebor** who in turn commands the Master of the Rolls or archivist, twelve scribes, and twenty Pages of the Table, who send messages to Golden Table members

**Master of the Gold Rod** who calls Golden Table meetings to order, and keeps order during them; in turn commands six Constables of the Table who guard the doors, escort guests to meetings, and help keep order at meetings

**The Lord Hand** who serves as head tax collector; in turn commands four High Bailiffs, who are moneylenders and moneychangers, and twenty-four Low Bailiffs, who are tax collectors

**The Golden Table of Iriaebor**, forty merchants of the city, appointed—and dismissed—by the Lord of Iriaebor; they meet in council in the High Tower to debate and vote on all major matters of policy; in many older cities and remnant realms, this role is occupied by some sort of nobles' council, but most more recent trading centers have a governing or advisory council dominated by, or entirely consisting of, merchants

**Lord Steward of Iriaebor**, the most powerful courtier, in charge of the daily running of the court and of most of its courtiers

Reporting directly to the Steward are:

- Magisters of Justice (seven judges, each of whom has a personal scribe and page)
- Constables of the Streets (sixty-six officers of the Shield on current duty as city police)
- Keepers of the Gates (who supervise Shield gateguard details)
- Keepers of the Dungeons (jailers)
- Master Keeper of the Purse (clerks, vault guards)
- Master of the Waters (head boatman to the High Tower; in turn commands sixteen boatmen)
- Lady Master of Conclaves (hostess for visiting VIPs; in turn commands six doorwardens, fourteen Maids Extraordinary—who are lady escorts as well as seeing to the usual cleaning and tidying—and a Master of the Closed Coach, used for conveying VIPs, who in turn commands six coachmen)

**Lord Constable**, who is the head of the city's garrisons, in charge of procurement—purchasing of all goods, including food and wine—and also organizes and oversees all rituals

Reporting directly to the Lord Constable are:

- Master of the Horse (who in turn commands four equerries, two stablemasters, two masters-of-harness, two horse trainers, ten coachlars [coachmen], and forty-three grooms)
- Master of the Revels (who in turn commands a Grand Carver, five Court Minstrels who are led by the Bard of Iriaebor, nine Lady Dancers, forty-four Servingjacks, sixteen Maids-of-Chambers, a Senior Cupmaster [wine taster and supervisor, who in turn commands eight Cellarers])

- Master of Arms (who in turn commands four Armorers, six Trusties [armorers' assistants], and two Weaponsmasters [tutors of weapon-handling])
- Paymaster (who in turn commands five Clerks of Coin)
- Lord Commanders of the Shield (the two equally ranked senior commanders of "The Shield," Iriaebor's military and police; they in turn command the Shield through various military-rank officers)

**Lady Warden of the Tower**, the head of the household functions, a role often entitled Chatelaine elsewhere, and in the case of Iriaebor also in charge of "everyone else," the miscellaneous offices

Reporting to the Lady Warden are:

- Master of the Kitchens (who in turn commands six Cooks, fourteen Undercooks, and eight Knaves [who wash dishes, clean the kitchens, take away scraps and garbage, and also see to the care and feeding of all tower pets, including six "doorguard-dogs," war-dogs trained to recognize people, strike bell-gongs rather than barking, and to slay if necessary])
- Lady Master of the Wash (the tower laundress, who in turn commands forty-eight Lady Launderers)
- Lord Falconer (who in turn commands three Mews Hands)
- Lord Coachmaster (who builds and maintains coaches and their wheels, having nothing to do with operating the coaches or seeing to their horses or harness; this courtier in turn commands four Wheelhands, his assistants)

In daily practice, the Lord Steward runs the High Tower with an iron fist, having authority over everyone except the Golden Table members and the personal staff of the Lord of Iriaebor. He gives orders—or tries to give orders—to every member of the lord's personal staff below Lord Physic in the listings, as well as to all the minor courtiers who report to courtiers listed above the Lord Physic. This of course puts those courtiers in a difficult position whenever his orders clash with those of the courtiers they serve or the Lord Constable or Lady Warden.

The incumbent Lord Steward is typical of the sort of men who hold such office: He wields absolute authority, relinquishing it only when countermanded by the Lord of Iriaebor, rather than deferring to the lord in the first place. The Lord of Iriaebor has such a large personal staff specifically to curb not just the power of the steward, but to make sure the steward will find it impossible to control information reaching the lord.

There are constant tensions, power plays, and shifts in real influence within the High Tower—determined in large part by the personalities of the key office holders.

All Grand Courts have courtiers who are secretive, authoritarian, overly bureaucratic, or some combination of these traits. Most larger courts don't have a single courtier who is quite so dominant as the Lord Steward of Iriaebor because the number of courtiers is too large to dominate—and because wise rulers or their advisors make sure that "controlling" personalities are pitted against, and balanced by, other authoritarian courtiers so that no one person holds great sway.

# WIN THE BATTLEFIELD

**F**aerûn has been wracked by warfare since its earliest days as governments, races, religions, and powerful individuals endlessly fight each other to establish their hegemony over locations, resources, and populations. Such conflicts unfold on battlefields that range from the wide open plains of the Greenfields to the depths of the Sea of Fallen Stars and from frozen reaches of the Great Glacier to the steaming Jungles of Chult. Some battles are fought out in the open, with two great armies pitted against each other, while others unfold in the shadows, with each side stalking the other and victory determined by the sharp edge of a knife.

Characters best suited to a leadership role on the battlefield usually have some degree of martial prowess, including barbarians, clerics, fighters, monks, and paladins. Alternative routes to leadership of an army include adopting a prestige class with a martial component such as bladesinger<sup>CW</sup>, havoc mage<sup>MH</sup>, legendary leader<sup>HB</sup>, nature's warrior<sup>CW</sup>, pious templar<sup>CD</sup>, rage mage<sup>CW</sup>, tactical soldier<sup>MH</sup>, warshaper<sup>CW</sup>, warpriest<sup>CD</sup>, or a faith-specific prestige class of a war god. Alternative classes with an appropriate martial component include hexblade<sup>CW</sup>, marshal<sup>MH</sup>, samurai<sup>CW</sup>, washbuckler<sup>CW</sup>, and warmage<sup>MH</sup>.

Although "rulership" in the context of a battlefield has a political and social component, by necessity the chain of command is much stronger in armies than it is in other social organizations. Advancing to a leadership position within an army is sometimes

a simple matter of survival and demonstrating your martial prowess. Faerûn's history is replete with highly unpopular generals who nevertheless exercised command without complaint solely because they continued to win. This chapter focuses on leadership in the martial arena and the unique challenges and rewards of pursuing such a role.

## The Burdens of command

A military leader is an individual who commands groups of warriors in battle. Sometimes those troops are professional soldiers, and sometimes they are simple peasants who fight in defense of their homeland. Some military leaders serve civilian leaders as professional soldiers (such as a general or admiral), while others lead civilian populations as well (such as a king or pontiff). Some military leaders are loyal to their country or creed, and some are simple mercenaries, loyal only to their coin purse. While most military leaders are promoted at the direction of a higher authority, some are self-selected or pushed into a leadership role by those they command.

In game terms, a military leader is any individual with a commander rating of 4 or more. While commanders with a rating of 1, 2, or 3 hold positions of leadership, they do not command sufficient numbers of troops to be considered military leaders in the sense meant by this chapter.

## what do military leaders do?

At the simplest level, military leaders command troops. They muster those troops into units that then work in concert to

### Rules for military campaigns

Military campaigns require a style of roleplaying different from that of the prototypical D&D adventure. *Heroes of Battle* and *Miniatures Handbook* both outline rules and approaches for running a military campaign. This chapter assumes access to *Heroes of Battle* and uses terms and concepts defined in that supplement.

achieve a greater military objective than the sum of their parts would be able to accomplish.

Military leaders and the units they command play two basic roles. First, they play a critical role in defense, not just defending against attacks but also deterring potential foes from deciding that attacks will be worthwhile. The latter is arguably the more important role, for such deterrence allows civil society to unfold with the common understanding that conflicts are resolved through mediation, not battle. Second, military leaders and the units they command play a critical role in waging war and demonstrating the potential to make war. Again, the latter is the more important role, for such latent threats convince foes to bow to the superior force without actually expending significant resources.

Military leaders can be focused on external and/or internal threats to a society. Those who focus on external threats typically command armies, while those who focus on internal threats typically command police forces. The distinction between these two orientations is often blurred, but the most successful and stable governments usually keep the two roles separate. The reason for such division of labor is that external threats usually need to be met with overwhelming force or the threat of such, while internal dissent needs some degree of stricture on the exercise of police authority in order to thrive. More important, a skilled general with access to a powerful army as well as the authority to use it within the government's territory can become a profound threat to the civilian leadership of the realm.

As such, military leaders must not just wage war or enforce the social compact; they must forge a deterrent to intimidate potential foes, and they must create a strike capability to enforce the will of the state or creed they are pledged to serve. They must decide what level of force is appropriate and when to deploy it to maximum effect. A powerful military leader can wield an army or police force as a weapon against foes without ever having his troops leave their barracks.

## HOW TO USE THE Leadership feat

The chain of command is instilled in every successful army, sublimating the goal of individual survival for group success. Military leaders with the Leadership feat find that their military

### commanders and followers

In certain situations, commanders might actually command troops made up wholly or partially of followers acquired by way of the Leadership feat or the Epic Leadership feat (which is reprinted on page 156). Such units are unusually loyal to their commander. A military unit that includes followers of a commander gets a +1 morale check modifier, a +1 morale bonus on melee attack rolls, and a +2 rally check modifier, assuming the followers make up 10% or more of the unit.

rank increases their ability to mold their followers into an effective fighting force.

The following modifiers are applied to a character's effective Leadership score with respect to the character's military community.

The Leader Is . . .	Leadership Score Modifier
A commander	+ commander rating
A decorated veteran	+ decoration Bonus

The rules for improving your commander rating and/or decoration bonus are given on pages 88–92 of *Heroes of Battle*.

## HOW DO YOU RUN military cohorts and followers?

Cohorts and followers who are members of the unit you command follow you as much because of your rank as your ability to inspire and lead. You are their superior, to be obeyed without dissent for the overall success of the group. However, although your cohort and followers are quick to answer your orders, by nature of your position and job you must put in them into harm's way quite often. You must do everything in your power to maintain the chain of command, to treat your troops strictly and equitably, and to reward merit and valor with commendations, decorations, and promotions.

You should establish a fort, castle, or citadel in which to base your unit, and you should drill the personnel regularly (almost every day). When not asked to fight, externally focused military cohorts and followers spend their days training, maintaining their weapons and defenses, preparing contingency war plans, and scouting potential enemies. Likewise, internally focused military cohorts and followers spend their days patrolling, investigating crimes, and training.

With rare exceptions, you should only call on military cohorts and followers to wage war or defend the peace. If you employ them for extraneous purposes, you are likely to significantly undermine morale and military readiness. Your military cohorts and followers become more valuable if you spread them out across multiple units under your command, because they can serve as loyal subcommanders and as able supporters of morale.

## playing the military game

Faerûn is littered with the cairns of countless battles, marking the rise and fallen of empires, kingdoms, cities, small settlements, and unfortunate individuals. Those wars continue in the modern era across the length and breadth of Faerûn, beneath the waves, in the subterranean depths of the Realms Below, in the skies above, and through *portals* to other planes, continually reshaping the economic, political, and religious landscape.

Whereas explorers and dungeon delvers seek adventure in the context of the social landscape, military leaders seek to change the social landscape or defend the status quo. By playing the

military game, you seek to defend, extend, or overthrow the writ of economic, political, and religious leaders through force of arms. Through the actions of military leaders and their followers, communities and cultures wax or wane in power and might even cease to exist.

## YOU ARE LEADING AN ARMY— NOW WHAT?

As a military leader, you must first determine why you fight. Are you defending your homeland, faith, or creed? If so, you must identify your most likely future foes and build defenses against the possibility of attack. Do you seek to grow your homeland, faith, or creed through conquest? If so, identify which new lands have the right combination of value, inadequate current defenses, and long-term defensibility so you can conquer and hold their territory. Are you motivated simply by profit, selling your sword to the highest bidder? If so, determine whether you fight for your first employer only or switch sides the moment a better offer is made. Seek regions prone to conflict where the employment of mercenaries is traditional and few employers attempt to renege on an agreement. Do you intend to earn your living by taking that which currently belongs to others? If so, seek out rich regions with weak defenses and few natural allies. Decide whether you wish to establish yourself in newly conquered territory or if you are simply an itinerant predator, migrating from region to region but never trying to hold more than the plunder you seize.

## crusades

Although wars fought for ostensibly morale reasons are often called crusades, such as King Azoun IV's crusade against the Tuigan Horde, true crusades combine the requirements of military leadership with the demands of spiritual leadership (as

outlined in Chapter 3). An army of crusaders is essentially a martial, mobile congregation of true believers willing to martyr themselves to fulfill the requirements of their faith. Leading a crusade imposes new requirements on military leaders in that the conduct of the armed force is often more important than the attainment of the objective.

For example, the Knights of Samular, an order of Tyrite paladins active in the North, fought bravely alongside the armies of the Lords' Alliance in the Dragonspear War. Whereas the armies of Waterdeep and Amn fought chiefly to reopen the Trade Way along which their economic lifeblood largely flows, the Holy Order of the Knights of Samular sought to demonstrate the moral superiority of those who espouse Tyr's justice over the cruelty and selfishness of diabolic interlopers from the Nine Hells.

In game terms, the leader of an army of crusaders is considered both a military leader and a spiritual leader and can build his effective Leadership score using the appropriate modifiers for both.

## Running Hordes

Although any large armed force made up of creatures seen as "less civilized" is commonly termed a horde, a true horde is essentially a leaderless army, indirectly mustered by the twin pressures of a burgeoning population and insufficient resources to support that population and directed only by cultural traditions such as hatred of a neighboring civilization. In such situations, individual marauders coalesce into larger and larger gangs that explode in orgies of destruction and plunder. Once sufficient mass is reached

Illustration by William O'Connor



*A wizard of Cormyr clashes with a Tuigan warrior*

that terrorizing the local populace is inadequate to support the horde, a horde migrates toward more tempting targets, usually a traditional foe.

In such situations, it is possible for military leaders to emerge, in effect transforming the horde into an irregular army. Oftentimes, cunning, would-be military leaders in a culture prone to giving rise to hordes at least once in every generation simply wait for natural population pressures to give rise to a horde and then move quickly to make it their own. (This sort of behavior is common among orcs of the North and the hobgoblins of the Giantspire Mountains.) Once a horde is formed, would-be military leaders must make a dramatic move or statement that causes the horde to crystallize around a specific cultural objective. They must then move quickly to create an informal command structure, recruiting other self-appointed military leaders who have achieved a smaller measure of the same. In effect, such military leaders do not plan

for victory but try to transform the horde into an army before it disbands as the original population pressures are reduced.

## Earning Rank

Although Faerûn is home to many armies, each one with its own unique set of titles and traditions, certain characteristics hold true among all successful militaries. First, armed forces are organized in a hierarchical fashion with a clear chain of command and a system of ranks, although in some cultures, those considered to be of noble birth enter the chain of command at a higher point than their lower class brethren. Second, armed forces have a merit-based promotion system, although there might be limits to promotion due to race or social class. Promotions are given for valor, success, sacrifice, and simply surviving.

## warfare in faerûn

The Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR) is seeing the usual endemic skirmishing between feuding neighbors. In particular, Chondath, the Blade Kingdoms, the Border Kingdoms, Chesenta, and Threskel seem to exist in a constant state of conflict and internecine warfare, in which mercenaries, merchants, and madmen often hold the blades that can trigger full-fledged wars. As it happens, the three major current wars have been raging for several years, and one major war has hopped across northern Faerûn.

**Reclamation of Shanatar:** The Reclamation of Shanatar began in the Year of the Gauntlet (1369 DR) when gold dwarves from the Great Rift and gray dwarves from Dunspeirin marched separately on the caverns of Shanatar, intent on restoring Shanatar to its former glory. Both the Army of Steel and the Army of Gold claim to have initiated the “crusade,” thereby provoking the other to launch a similar venture.

After five years of warfare, the Reclamation of Shanatar has bogged down into a bitter war of attrition, with the gold dwarves stoutly defending the reclaimed caverns of Barakuir against repeated incursions by the duergar, who have established a fortified base in the deepest mines of fallen Tathtar. The gold dwarves have allied themselves with a colony of spellweavers, while the gray dwarves have forged an alliance with a small group of beholder outcasts from Ilt’Zokir.

**Seiveril’s Crusade:** Around Midwinter, the daemonfey of House Dlardrageth mustered an army of fey’ri, orcs, and ogres to attack elf holdings in the High Forest and Evereska. In response, Lord Seiveril Miritar formed a “crusade” from Evermeet to defend elf holdings in Faerûn. Although Lady Sarya and her followers were defeated, the daemonfey and fey’ri rebuilt their army from a new redoubt in the ruins of Myth Drannor a few months later. With the aid of the archdevil Malkizid, House Dlardrageth raised an army of demons, devils, and yugoloths beneath the boughs of fabled Cormanthyr, so Lord Seiveril’s Crusade moved eastward to Semberholme. The

resulting conflict drew in the armies of Cormanthor’s drow, Hillsfar, Sembia, and Zhentil Keep, but ultimately resulted in the defeat of the demonspawned elves, the reclamation of Myth Drannor and the Elven Court, and the coronation of Seiveril’s daughter, Ilsevele Miritar, as coronal of Cormanthyr.

**Sothillisian War:** This conflict between the merchant lords of Amn and the ogre-led monster armies of the Sothillisian Empire is well into its fourth year. Shortly after midsummer, it ends in the Trade Way Truce, marking the beginning of the Stinger War, pitting former enemies who form a temporary alliance against the newly emerged threat of a massive hive of stingers. See the end of this chapter for further details.

**Untheric Crusade:** For three years, the armies of Mulhorand have slowly pushed into Unther, claiming more and more of their once-powerful rival’s territory for Pharaoh Horustep III. By the end of the Year of Rogue Dragons (1373 DR), Mulhorand had conquered all of Unther except the city of Messemprar, and its armies threatened to lay siege to that city once the rainy season (winter) had passed despite frenzied attacks by small flights of dragons from the Riders to the Sky mountains. Early in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR), two events changed the thrust of this war. First, the Banite templars of the Black Lord’s Altar in Mourktar marched forth to the defense of Messemprar, reinforcing the besieged defenders of that city. Early successes by the Banites were attributed to a massive influx of magical weaponry from Thay sold to the church of Bane at cut-rate prices. Second, the Shussel-folk who disappeared from their city in the mysterious event known as the Vanishing have reappeared in Shussel as the Legion of Nanna-Sin. According to reports, the Shussel-folk were taken to the “lost” plane of Zigguraxus by Nanna-Sin (who might be an aspect of Selûne), transformed into aasimar, and trained as elite warriors. Now the Legion has returned, opening a new front against the rear flank of Mulhorand’s forward armies.

TABLE 2-1: SAMPLE RANKS OF FAERÛN

Rank (rating)	El Sadimmin and El Nallojal (Army and Navy of Calimshan)	Purple Dragons of Cormyr	Shield Dwarves of the North	Warswords of Impiltur	City Guard of Waterdeep <sup>1</sup>	City Watch of Waterdeep <sup>2</sup>	Zhentilar of the Zhentarim <sup>3</sup>
Private (0)	Askar (non-noble)	Blade	Huryrn	Warblade	Trusty	Blade	Stalwart
Corporal (1)	Djawal (noble)	Telsword ("Sword")	Haurhammer	n/a	n/a	Armar ("Sword")	Sternhelm
Sergeant (2)	Musar	First Sword	Axe	Warsword	Vigilant	Swordcaptain <sup>4</sup>	Swordhar
Lieutenant (3)	Chawal; Amhir (noble)	Swordcaptain	Battle Hand	Alorn	Shieldlar	Rorden <sup>4</sup>	Swordcaptain
Captain (4)	Yuzas	Lionar	Daethand	Highsword	Aumarr	Orsar <sup>4</sup>	Lance
Major (5)	Shyk; Rysal (noble, ship captain)	Ornrion	Warbeard	Vigilar	Valabrar	Guardsword	Battle-Captain
Colonel (6)	Mumijn	Constal	Moragarr	Shieldlord	Torsin	Commander	Ardragon
Major General <sup>5</sup> (7)	Balak	Oversword	Arthane	Wargauntlet	Commander	Watchlord <sup>6</sup>	Dark Hand
Lieutenant General <sup>7</sup> (8)	Qyadin (army general); Ralbahar (noble, admiral)	Battlemaster	High Axe	War Captain	Several <sup>8</sup>	Captain of the Watch	Banefist
General <sup>9</sup> (9)	Sahrmak	Lord High Marshal	First Axe	High Captain	Warden of Waterdeep	Commander of the Watch	High Lord of the Zhentarim

1 To outsiders, the City Guard come in two sorts: "soldier" and "commander" (any officer).

2 To outsiders, "Watchmen" (a term used for both genders) come in three sorts: "patrolman" (male) or "patroljan" (female), "captain" (any officer controlling a patrol) and "commander" (any officer of higher rank). Many folk call every Watchman "officer," just to be safe.

3 The Zhentilar are the soldiers of the Zhentarim and Zhentil Keep. The Zhentarim are technically the governing wizards and priests. Zhents are the common people of Zhentil Keep. Zhent (adjective form: Zhentan) means "of Zhentil Keep" and is applied to people, goods, customs, and laws. Note that before Fzoul assumed command, the Zhentarim experimented with many battlefield ranks and groupings.

4 "Civilar" is a term applied to all ranks from swordcaptains up through orsar.

5 Major general is equivalent to the rank of general in *Heroes of Battle*, requiring 600–899 promotion points and usually commanding 5,000 to 15,000 troops.

6 Watchlords usually have special titles bestowed upon them by the Commander of the Watch (a title held by the Open Lord of Waterdeep).

7 Lieutenant general is a new rank, higher than the rank of general in *Heroes of Battle*, requiring 900–1,299 promotion points and usually commanding 15,000 to 30,000 troops.

8 Titles bestowed at this rank include Seneschal of Castle Waterdeep, Lord Defender of the Harbor, Lord of the North Towers, Lord of the South Towers, Lord Armorer, Lord Hand, and Lord's Champion.

9 General is much higher than the rank of general in *Heroes of Battle*, requiring 1,300 or more promotion points and usually commanding 30,000 or more troops.

The general process of earning promotions is detailed on pages 88–92 of *Heroes of Battle*. Sample Faerûn-specific titles are given in Table 2–1, to supplement a similar table in that supplement.

## Leading Armies

The primary role of military leaders is commanding the troops that make up an armed force. Military leaders must make judgments about how to supply their forces, define their objectives, and create battle plans by which the objectives can be achieved. Like playing pieces on a game board, each unit must be given

achievable orders that are likely to be obeyed so that the collective effect of their actions has a reasonable chance of victory. Depending upon the army or police force, such leadership might take the form of charging into combat in the vanguard of the troops or planning deployments in a secure rear base.

## giving commands to subordinates

Every organized military (as opposed to a true horde) has a chain of command. Commanders in the chain of command can give orders or make requests. Orders given by ranking superiors are

expected to be obeyed, but invariably some orders are resisted or ignored, subject to a unit's morale.

In game terms, an order is represented by an Intimidate check, whereas a request is handled as a Diplomacy check. In both cases, the DC is determined using the Influencing NPC Attitudes sidebar on page 72 of the *Player's Handbook*. An order automatically fails if the orderer does not outrank the orderee. You must make a Diplomacy check if the NPC is immune to fear. Table 2-2 details additional modifiers that apply to Intimidate and Diplomacy checks when giving orders or making requests:

TABLE 2-2: GIVING ORDERS

The Orderee Is ...	Diplomacy and Intimidate Modifier
Lower ranking than the commander	The difference between the commander rating of the orderer and the commander rating of the orderee
Influenced by the orderer	+ Influence modifier
Lawful	+5
Chaotic	-5
Heartened <sup>1</sup>	+5
Shaken <sup>1</sup>	-5
Frightened <sup>1</sup>	-10

<sup>1</sup> These are morale conditions, as defined on page 74 of *Heroes of Battle*.

## Mobilizing Troops

Armed forces regularly lose troops. Casualties are most common in times of war, but accidents and minor skirmishes occur in times of peace as well. Some troops desert or choose not to reenlist when their terms of service expire, due to low morale, advancing years, or other opportunities. Many armed forces maintain a core fighting force and only mobilize additional troops in times of imminent need. Military leaders are expected to maintain troop strength through regular voluntary recruitment and/or conscription.

Players are encouraged to role-play attempts at troop recruitment and retention. Likely tactics include motivational speeches, adjusting pay rates, and acting on behalf of the local population. Alternatively, a mechanical substitute for maintaining troop levels is a monthly DC 25 Diplomacy check (in the case of troops who join voluntarily) or a DC 20 Intimidate check (in the case of troops who are conscripted). The base DC is modified as noted in Table 2-3, depending on the morale of the troops and the targeted population for recruitment. (In the case of conscription, treat the attitude of troops and population as being two steps worse, to a maximum of hostile.) If the check is successful, recruitment and retention exceeds attrition and casualties by 1% plus 1% for every point by which the check result exceeds the DC. If the check fails, recruitment and retention falls below attrition and casualties by 1% for every point of difference between the check result and the DC. Of course, a military leader should not recruit more troops than he can pay for.

For example, in times of peace the Purple Dragons of Cormyr rely on voluntary recruitment from the citizenry of the Forest Kingdom to maintain troop levels. During the reign of King Azoun IV, morale was high and the troops were considered help-

ful by their commanders, while the population was considered friendly. Therefore, maintaining troop levels was straightforward for a skilled and diplomatic leader such as Azoun IV, requiring a successful DC 17 Diplomacy check to maintain or exceed current troop levels each month. When the Devil Dragon and her army attacked the Forest Kingdom, the population became helpful and considered itself under attack (DC 5).

In contrast, the Zhentilar rely on conscription to maintain their ranks. They recruit troops from the citizenry of Zhentil Keep and the surrounding lands (including fallen Teshendale). Since the return of Bane, morale has been good and the troops have been considered friendly by their commanders. In contrast, the population is unfriendly with regards to the Zhentilar. As such, Scylla Darkhope (described on page 164 of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*) must make a successful DC 28 Intimidate check to maintain troop levels each month. Her job became much more difficult after her army's crushing defeat in Shadowdale battling the Lord Seiveril Miritar's army of elf crusaders from Evermeet in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR), for the population considered the invasion ill-conceived (DC 32).

TABLE 2-3: MOBILIZING TROOPS

Attitude of Troops <sup>1</sup>	Modifier to DC
Troops are hostile	+5
Troops are unfriendly	+3
Troops are indifferent	+0
Troops are friendly	-3
Troops are helpful	-5

Attitude of Population <sup>1</sup>	Modifier to DC
Population is hostile	+5
Population is unfriendly	+3
Population is indifferent	+0
Population is friendly	-3
Population is helpful	-5
Population disapproves of current military activity	+5

### Other Modifiers

Population is threatened	-5
Population is under attack	-10
Size of armed forces as percentage of population	+1 per 1% of total population <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the case of conscription, treat the attitude of troops and population as two steps worse.

<sup>2</sup> Divide this modifier by 2 for hordes or if the armed forces include both male and female troops, and divide this modifier by 4 if both of these conditions are true.

## Holding Territory

Other than a few mercenary companies that only accept commissions to fight (not to hold territory) and hordes (some of which seek only to plunder before moving on to the next tempting target), most armed forces need to defend territory against external and internal threats. Holding territory is as much about deterrence as it is about defense, and it requires a number of interrelated activities by military leaders.

First and foremost, holding territory requires armies to build and maintain fortifications. Military leaders must consider where future battles are likely to be fought and the nature of likely opponents. They must identify strategic chokepoints where it makes sense to make a defensive stand. They must identify which resources and which populations must be defended. They must decide whether “defense” means hunkering down behind stout walls or taking the battle to the enemy with highly mobile troops and fortifications.

Second, holding territory requires armies to pacify the local inhabitants. In uncivilized areas, that means driving out the local monster population. In rural and urban areas, that means establishing military hegemony over the civilian population, either through their willing consent or by subjugating them unwillingly. Once a territory is pacified, regular patrols, spies, and magical divinations are required to keep an eye on the territory and make sure it remains pacified.

And finally, holding territory requires establishing lines of communication and lines of supply. Military leaders must find and secure sources of water and food, determine how many days worth of stores to provide and for what fraction of the population, and determine primary and backup means of communication. Magical resources, such as individuals and items that can employ spells and spell-like abilities such as *create food and water*, *sending*, *heroes' feast*, *purify food and drink*, and *whispering wind*, can be used to supplement such plans. However, overreliance on such magical means invites enemies to target such individuals and items.

## obligations and duties of a military leader

Military leaders are obligated to fight at the command of those they serve. (Where martial rule prevails, military leaders in effect serve themselves.) They must differentiate between the political decision-making process to threaten or use military force and the strategic decision-making process to achieve victory, staying out of the former while tolerating no interference in the latter.

A military force must be available at any moment, and yet most soldiers spend very little time actually fighting. As such, it is the responsibility of a military leader to use the time between conflicts wisely, training troops, maintaining equipment, building fortifications, reinforcing supply lines, and planning for every contingency. Daily duties typically involve a mix of reviewing existing plans and preparations, conducting training and drills, synthesizing new intelligence about potential foes, and adapting plans and preparations for newly arisen contingencies. Military leaders must be concerned about morale, keeping a close watch on their troops' willingness to fight and the civilian community's willingness to support the warriors in its midst.

Military leaders must pay particular attention to the effectiveness of their forces as a deterrent. Concurrent with the endless diplomatic dance between rival powers, most military forces continue to probe their potential future opponents' strengths and weaknesses. As such, it is of critical importance that a military leader regularly root out spies within his ranks as well

as informers from the surrounding community; clearly, they can severely weaken the deterrent effect provided by a military by communicating its true strengths, or weaken the actual fighting ability of the military by acting as saboteurs. In a sense, a military that is forced to fight has already at least partially failed, because its leaders failed to maintain a sufficient deterrent to prevent attack or failed to project a threat of sufficient strength, so that opponents refuse to concede diplomatically.

## conflicts

As instruments of police enforcement and warfare, military forces are the ultimate recourse for irreconcilable conflicts in any other arena. A military's ostensible foes on the battlefield might include the armed forces of hostile powers, or creatures of such power that they can fight entire armies. Some foes choose not to fight on the battlefield, but attack from within. In addition, armies are often caught up in other conflicts, as well, reflecting tensions within the ranks and with the civilian or religious leadership.

## opposing armies

Armies are built to fight one another, and this form of conflict comes naturally to most military leaders. In the case of national armies, including those of city-states and kingdoms, the primary task is defense of the homeland against rival national armies and humanoid hordes. In the case of police forces, the primary task is law and order, meaning they must be powerful enough to take on and defeat criminal gangs and predatory monsters that operate in secrecy from within the society. Church armies often play the role of national armies, but they must also be prepared to battle the defenders of hostile faiths.

*Heroes of Battle* details how to run large-scale battles between armies, yet focus on the actions of the PCs.

## internal strife

All organizations are plagued by internal strife, and military forces are no exception. Armed forces suffer a unique weakness due to the common practice of battlefield promotions. Although most ambitious subordinates seek to earn promotions through merit, by fawning over their superiors, or by undermining their rivals, some see opportunity in betraying their commander.

Military leaders must guard against ambitious underlings who might change or “misinterpret” an order at a crucial moment, leaving their commander at grave risk of death or dismemberment. In companies where such tactics are common, such as among the templars of Bane, most military leaders command from the rear, giving up the morale advantages their forces might gain by leading them into combat. In armies where betrayal is rare, such as among the Purple Dragons of Cormyr, military leaders often lead by example, serving in the vanguard of their elite forces. Of course, wise military rulers, such as King Azoun IV in his day, employ enforcers skilled at ferreting out traitors, such as the War Wizards of Cormyr.



## powerful monsters

Faerûn is home to many powerful monsters, some of whom are powerful enough to battle an entire army single-handedly. Great wyrms, such as Balagos, Imvaernarhro, Iryklathagra, Klauth (see page 167 of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*), and Palarandusk, periodically awake from their slumbers to hunt for food and/or plunder, only to feast upon a burgeoning horde of orcs. Elder evils such as Ityak-Ortheel the Elf-Eater<sup>CR</sup> are dispatched to the Material Plane to wreak havoc, destroying settlements such as Synnoria and the armies that defend them.

Powerful monsters pose a unique challenge to armies arrayed against them. It is both a strength and a weakness to have the opposing force wielded by a single mind. On one hand, powerful monsters do not need to maintain lines of communication, and they are aware of the actions of all their weapons. On the other hand, they can usually only focus on the task at hand and therefore can be more easily deceived by a feint. Moreover, creativity in combat often springs from multiple minds considering a problem from different angles, an advantage held by armies that allow individual commanders to think for themselves.

When pitted against such a foe, armies should avoid large formations through which a powerful monster can rampage, inflicting huge casualties. Military leaders should employ every clever trick and feint they can devise. Divide attackers into small companies that mount hit and run attacks as opportunities present themselves and attack with a wide variety of weapons and styles.

## insidious threats

Most armies are so focused on external threats that saboteurs can wreak great havoc from within the ranks. Enemy infiltrators who join the ranks can employ a variety of tactics, from undermining morale, to

spreading rumors, to deliberately altering orders. Such tactics are even more effective when the saboteurs are shapechangers, able to assume the guise of a variety of officers during the course of a battle, sowing confusion wherever they go.

In the face of such threats, many military leaders devise codes and pass-phrases that are difficult for saboteurs to absorb quickly, even if they have access to spells or spell-like abilities such as *detect thoughts*. Of course, such defenses can impede the quick flow of orders through an army during a battle. Other military leaders with access to powerful spellcasters establish *zones of truth* at command points (often tied to a *hallow* or *unhallow* spell) and dispatch spellcasters with *true seeing* spells to monitor the troops. Of course, such tactics limit the mobility of commanders and require spellcasting effort that might otherwise be used for battle magic.

## The throne

In some cultures and faiths, no conflict exists between military leadership and leadership of the community. This is true in militaristic societies such as Zhentil Keep, where the strongest rule, and in benevolent dictatorships such as Cormyr, where the sovereign of House Obarskyr directly rules the kingdom and leads the army. However, in many cultures and faiths, there exists the concept of a professional military, subservient to the rule of the civilian or religious leadership, yet restrained from seizing power only by tradition and morality.

All such cultures, no matter how deeply ingrained the division of labor, experience an inherent tension between those who decide when and where to use military force and those who command troops into battle. Inevitably, civilian leaders arise who give orders contrary to the best judgment of the military leadership or attempt to insert their opinions into the strategic planning process.

Illustration by Lucio Parrillo



*Defenders of the realm ensnare a marauding dragon*

Leaders of professional military forces generally view themselves as expendable tools subject to the chain of command and yet given discretion to implement their orders as effectively as possible within their constraints. Conflicts inevitably arise when military leaders refuse to implement or delay enacting their orders as well as when civilian or religious leaders interfere beyond setting objectives. Often, such tensions play out in the political arena through communiques and field reports in the midst of an armed conflict as each side prepares for the aftermath of military victory or defeat.

## Military Rivals

Given the potential threat posed by armies and their military leaders, political leaders rarely concentrate all their military forces under one command. For example, in the Forest Kingdom of Cormyr, House Obarskyr has traditionally divided military power among the Purple Dragons (army), the Blue Dragons (navy), and the War Wizards (magic). However, House Obarskyr has long held a firm grip on power in Cormyr, so they have found it safer to disallow

powerful church armies or private militias in the employ of noble families and to severely restrict the existence of large mercenary companies through the limited granting of charters (even regulating small adventuring companies in this fashion).

Although such tactics might prove wise for a ruler who wishes to keep his throne, it can create significant headaches for military leaders of the various armed forces. Such leaders must compete for influence with the sovereign and for tax revenue held in the royal coffers. Rivals seek advantage, even during the course of battle, by “misinterpreting” orders. If eventual victory against the common foe is not in doubt, a rival leader might seek to position himself to gain more glory or to suffer fewer casualties among his troops. Wise military leaders cultivate allies among the mid-level officers of nominally allied forces to prevent such petty tactics from undermining their success.

## Rewards

In war, the rule has always been “To the victor go the spoils.” Although armies fight for a wide range of reasons, the rewards of warfare generally fall in three broad categories: attainment of strategic objectives, plunder, and individual promotions and decorations.

Strategic objectives can be characterized as defensive or offensive: either to hold on to something of value or to acquire something of value. Sometimes the reward of the strategic objective goes to the military force as a whole, sometimes the reward goes to individual members of the armed force, and sometimes it goes to the sponsor of the armed force. Mercenary companies and national armies usually fight on behalf of a sponsor: individuals, guilds, or the citizenry who make up the tax base. Martial kings and other ruler-generals usually claim the strategic objective

for themselves or their immediate families.

Crusades and hordes usually claim strategic objectives for the group as a whole, but the latter example usually devolves into plunder by individual members.

For example, the Purple Dragons of Cormyr defended the Forest Kingdom from the goblinoid troops of Nalavatoryl the Devil Dragon in the Year of the Unstrung Harp (1371 DR). Their

strategic objective was the defense of Cormyr’s territory. Al-

though Cormyr’s army proved victorious, neither the troops nor the army as a whole were given control of the reclaimed territory and its assets. Ownership of the land and its assets instead reverted back to the crown and the citizenry (which included many members of the army who had been called up to fight).

In contrast, Mulhorand’s templars have directly benefited from their land’s unfolding conquest of southern Unther. Part of the reason for Mulhorand’s slow advance in the face of relatively weak opposition has been the tendency for individual units to immediately “squat” on newly seized territory, building temples, taking ownership of the farms, and establishing residences. In effect, in order to continue to advance, Mulhorand’s generals must regularly muster a new army of would-be pioneers to leapfrog over the previous front line. Although incredibly slow, Mulhorand’s successive waves of invasion are relentlessly gobbling up Unther in a slow tide of colonization.

Although different cultures hold varying standards on the appropriateness of seizing items of value from the bodies of



*A young warrior receives a medal for valor on the field of battle*

Illustration by Francis Tsai

TABLE 2-4: SAMPLE DECORATIONS OF FAERÛN

Decoration	El Sadimmin and El Nallojal (Army and Navy of Calimshan)	Purple Dragons of Cormyr	Shield Dwarves of Old Delzoun	Warswords of Impiltur	City Guard/ Watch of Waterdeep	Zhentilar of the Zhentarim
1-point wound	Sword of the Syl-Pasha (embroidered badge)	Blood of Gordroun (ribbon)	Axe of Adbar (runestone)	Tear of the Broken God (embroidered badge)	Blood of Dragonspear (ribbon)	Blood of Zhentar (ribbon)
2-point training	Howl of the Black Horde (embroidered badge)	Shield of Aunkspear (badge)	Fist of Felbarr (runestone)	Gauntlet of the Steadfast (embroidered badge)	Justice of Amphail (ribbon)	Shield of the Raven (badge)
2-point service (battle)	Chains of Harakhti (embroidered badge)	Sword of Ibratha (medal)	Mug of Mithral (runestone)	Shield of the Faithful (ribbon)	Doom of Myrkul's Legion (ribbon)	Scourge of the Night Plague (ribbon)
4-point service (campaign)	Torch of the Seven Burnings (embroidered badge)	Rock of Hlundadim (periapt)	Sword of Sundbarr (runestone)	Bane of the Giantspires (ribbon)	Bane of Orcfastings (ribbon)	Bane of Phlan (ribbon)
5-point	Axe of Shanatar (embroidered badge)	Scale of Nalavatoryl (medal)	Beard of Clangeddin (silver medal)	Sword of Cleansing (badge)	Flame of the Everlasting Ones (medal)	Terror of Mulmaster (medal)
10-point	Eye of the Beholder (embroidered badge)	Crusader of Thesk (medal)	Fire of Gorm (gold medal)	Blessing of the Grimjaws (medal)	Thorn of Evereska (medal)	Conqueror of Ankhalus (medal)
20-point	Quarrel of the Night (embroidered badge)	Witch Lords' Lament (medal)	Axe of Haela (platinum medal)	Aegis of the Penitent (medal)	Scourge of the Sea (medal)	Annihilator of Thar (medal)
40-point	Fire of Memnon (reddish-gold sash)	Horn of Magrath (medal)	Secret of Dumathoin (mithral medal)	Hand of the Saints (medal)	Bane of the Black Claw (medal)	Terror of the Moonsea (medal)
80-point	Breath of Calim (silvery-gold sash)	Heart of the Purple Dragon (medal)	Forge of Moradin (adamantine medal)	Wings of the Seraph (silver medal)	Flight of the Black Horde (medal)	Fist of Bane (medal)

dead foes, prisoners, and those unable to defend themselves, all armies engage in plunder to varying degrees. The logistics of war ensure that all armies must, at a minimum, scrounge to feed and resupply themselves, and such resources must come, at least in part, from wherever the army is based. No army can afford to pay for everything it needs, because such funds can always be put to better use acquiring more soldiers or more weapons. Some armies overtly engage in plunder, while others do so quietly and indirectly through what amounts to a wartime tax.

For example, the Knights of Imphras II, an elite order of paladins and clerics who pledge fealty to the crown of Impiltur and specialize in hunting down and destroying fiends and other buried legacies of ancient Narfell, uphold the noble principals of the Triad. Nevertheless, according to Impilturan custom, they are entitled to a night's food and lodging at any home in Impiltur upon request. Although members of the order generally take care not to abuse this privilege, it is a subtle form of plunder in that it takes resources from the civilian population whenever the order's troops need to operate in an area.

In contrast, Zhentil Keep's Zhentilar operate in accordance

with the tenets of the Church of Bane. Banite dogma holds that a victor is entitled to all property formerly owned by the defeated, a category that includes former combatants and the civilians on behalf of whom they fought. Civilians allied to an army operating under the banner of the Black Hand are expected to tithe up to 50% of their current food stores, weapons, and armor. Moreover, they must offer up lodging, food, and nighttime comfort to Banite officers upon request.

In addition to their titles and traditions, Faerûn's armed forces each have their own unique set of decorations. Like promotions, decorations are given for valor, success, sacrifice, and simply surviving. Decorations are of particular value to armed forces in that they cost little to bestow, yet they are perceived as valuable by those who receive them in that they increase the respect (or fear) the recipient engenders from their fellow soldiers, their enemies, and the civilian populace.

The general process of earning decorations is detailed on page 89 of *Heroes of Battle*. Sample Faerûn-specific decorations are given in Table 2-4, to supplement a similar table in that supplement.

## military strongholds

Military strongholds range from simple wooden forts to great stone citadels and from undersea hollowed-out coral reefs to multispired castles floating in the sky. The nature and size of such strongholds varies from region to region, reflecting the unique nature of threats in each area. Two examples, one a simple watchtower linked to an unusual floating fortification and the other a great grim fortress guarding a strategic pass, are detailed below.

### The flaming tower and the temple in the sky

The Flaming Tower stands along the southern edge of the Border Forest, where its garrison can watch for an invading force headed toward the Citadel of the Raven. The tower is named for the elevated bonfire that rests on its roof and acts as a signal fire visible from the western end of the Citadel of the Raven.

Originally built by a set of fire giant brothers, the Flaming Tower was rebuilt by the Zhentilar following its destruction by the Knights of Myth Drannor in the Year of the Morningstar (1350 DR). The walls of the tower are made of solid black granite reinforced with magic, and they can now easily withstand battering and powerful spells. The ceilings are 25 feet high, and every floor is constructed with an encircling hallway. Arrow slits are cut every 10 feet along the outer walls at a height of 5 feet, and quivers of arrows and composite longbows hang from

pegs stationed every 20 feet or so along the inside walls. The soldiers of the tower work in eight-hour shifts. One group of three Zhentilar patrols the base of the tower constantly, either on mounts or on foot.

A seasoned Zhentilar garrison of 36 stalwarts (LE male or female Vaasan human warrior 5), 3 sternhelms (LE male or female Vaasan human warrior 7), and Swordhar Pitsmin Finival (LE male Vaasan human fighter 9) operates the tower. Its ranks are supplemented by 5 fire giants, 4 magelings (LE male or female Vaasan human sorcerer 4 or wizard 4), and 3 priests (LE male or female Vaasan human cleric 3 [Bane]).

The Flaming Tower acts as a tether for an enormous chunk of strange rock that defies gravity and simply floats in the sky. The Temple in the Sky is made of black and brown stone, is taller than it is wide, and has a rough, jagged exterior. All ceilings within the temple are 20 feet high, and every chamber is lit by *continual flame* torches. The Temple in the Sky is linked to the Flaming Tower by a quarter-mile of heavy iron chain, magically strengthened to keep it from breaking in rough weather, and a newly constructed two-way *portal*.

Twenty-four cultists (LE male Vaasan human warrior 4, armed with short swords and light crossbows, wearing hide armor) make their home in the Temple of the Sky. They are led by Travin Murl (LE male Vaasan human cleric 5/ocular adept<sup>FP</sup> 8 [Great Mother]), Xulla (LE advanced 25 HD mindwitness<sup>Und</sup> [half-illithid beholder]), and Xulla's new "advisor," Vinqik (LE illithid), who guided his recent transformation.

Illustration by Franz Vobwinkel



*A fire giant sentry stands ready atop the Flaming Tower*

### LAYOUT OF THE FLAMING TOWER

**1. Entryway:** The door to the Flaming Tower is constructed of hardwood and reinforced steel and is 20 feet tall. The interior and exterior walls of the courtyard area have arrow slits.

**2. Guardposts:** These guardposts are manned by Zhentilar troops and at least one fire giant.

**3. Armory:** These chambers hold extra arrows, bolts, long bows, crossbows, and longwords.

**4. Gathering Hall:** The Zhentilar and their fire giant allies gather here for meals. The room holds a huge table and many chairs and stools.

**5. Kitchen:** The tower kitchen holds a large fireplace with a small spit and a double oven. The fireplace has no chimney, since it is magically vented. The walls are lined with shelves holding bins filled with staples, spices, and vegetables as well as cooking pots and pans.

**6. Cold Storage:** This chamber is kept magically cool by a large patch of brown mold. It holds meats and perishable fruits and vegetables.

**7. Privy:** The privy holds several chamber pots, which are periodically emptied outside.

**8. Well Room:** This chamber houses a deep, fast-flowing well covered by a heavy, hinged wooden cover with a hole cut in one side. A bucket and rope hangs from a pulley and can be lowered down through the hole to bring up water.

**9. Stable Storage:** Long-term food stables and casks of weak beer are stored in this chamber.

**10. Stables:** The stables hold six light warhorses, with room for two more.

**11. Tack and Feed:** Horse tack and equipment for repairing it, pitchforks, bales of hay, barrels of grain, and a salt lick are stored in this room.

**12. Activity Room:** This chamber is used for group activities such as arms practice, weapon and armor repair, games, drinking, and lounging.

**13. Entryway:** This chamber is dominated by five enormous beds, but the fire giants spend most of their time on guard duty or hunting in the surrounding countryside.

**14. Barracks:** Each of these rooms contains beds and footlockers for six soldiers.

**15. Leader's Conference Room:** This comfortably furnished room holds a meeting table and chairs. The walls are hung with maps from the surrounding region.

**16. Leader's Quarters:** This comfortably furnished room is the bedchamber of Pitsmin Finival.

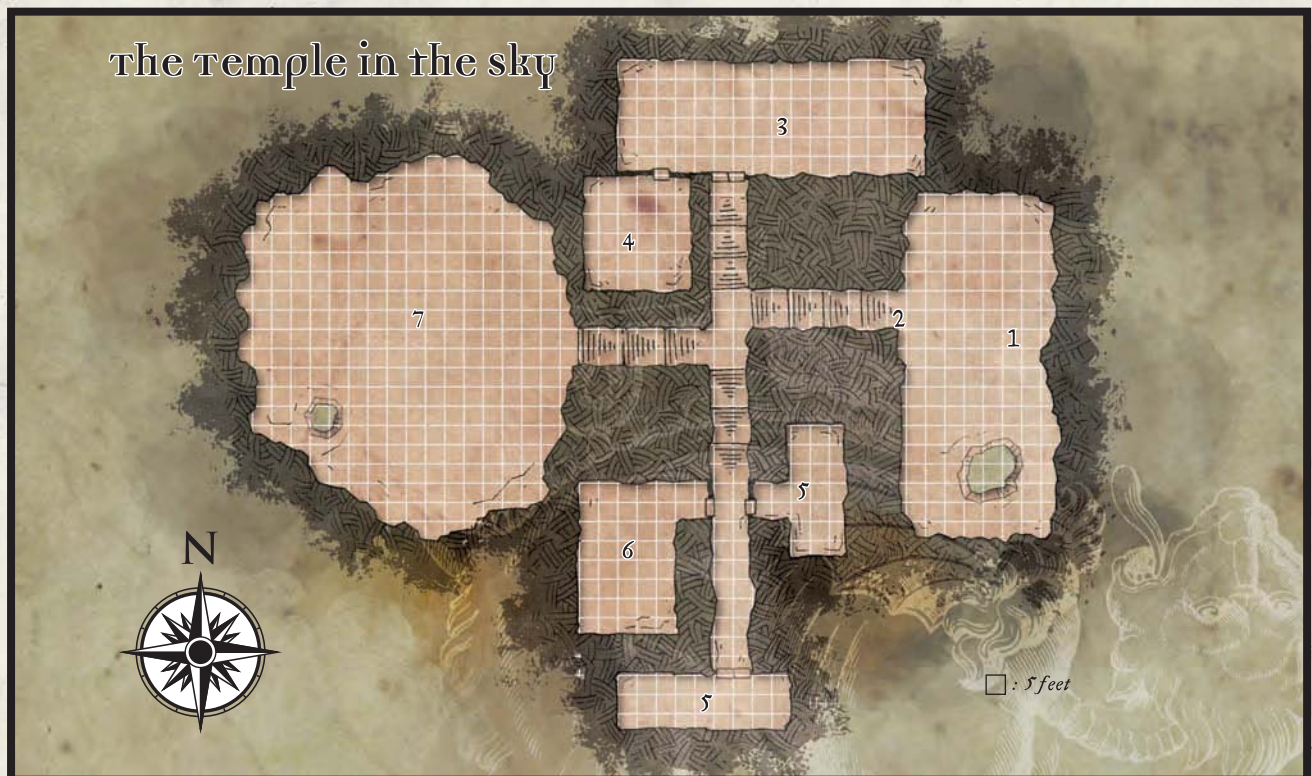
**17. Storage:** These rooms hold spare parts, spare weapons, food stores, broken and unused furnishings, and even empty containers. The central room (just west of room 15) contains a *portal* to room 6 in the Temple in the Sky.

**18. Signal Fire:** The large signal fire rests on a 15-foot-tall elevated platform. The wood is soaked in oil and ignites with the slightest spark.

**19. Ballista:** A large ballista is positioned at each of the tower's four corners, mounted atop a rotating wooden disk.

**20. Boulders:** Four piles of approximately 35 boulders each serve as ammunition for the fire giants.

**21. Fire Giant Barbeque Spit:** The fire giants spit-roast whole animal carcasses on this spit, since they won't fit in the kitchen



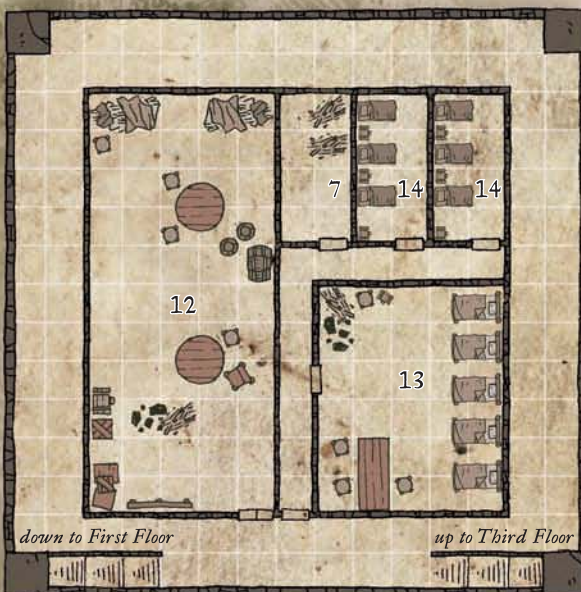
# The flaming tower



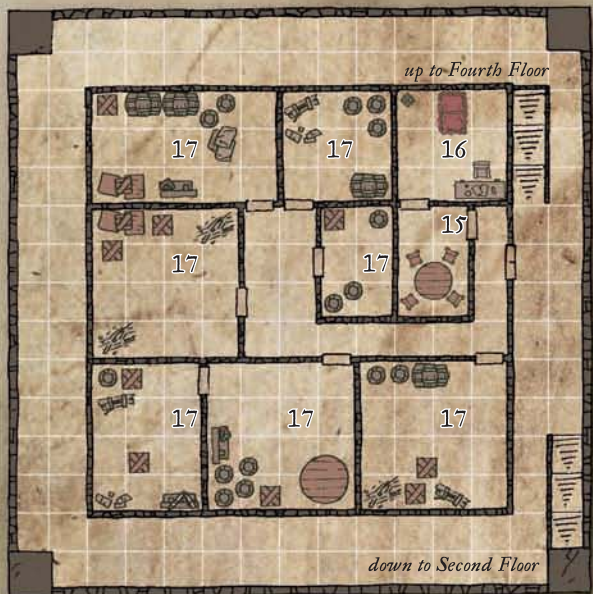
First Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor



Fourth Floor



□ : 10 feet

hearth. Often the fire giants combine cooking and guard duty in this fashion.

**22. Chain:** This chain links the Temple in the Sky to the Flaming Tower.

### LAYOUT OF THE TEMPLE IN THE SKY

**1. Entrance/Stables:** Visitors stable flying mounts such as chimeras, criosphinxes, dire bats, dragonnes, dragons, giant eagles, giant owls, griffons, hieracosphinxes, hippogriffs, manticores, nightmares, perytons<sup>Mon</sup>, sinisters<sup>Mon</sup>, spider eaters, wyverns, and yrthaks. The cult keeps four yrthaks here for its own use.

**2. Stairway:** Extremely steep, somewhat irregular stairs lead up from the stables. Navigating the steps requires a successful DC 10 Balance check.

**3. Common Room:** Cult members gather in this room for meals, usually consisting of raw meat. Bones and refuse litter the floor, and the sickly sweet odor of rotting meat clings to the straw pallets scattered about.

**4. Storage:** This chamber holds extra weapons, the rough, poorly tanned or green hides of animals consumed by the cultists, and other random items tossed herein. Two butcher blocks in the center of the room hold knives and tools for dressing animal carcasses. Cuts of uneaten meat hang from hooks on the ceiling.

**5. Sleeping Chambers:** The cultists sleep on filthy straw mats in the two designated sleeping chambers. Overflowing chamber pots line the walls, giving the room a horrible smell.

**6. Cult Leader's Chambers:** Travin Murl sleeps in this chamber on a nest of foul straw, animal hides, and the bones of past meals. On the north wall is a recently constructed two-way keyed *portal* to the central room 17 (just west of room 15) in the Flaming Tower. The *portal* requires placing the archway in an antimagic zone (or ray) for 1 full round before it will operate.

**7. Beholder Audience Chamber:** Xulla has made its home herein in recent years, having succeeded Xulqorth the Great Eye. Xulla returned from death as a doomsphere after it was caught up in a fierce battle outside the temple with an errant red wyrm. This chamber serves as a temple, audience chamber, and residence. The ceiling reaches nearly 70 feet in height, and the doomsphere often hovers near the highest points. Daily rituals by the cultists please Xulla's extraordinary vanity, particularly if they include the offering of a human sacrifice.

**8. Escape Room:** A shaft in the ceiling of the audience chamber leads out through the roof the temple.

## High Horn

Castle High Horn, named for the highest peak of High Horn Pass, looms over the High Road, guarding the western approach to the Forest Kingdom of Cormyr. Three trails climb the thousand-foot-high cliff that rises from the pass road. This great, grim fortress of high curving walls and frowning towers is the center of Cormyr's military operations and the strongest defensive position in the kingdom. Built during the reign of Thargreve the Greater (349–360 DR) to defend the Forest Kingdom against the Border

Raiders (bandits from the Plain of Tun) and the lizardfolk of the western marshes, the great tower of High Horn was once essential to Cormyr's defense but is now not so heavily used.

High Horn has a guest enclave where travelers can stay, but it is strictly a military community. High Horn is the wintering quarters of half the Cormyrean army, and it has extensive facilities to host both people and animals through a season-long siege. In recent years, the walls have been strengthened and discipline tightened in the face of the growing menace of Zhentarim-controlled Darkhold to the west and the city of Shade.

A standing garrison of over four hundred soldiers is posted at High Horn at any time: 100 archers (LG or LN male or female Chondathan human warrior 2), 300 blades (LG or LN male or female Chondathan human warrior 1), and their commanders. In addition, the War Wizards maintain a strong presence here, keeping at least three mid- to high-level wizards and sorcerers (LG or LN male or female Chondathan human sorcerer or wizard 5–10) in residence at any time. Oversword Thursk Dembarron (LG male Chondathan cleric 16 [Helm]) has served as Lord Commander of High Horn for many years, having been reappointed every year by Cormyr's sovereign. Dhag Greybeard (LN male Tethyrian human ranger 12) serves as herald.

### LAYOUT OF HIGH HORN

**1. Foyer:** The central keep's great outer doors lead through a central foyer lined with tapestries to the keep's central stair case. The broad, spiraling stairs lead up from cellar to roof, exiting at several sleeping levels containing two rooms each. The dwarf-built stairs are ingeniously constructed to collapse if certain hidden pins are removed and too much weight is put on any steps in the middle of the staircase.

**2. Sleeping Quarters:** Each room designated as sleeping quarters holds one or more beds, a wash basin, a chamber pot, and a lit brazier for warmth. Some also hold various stores, chairs, or tables. The cellars hold the main castle records and stores, as well as a series of dungeons built to hold those awaiting inquisition by the War Wizards. The senior commanders of High Horn are billeted here.

**3. Planning Room:** This chamber is a smaller version of the main banquet hall. Its large oak table can seat ten commanders. The walls of this room are lined with detailed maps depicting every strategic region of Cormyr.

**4. Steward's Office:** This chamber is used by the castle steward as an office and bedroom. It is dominated by a great hearth on the western wall and tables along the southern and eastern walls that are piled high with supply records.

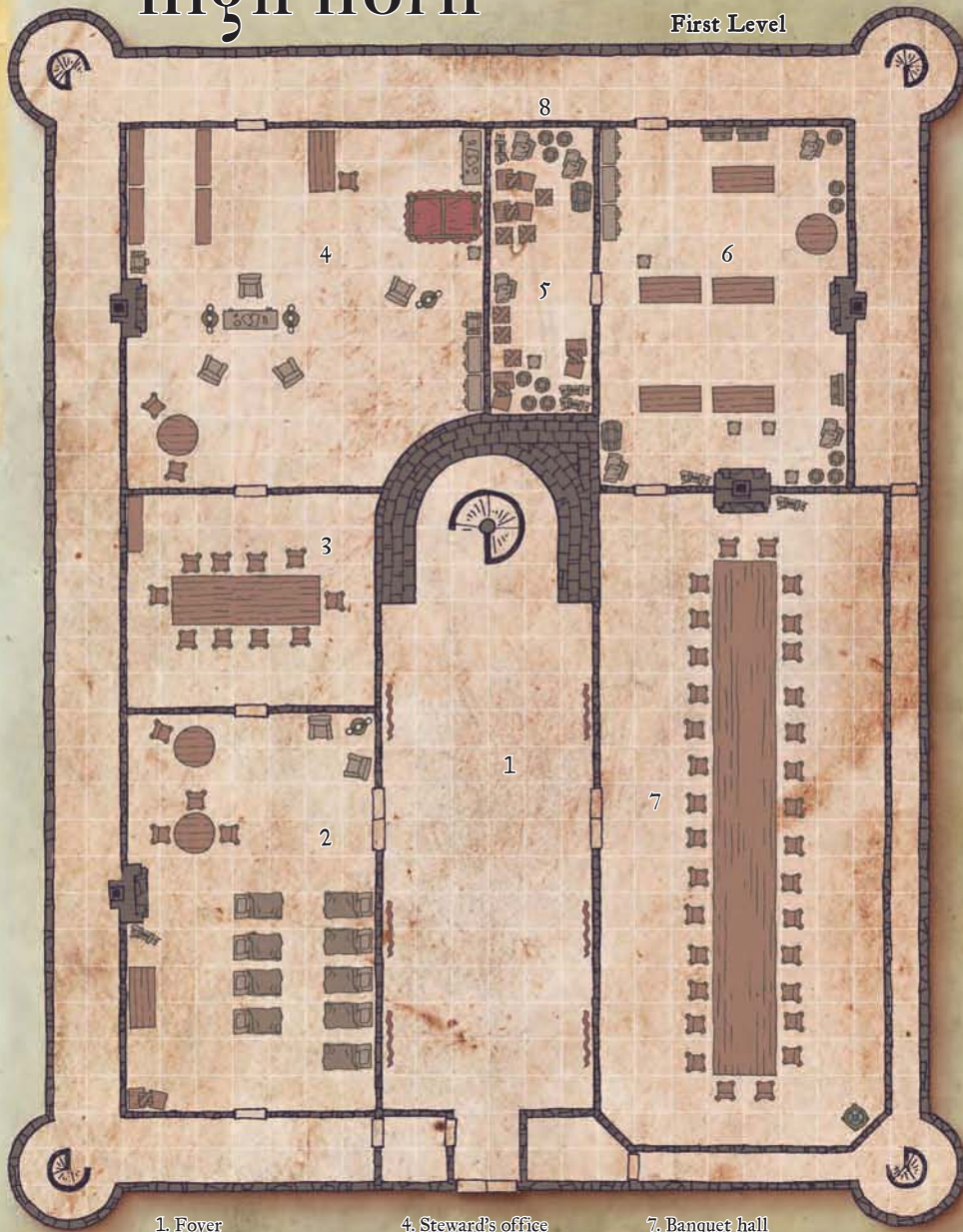
**5. Storage:** This long, thin chamber serves as the pantry for the castle.

**6. Kitchen:** This large kitchen is dominated by two oak tables used for food preparation and three hearths along the eastern wall.

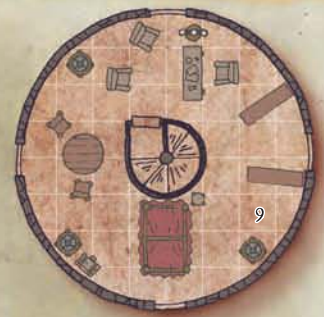
**7. Banquet Hall:** High Horn's banquet hall is legendary, dominated by a great oak table, large enough to seat more than thirty. At the end of the table lies the lord commander's chair.

# High Horn

First Level



- 1. Foyer
- 2. Sleeping quarters
- 3. Planning room
- 4. Steward's office
- 5. Storage
- 6. Kitchen
- 7. Banquet hall
- 8. Guard perimeter walkway
- 9. Commander's quarters



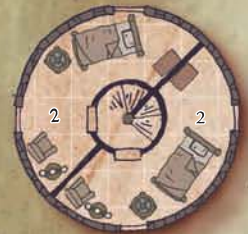
Seventh Level



Sixth Level



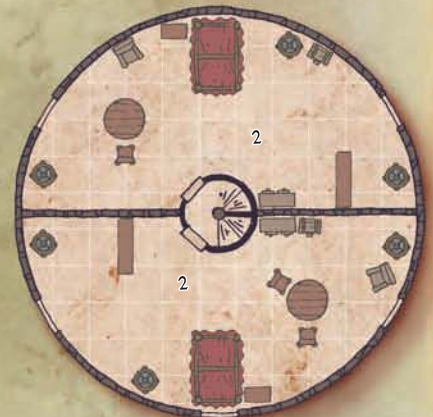
Fifth Level



Fourth Level



Third Level



Second Level





in front of a magnificent fireplace. The walls of this chamber are paneled with ornately carved wood.

**8. Guard Perimeter Walkway:** This walkway connects four lesser towers and a guard balcony that overlooks the main entrance to the keep. Each tower, used largely for defense, is four stories high.

**9. Commander's Apartment:** The highest room in the central tower is a sumptuously appointed apartment that holds a bed, several comfortable chairs, and a desk and chair. The room is kept warm by four braziers.

**10. Ring Wall:** The innermost ring wall curves around the mountain's slopes, punctuated by a single gate. The ring wall encloses the central keep (areas 1–9).

**11. Inner Ward:** The inner curtain wall curves around the mountain's slopes, punctuated by three towers and broken by a gatehouse at the top of each of the trails. A moat runs along the outside of the inner wall.

Along the inner face of the inner curtain wall lies an assortment of wooden garrison buildings, including numerous barracks and the old guest house (which now serves as additional quarters for the troops).

**12. Outer Ward:** The outer curtain wall curves around the mountain's slopes, punctuated by three towers and broken by a gatehouse at the top of each of the trails. A moat runs along the outside of the outer wall. Each gatehouse can be blocked by a drawbridge as well as three inner gates.

Along the inner face of the outer curtain wall lies an assortment of wooden garrison buildings, including two armories, a smithy, numerous storerooms and barracks, two stables, and a mess hall.

**13. Guest House:** This cold, hastily constructed guest house lies just outside South Gate. Although less than two decades old, the building already feels rundown. Nevertheless, travelers along the High Road gladly room here, for it is an oasis of safety in the Dragonjaw Range of the western Storm Horns.

## Example: The sothillisian empire

Although this campaign arc has its roots in a war that first flared in the Year of the Tankard (1370 DR), it deals with events of the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). It is centered on the ongoing war between the country of Amn and the so-called "Sothillisian Empire." If the player characters get involved, they might work for or against the Sothillisian Empire. If an ogre mage is part of the adventurers' group, he might replace Sothillis as the leader of the monster empire.

## Background

The lands of Tethyr and Amn have always been home to wandering bands of ogres. Since the founding of both kingdoms, the ogres have been reduced to isolated holdings in the depths of the small mountain ranges and deep forests of the South.

In the Year of Forests (479 DR), Prince Imnel Torlath and the armies of Amn cleared the ogre-held passes through the Small Teeth, reopening trade between Murann and Crimmor in a series of conflicts now known as the Ogre Wars. The major battle site, once called Imnel's Scar, is now the town of Imnescar. During the battle, Prince Imnel's men discovered the long-vanished Armory of Nedeheim, a treasury of magical weapons once seized from the giants of the eastern mountains during the Battle of Karlyn's Vale and hidden here by a dwarven general of High Shanatar, Karlyn of Clan Kuldelder. Prince Imnel had the giants' legacy brought back to Athkatla and then moved to Esmeltaran after it became Amn's new capitol.

After decades of skirmishing with Amn's garrisons, the ogres finally found hope of regaining their territory in the form of a charismatic ogre mage known only as "the Horned Mage." In the Year of the Tusk (661 DR), using magic to cloak their passage, the Horned Mage led several small tribes of ogres from the Cloud Peaks to join their brethren in the Small Teeth and there raised an ogre-led army of monsters. The Horned Mage's forces sacked the towns of Imnescar and Trademeet and nearly laid siege to their true objective, Esmeltaran, before the armies of Amn under the command of General Rashturl stopped them. In the wake of their defeat, the ogres retreated to isolated holdings within the Small Teeth to nurse their wounds and rebuild their population. The Horned Mage vanished and his fate was never learned, although some suspect he eventually became a hooded pupil<sup>LM</sup>, apprenticed to Rysellan the Dark of Memnon.

Centuries of vigilance by the armies of Amn kept the Small Teeth's monstrous inhabitants contained and unable to mount more than the occasional raid. However, in the Year of the Worm (1356 DR), a mated pair of ogre mages—Sothillis and Cyrvisnea—chanced upon the Horned Mage's long-abandoned lair in the depths of the Small Teeth, wherein they discovered two ancient journals: *Runes of the Wailing Dwarf*, a long-forgotten chronicle of House Kuldelder written by one of Karlyn's descendants, and Prince Imnel's long-lost and long-forgotten personal journal, entitled *Imnel's Scar: A Personal History of the Ogre Wars*.

Like the Horned Mage before him, Sothillis deduced that the Armory of Nedeheim had been plundered by Prince Imnel and eventually relocated to Esmeltaran. In the Year of the Tankard (1370 DR), after fourteen years of preparation and while Amn's armies were distracted by the defection of Riatavin, the two ogre mages gathered an army of goblins, kobolds, ogres, and hill giants, furthermore backed by worshipers of Cyric. After sacking Fort Ishla, the army of monsters attacked Esmeltaran with complete surprise and quickly conquered the city. While the ogre mages did not find the Armory of Nedeheim under the castle of Dahaundar, they did find royal records dating back to Imnel's regime suggesting that the armory had been moved to the city of Murann after the Horned Mage's attack.

The ogre mages then split their forces. Cyrvisnea led a host of goblins and kobolds west to Imnescar, where they and Cyricists

of the Twin Towers of the Eclipse together sacked the town. In Imnescar, Cyrvisnea searched the old armory hidden beneath the town, confirming that Prince Imnel had indeed looted it of its weapons centuries before. After leaving a garrison in Esmeltaran to occupy Amn's army, Sothillis led the remainder of his forces southwest through Trademeet to the port city of Murann, where the monsters laid siege aided by a naval blockade by the pirates of the Nelanther.

The besiegement ground to a halt over the winter while the monsters fortified their rear flanks against attack by Amn's army. The ogre-led armies began garrisoning a series of watch towers in the northern foothills of the Small Teeth (originally built by Amn for the opposite purpose) and building new ones west of Trademeet. In the spring, their armies attacked in earnest, and by midsummer the city had fallen. The humanoid armies seized Murann's gold-laden ships, trapped within the harbor by the pirates, and claimed the city for their own. Sothillis wisely left the city's alchemists' guild intact, forcing its members to create alchemical items and potions for the armies of the Sothillisian Empire. However, Sothillis and his mate failed to recover the weapons they sought. The Armory of Nedeheim was nowhere to be found in the city, but the ogre mages are uncertain whether they were deceived as to its true location or if someone plundered the armory before their conquest of the city.

For more than a year, Amn's armies failed to make any headway against the ogre-led armies because the Council of Six dithered over how much to spend on the campaign and whether to attack Esmeltaran, Imnescar, or Murann first. With the coming of spring in the Year of Wild Magic (1372 DR), the church of Selûne lent its considerable resources to the campaign, mustering an army of Selûnite crusaders pledged to retake Moonmaiden's Hall in Murann. The Selûnites succeeded in retaking Imnescar, claiming Hydcont Hall as the site of their newly founded abbey, while Amn's armies continued their half-hearted besiegement of Esmeltaran and garrisoning of Trademeet.

Things might have dragged on, largely unchanged, in the Year of Rogue

Dragons (1373 DR), if not for the unexpected emergence of Iryklathagra "Sharpfangs." In a raging assault suggestive of madness, Sharpfangs attacked and shattered the eastern tower of the Twin Towers of the Eclipse before retreating to her lair, badly wounded. The commander of the Selûnite garrison in Imnescar took advantage of this surprise assault to reopen the pass through the Small Teeth, marching his forces south all the way to Trademeet. The Selûnite's maneuver severed the supply route supporting the giant defenders of Esmeltaran, and by late fall Amn's army had its first significant victory as it retook that central city. This in turn allowed Amn to move more forces west to hold the new frontline just west of the Trade Way.

The start of the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR) has seen the resumption of trade along the Trade Way as caravans no longer must detour around the Small Teeth along the new trade road built to Brost. Amn's armies now control Esmeltaran, Imnescar, and Trademeet, as well as the Trade Way between the latter two cities. Tethyr and the elves of the Wealdath continue to guard the forest's northern edge, refusing to come to Amn's assistance until the Council of Six recognizes Tethyr's sovereignty over Riatavin and Trailstone. The Sothillisian Empire has been reduced to the western Small Teeth, the city of Murann, and the western Swordbelt (as the plains west of the Trade Way between the Small Teeth and the Wealdath are known) but the empire's forces are well entrenched.

## sothillis, murkul of murannheim

Even among ogre mages, Sothillis is a giant, standing almost 16 feet tall and weighing nearly 4,000 pounds. His skin is a mottled green, and his jet black hair is kept neatly groomed in a long, thick braid down his back. A pair of short, thick ivory horns,



*Sothillis, Murkul of Murannheim*

died blood red and filigreed with mithral in the form of arcane runes, protrude from his forehead. His eyes are jet black with alabaster pupils, and his teeth and claws are ebony in hue.

The self-proclaimed Murkul of Murannheim, or Emperor of the Sothillisian Empire, is a cunning, patient strategist with a talent for the bold gesture that inspires his followers and intimidates his foes. Driven by a hunger for wealth and status, Sothillis sees ogres as oppressed too long by pitiful humans and deserving of their fair share of the treasure that passes through their traditional lands. He is wise enough to realize the inherent weakness of the ogre race's position in Amn, and that is why he has spent so much effort on acquiring the Armory of Nedeheim.

For now, Sothillis and his mate are content to fortify their position, making the price of a full-scale assault too expensive for Amn. Toward that end, Sothillis has been dispatching secret envoys to various powerful merchant families, offering to restrain attacks on their caravans and ships in exchange for regular tithes of weapons and coin. Concurrently, however, Sothillis's agents continue to scour Murann and the surrounding region for evidence of the armory's existence. Assuming the ogre mage eventually recovers the weapons of ancient Nedeheim, he is sure to build on his current position of strength.

**SOTHILLIS**

**CR 19**

Male elite ogre mage sorcerer 12/legendary leader<sup>HB</sup> 5

LE Large giant

Init +4; Senses darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision; Listen +11, Spot +11

Aura runt-squasher commander, spell-slinger commander

Languages Common, Dwarven, Giant, Goblin, Infernal

AC 23, touch 9, flat-footed 23

hp 164 (22 HD); regeneration 5

Immune fear

Resist evasion; SR 19

Fort +16, Ref +9, Will +21; heroic success 1/day

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee +3 human bane keen greatsword +21/+16/+11 (3d6+13/17-20)

Ranged +1 distance thundering shocking burst composite longbow +12/+7/+2 (2d6+8/×3 plus 1d6 electricity)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +12; Grp +23

Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Power Attack

Special Actions quick rally

Combat Gear 4 potions of bull's strength, 4 potions of cure serious wounds

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 12th, 10% arcane spell failure chance):

6th (4/day)—*Tenser's transformation*

5th (6/day)—*cone of cold* (DC 21), *dominate person* (DC 21)

4th (7/day)—*lesser globe of invulnerability*, *shout* (DC 20), *stoneskin* (DC 20)

3rd (7/day)—*dispel magic*, *haste* (DC 19), *nondetection* (DC 19), *rage*

2nd (8/day)—*bull's strength* (DC 18), *eagle's splendor* (DC 18), *protection from arrows* (DC 18), *resist energy* (DC 18), *scorching ray*

1st (8/day)—*burning hands* (DC 17), *comprehend languages*, *disguise self*, *expeditious retreat*, *true strike*

0 (6/day)—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *open/close* (DC 16), *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*, *resistance* (DC 16)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th):

At will—*darkness*, *invisibility*

2/day—*greater command* (DC 22)

1/day—*charm person* (DC 17), *cone of cold* (DC 21), *gaseous form*, *polymorph*, *sleep* (DC 17)

Abilities Str 24, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 23

SQ familiar (none at present), to hell and back

Feats Cleave, Combat Expertise, Extra Followers<sup>HB</sup>, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Natural Leader<sup>HB</sup>, Power Attack, Rulership\*

\*New feat described on page 158.

Skills Bluff +26, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +29 (+34 with any NPC who is not already unfriendly or hostile), Disguise +6 (+8 in character), Intimidate +23, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Listen +11, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +25, Spot +11

Possessions combat gear plus Blue Lightning (+1 distance thundering shocking burst composite longbow [+7 Str bonus]), Kingscar (+3 human bane keen greatsword), mail of the Horned Mage (+4 mithral shirt), gloves of Dexterity +2, medallion of thoughts, ring of evasion, 200 gp in jewelry, gems, and coins

Heroic Success (Ex) Once per day, Sothillis can choose to automatically succeed on a single saving throw instead of rolling the dice.

Quick Rally (Ex) Sothillis can perform a rally check<sup>HB</sup> (+17) as a free action once per round.

Runt-Squasher Commander (Ex) Allies within 30 feet of Sothillis gain a +2 morale bonus on attacks made against foes at least one size category smaller than they are.

Spell-slinger Commander (Ex) Any area spell cast by an ally within 30 feet of Sothillis deals an extra 1d6 points of damage. Only spells that deal damage gain this bonus. This benefit is considered a morale bonus.

To Hell and Back (Ex) Sothillis's followers are immune to fear effects (including morale checks) when they have line of sight to him.

Hook "I spit on the graves of Karlyn and Imnel. We are giants, and we shall have this land."

## Leadership, influence, and rank

Sothillis is a leader of great renown, but he is justly feared for his cruelty. His base Leadership score is 25. Due to his position as commander of the armed forces of his empire, Sothillis has a commander rating of 7. In the eyes of his troops, he earned his self-anointed decoration of Scion of the Horned Mage (an 80-point decoration). His effective Leadership score is 52.

Sothillis has a 21st-level cohort, his mate and queen, Cyrvisnea (LE female ogre mage fighter 16). Sothillis has 1,480 1st-level followers, 148 2nd-level followers, 74 3rd-level followers, 38 4th-level followers, 20 5th-level followers, 10 6th-level followers, 6 7th-level followers, 4 8th-level followers, and 2 9th-level followers. Most of the Murkul's low-level followers are humanoid warriors, while his higher-ranking followers tend to be humanoid or giant fighters, barbarians, and adepts.

Given his followers (+2,860), rulership position (+100), placement of five followers in positions of influence within the Amnian army (+9), placement of one cohort within a position of leadership within the pirates of the Nelanther (+10), placement of four additional followers in positions of influence within the pirates of the Nelanther (+4), and five more significant, public victories than defeats (+50), Sothillis has a base Influence modifier of +3,033, and an actual Influence modifier of +15.

## Timeline

The following timeline outlines the events of the Sothillisian Empire campaign arc in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). Depending on their relationship to Sothillis and Cyrvisnea, the PCs can lead, assist, undermine, or observe this campaign arc, sparking a series of related adventures, ensuring its success or preventing its successful conclusion.

**Ches 15:** Selûnites from Hydcont Abbey mount a moonrise raid on the western Tower of the Eternal Eclipse. They inflict some external structural damage, but are driven off.

**Ches 19:** A Selûnite prior of Hydcont Abbey in Imnescar is assassinated. Cyricists from the western Tower of the Eternal Eclipse are suspected.

**Tarsakh 17–23:** Three successive caravans belonging to House Tanislove are attacked and plundered by Sothillisian forces as they cross the Swordbelt along the Trade Way. Rumors quickly spread that House Tanislove is refusing to bribe Sothillis and the Amnian commanders along the route, as has become the custom over the past year, despite the ongoing war between Amn and the monstrous separatists. House Tanislove begins rerouting its shipments through Brost, costing it valuable time and money.

**Mirtul 3:** Hostilities suddenly break out four miles north of Trademeet between a troop of raiding ogres and the first Tanislove caravan to dare the Trade Way in a tenday. The caravan is a decoy, manned by mercenaries of the Flaming Fist and paid for by House Tanislove. The ogres suffer significant casualties in the Battle of Broken Wheels.

**Mirtul 12:** A de facto truce along the northern flanks of the Small Teeth is broken when Sothillisian raiders overrun a large farm along the southern banks of the River Specie near the

small fishing village of Kalathtyr. Rumors suggest this raid is in retaliation for House Tanislove's privately funded hostilities, less than a tenday before, because the farm belongs to House Gheldieg, whose assets are now controlled by House Tanislove by dint of marriage between their principals.

**Mirtul 13:** An elite company of adventurers, based at the western Tower of the Eclipse and said to be led by the half-ogre bastard son of Sothillis, mounts a daring prison break on the dungeons beneath the Black Spires of the Maiden, a temple of Loviatar in the Vale of Wailing Women in the eastern Small Teeth. All members of the Company of Rune-scribed Horns escape, along with a dozen ogres captured in the retaking of Esmeltaran. One of the ogres brings word that a clue was found in the last days of the siege suggesting that the Armory of Nedeheim is hidden deep beneath Murann, in the caverns of the Underdark once claimed by the Shanataran kingdom of Xothaerin.

**Mirtul 21–Flamerule 11:** The Army of Three Stars, made up of crusaders from the Dark Embrace (rival temple of Cyric allied with Amn's government), Hydcont Abbey, and the Black Spires of the Maiden, lays siege to the western Tower of the Eclipse.

**Flamerule 12:** The western Tower of the Eclipse falls, and, by prior arrangement, is claimed by crusaders from the Dark Embrace. A few of the defenders escape through the newly constructed *portal*, presumably seeking refuge in Murann. Interrogations of the bodies left behind reveals the discovered clue to the Armory of Nedeheim to the commanders of the Army of Three Stars. The ogre emperor quietly dispatches a company of adventurers into the depths upon receiving word.

**Flamerule 13–19:** Word quickly spreads through the taverns of Amn of the "Armory of Nedeheim." Many adventuring companies begin making plans to explore the ruins of Xothaerin.

**Flamerule 20:** Sothillis announces he will top any offer to the adventuring company that brings him the Armory of Nedeheim in its entirety.

**Flamerule 29:** Reports spread through Amn and Murann that Xothaerin is home to a large colony of stingers<sup>Mon</sup>, strange human-scorpion centaurlike hybrids.

**Midsummer:** The city of Murann and settlements all along the Trade Way from the Cloud Peaks to the Wealdath come under attack by packs of "stinger-men" emerging from newly constructed sinkholes that lead down into the Underdark. The leaders of these packs are said to employ giant-sized magic weapons and armor and demand repayment of all treasure plundered from far-off Maztica.

**Eleint 5:** The Council of Six and the Murkul of Murannheim jointly dispatch heralds announcing the Trade Way Truce, ending hostilities between the Sothillisian Empire and the kingdom of Amn. This marks the beginning of the Stinger War, pitting the tincallis of Oaxaptupa, as the stingers call themselves and their newly established kingdom, against the allied forces of Amn, including the Army of Three Stars, and the Sothillisian Empire, including the Renegades of the Eclipse. Of course, the Swordbelt Alliance, as the surface-dweller truce-army comes to be called, is one of temporary convenience, and hostilities often break out between the various factions, significantly undermining their effectiveness.

# KEEP THE FAITH

**T**he inhabitants of Faerûn venerate many gods from multiple pantheons, including living gods such as Lathander, dead gods such as Moander<sup>LE</sup>, and Outer Planes inhabitants such as the demon lord Eltab<sup>CR</sup>. Within each god's church, mortal followers of the divine divide themselves into lay and ecclesiastic followers and splinter into multiple factions, sects, heresies, and cults.

Characters best suited to a leadership role in a faith usually have some degree of divine spellcasting ability or god-given supernatural ability, including clerics, druids, paladins, rangers, and monks. Alternative routes to leadership within a faith include adopting a prestige class with a divine component such as arcane devotee<sup>PG</sup>, divine champion<sup>PG</sup>, divine devotee<sup>PG</sup>, divine seeker<sup>PG</sup>, hierophant<sup>FRCS</sup>, or a faith-specific prestige class. Alternative classes with an appropriate divine component include adept, favored soul<sup>CD</sup>, shugenja<sup>CD</sup>, and spirit shaman<sup>CD</sup>.

Like any milieu, "rulership" in the context of a religious faith always has a political and social component. Advancing to a leadership position within a faith requires one to curry favor with the current generation of leaders, to show initiative, charm, and drive, and to strictly conform to the current orthodoxy. What makes a religious faith different from more secular arenas

## daily worship

Across Faerûn, there are literally hundreds of different local festivals and specific rituals; ceremonies vary from temple to temple within a faith, just as the high priests of different temples to the same deity often disagree on what the god wants faithful worshipers to do. Persons residing in a locale with a temple usually attend services at least once every two days.

Most lay persons, including adventurers, also pray briefly to their patron deity upon awakening, at moments of crisis (such as healing a wounded friend or family member, seeking someone lost, or trying to keep the sick or poisoned alive), and in a more lengthy private prayer following evening meals or before settling down to sleep. Such prayers are for guidance. Believers usually look for a sign later the same day, in dreams, or the following day; this could be something as small as a particular word overheard or said to them, the sighting of an unusual insect or creature or windblown leaf. On rare, exalted occasions, they might receive vivid dream-visions or even "waking" mental visions (a detailed scene coming to mind, tinged with a feeling of favor or disapproval). On

very rare occasions—usually once or twice a lifetime for nonclergy—prayers will be answered by a visible-to-others manifestation (Lathander, for example, might be seen as a rose-red aura glowing around a weapon, a person, a keyhole or secret door, or moving along a route).

Only fanatics will persist in daily rituals if they are under attack or in some emergency—after all, the gods see into hearts and minds if they so desire, and thus they measure intent and not mere ceremony.

Many people grow used to hearing their daily news in three places: the market and streets, the tavern, and the temple. Priests of many faiths work at "influencing the laity" by dispensing news and gossip carefully slanted to promote the importance of their god and the creed and aims of the faith, and to motivate the people hearing it to do certain things that further the work of the god. Clergy usually do this at the end of formal services, sometimes while blessing worshipers (often done through the custom of the elder priest standing at the door to speak to everyone leaving).

of society is the spiritual component of a faith: A church is dominated by a being of divine rank (or at least the illusion of one, as in the case of fallen deities), and it is the presence of a divinity that makes ruling a faith a unique and difficult challenge. This chapter focuses on leadership in the spiritual arena and the unique challenges and rewards of pursuing such a role.

## The spiritual leader

A spiritual leader is an individual who plays an important role within a religious faith, interpreting the teachings of the god in the mortal world, defending the church against overt threats and the curse of indifference, and challenging the orthodoxies of the faith. A spiritual leader is not simply a high-level character with divine spellcasting ability who employs a holy symbol but otherwise does not involve himself in the matters of the church to which he belongs.

In game terms, a spiritual leader is an ecclesiastical member of a religious faith, formally initiated into an organized clergy or monastic order. Most spiritual leaders of sufficient level have the ability to cast divine spells, but many exceptions exist. For example, wizards in the Church of Mystra, rogues in the Church of Mask, and bards in the Church of Oghma sometimes hold formal positions within the clergy, as do high-ranking monks in many lawful faiths.

## what do religious leaders do?

Religious leaders play a significant role in the ongoing evolution of any faith. It is a myth promulgated to credulous commonfolk that the gods are unchanging and ever inviolate. Divine beings can and do change over time, and religious leaders play an im-

portant—but misunderstood—role in shepherding that evolution. For example, the Time of Troubles saw the death of deities such as Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul and the creation of new ones such as Cyric and Kelemvor.

The fissures that appear in any church—whether they result from the emergence of new factions within a church, the partial splitting off of sects or affiliated orders from a church, or the recognition through excommunication of heresies outside a church—serve as a forum for a divine being to explore new philosophies and thus shape the evolution of the faith. However, just as mortals are slaves to the divine, bound to obey the teachings of the god if they wish to remain within the faith, gods are slaves to their followers, bound to represent the consensus that emerges among the followers of a faith. For example, if a sect emerges within the church of Lathander preaching that the Morninglord is Amaunator reborn, then Lathander has one of three options: He can embrace the new belief, thus making it true; he can effectively ignore the new belief, thus allowing diversity to persist within the faith and weaken the absoluteness of his authority; or he can reject the new belief as heresy, thus splitting the ranks of his followers and reducing his divine strength.

Religious leaders, involved in an ongoing dialogue both with the deity and the body of the church, are either a never-ending source of such tensions as they introduce new concepts into such conversations, or defenders of the status quo as they argue against new interpretations—or occasionally both, depending on the circumstances. In a sense, how well a religious leader builds a following for new ideas of his own or others or suppresses support for the new ideas of others is a measure of his influence within a church. A powerful spiritual leader can shape both the body of the faithful and the nature of the divine during his tenure in the role.

TABLE 3-1: FAITH-SPECIFIC PRESTIGE CLASSES

Class Name	Church	Source	Class Name	Church	Source
Arachne	Lolth	FP 183	Maiden of pain	Loviatar	PG 183
Auspicion	Tymora/Beshaba	FP 185	Martyred champion	Ilmater	PG 185
Black flame zealot	Kossuth	Una 21	of Ilmater		
Celebrant of Sharess	Sharess	PG 179	Morninglord of Lathander	Lathander	PG 67
Darkmask	Vhaeraun	LD 34	Nightcloak	Shar	FP 198
Doomguide	Kelemvor	FP 187	Ocular adept	Great Mother	FP 200
Dreadmaster	Bane	FP 188	Scourge maiden	Loviatar	SS 40
Dweomerkeeper	Mystra	FP 190	Sea Mother whip	Blibdoolpoolp	Und 42
Elemental archon	Akadi, Grumbar, Istishia, Kossuth	FP 191	Silverstar	Selûne	FP 201
Entropy	Entropy (Tiamat)	LD 138	Slime lord	Ghaunadaur	PG 186
Eye of Horus-Re	Horus-Re	PG 55	Spur lord	Cyric	LD 11
Forest master	Silvanus	FP 193	Stormlord	Talos	FP 203
Glorious servitor	Any Mulhorandi deity	LE 13	Strifeleader	Cyric	FP 204
Goldeye	Waukeen	FP 194	Sunmaster	Amaunator	LE25
Hammer of Moradin	Moradin	PG 56	Sun Soul monk	Lathander, Selûne, Sune (Amaunator)	CS 88
Hand of the Adama	"Adama"	SS 31	Sword dancer	Eilistraee	FP 205
Heartwarder	Sune	FP 196	Talontar blightlord	Talona	Una 34
Horned harbinger	Myrkul	FP 197	Techsmith	Gond	FP 207
Inquisitor of the Drowning Goddess	Blibdoolpoolp	Und 39	Waveservant	Umberlee	FP 209
Justiciar of Tyr	Tyr	PG 64	Windwalker	Shaundakul	FP 212
			Yathrinsee	Kiaransalee	PG 187



Clerics of Lathander unite to destroy a pack of vampires

Illustration by Darken

## faithful heretics and the church

In a world where deities are tangible beings who directly communicate with their followers through manifestations, miracles, and spells such as *commune*, the opportunity for heresy would seem to be minimal. Nevertheless, to the amazement of devout worshippers, differences among the faithful—sometimes escalating to the level of heresy—are seemingly tolerated by most deities.

### NEW FEAT: HERETIC OF THE FAITH

You stray significantly from the teachings of your faith.

**Prerequisite:** Patron deity and either divine spellcasting ability or code of conduct class ability.

**Benefit:** You can grossly violate your deity's code of conduct, but not your class alignment restriction, without risk of loss of spells or class abilities. If you are a cleric, your alignment can be two steps away from your respective deity's alignment instead of just one. (In other words, you can violate your deity's alignment restrictions by one extra step.) You can gain levels without atoning (see the *atonement* spell description). However, you are in no way exempt from excommunication or immune to divine retribution from your deity or his servants. In fact, your actions invite the highest level of divine scrutiny.

If you have access to domains, you can exchange any one domain you have already selected for another domain outside those normally available to your faith. The new domain must be consistent with the tenets of your heresy (as adjudicated by

## fallen gods and nondivine entities

There are two special classes of faith: churches of fallen gods who have died or vanished and churches of nondivine entities. Spiritual leaders of fallen gods and nondivine entities have certain freedoms and certain restrictions not available to spiritual leaders of true churches.

It is possible to be a spiritual leader in the church of a fallen god by taking the *Servant of the Fallen*<sup>LE</sup> feat. In such a case, a spiritual leader lacks the divine guidance accessible to his counterparts in true churches and thus lacks the divine check that keeps him from wandering too far afield from the comfort zone of the faithful. In game terms, the indirect effects of taking the *Servant of the Fallen* feat include:

- Not being able to cast *commune*;
- Never incurring a deity's wrath (which might result in a loss of divine spells, for example);
- Incurring a  $-4$  penalty to the effective Leadership score.

It is possible to be a spiritual leader of a nondivine entity by taking feats such as *Disciple of Darkness*<sup>CR</sup>, *Favored of the Companions*<sup>BE</sup>, *Knight of Stars*<sup>BE</sup>, *Scion of Sorrow*<sup>CR</sup>, *Servant of the Heavens*<sup>BE</sup>, or *Thrall to Demon*<sup>CR</sup>. In game terms, the indirect effect of taking this type of feat equates to incurring a  $-2$  penalty to the effective Leadership score.

the DM). Likewise, you can exchange your favored weapon and *weapon of the deity*<sup>Mag</sup> spell effect for another consistent with the tenets of your heresy (as adjudicated by the DM).

Taking this feat automatically prompts a Leadership check. All cohorts or followers who are members of your faith either agree to the heresy or are lost.

Moreover, upon your death you are judged one of the False (see page 259 of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*) unless your deity specifically intervenes on your behalf with Kelemvor. Without the use of a *miracle* or *wish* spell, this does not happen unless your heresies are adopted by the deity and the faith as a whole. It is theoretically possible that such intervention could occur long after your death, but such cases are vanishingly rare.

**Normal:** If you grossly violate your deity's code of conduct, you risk losing spells and class abilities until you atone (see the *atonement* spell description and Sins and Penance, page 232 of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*).

### HERESIES OF NOTE

There are many famous or infamous heresies among the well-known faiths of Faerûn. Some of the more notable heresies include these.

**Cult of Shared Suffering:** Ilmatari heretics of this cult believe that all mortals must share part of the Crying God's burden in order to understand his sacrifice. They are noted for self-flagellation, kidnappings, inciting riots, and passing the suffering around to nonbelievers. Cultists of Shared Suffering have access to the Healing, Retribution, Strength, and Suffering domains. They employ the favored weapon and *weapon of the deity*<sup>Mag</sup> of Ilmater. Cleric believers in this heresy must be neutral.

**Dark Moon Heresy:** Dark Moon heretics teach that Selûne and Shar are one and the same, two faces of the same goddess. Dark Moon heretics have access to the Cavern, Darkness, Knowledge, Moon, Protection, and Travel domains and can use the favored weapon or *weapon of the deity*<sup>Mag</sup> of either goddess. Cleric believers in this heresy must be lawful neutral, neutral, or chaotic neutral.

**Risen Sun Heresy:** The Brotherhood of the Glorious Sun has long existed within the church of Lathander, tolerated by other followers of the Morninglord and preaching that Lathander is the reincarnated form of Amaunator, Netherese god of the sun. Heretics of the Risen Sun take the Brotherhood's beliefs one step further into heresy, by preaching that the time of Lathander's transformation is nigh and Amaunator is about to return. Risen Sun heretics have access to the Fire, Law, Nobility, Renewal, Sun, and Time domains. Their only option for a favored weapon is the light mace. They employ the *weapon of the deity*<sup>Mag</sup> of Lathander. Cleric believers in this heresy must be lawful good or lawful neutral.

Believers in the Risen Sun heresy often adopt the sunmaster<sup>LE</sup> prestige class. Note that the entrance requirements of that class should be modified to include either Servant of the Fallen<sup>LE</sup> (Amaunator) or Heretic feats.

**Three-Faced Sun Heresy:** Heretics of the Three-Faced Sun believe that the sun is a tripartite overdeity, with aspects of dawn, highsun, and dusk. Like a spinning prism viewed from the side,

believers in this heresy teach that only two of the three aspects can be "seen" at any time. (There are said to be brief instants in deific time when only one aspect is manifest.)

According to this heresy, during the Age of Netheril, Amaunator ruled as the aspect of highsun, while Jergal held the portfolio of dusk. After Amaunator faded away, Lathander appeared as the aspect of dawn, and Myrkul inherited the aspect of dusk. The Time of Troubles marked the fall of Myrkul and Lathander's brief moment of unchallenged dominance. Now, believers in the Three-Faced Sun are heralding the rise of Amaunator. Some believers in this heresy suggest that Lathander will become the new aspect of highsun and another will take his place as the aspect of dawn, while others herald the rise of a new deity who is the aspect of highsun.

Believers in the Three-Faced Sun have access to the Death, Law, Renewal, Sun, and Time domains. They use a light mace or scythe as a favored weapon. Their *weapon of the deity*<sup>Mag</sup> is a +1 *flaming light mace* or a +1 *flaming scythe*. Cleric believers in this heresy must be lawful neutral.

## HOW TO USE THE LEADERSHIP FEAT

Religious faith inspires great devotion among the faithful. The promise of divine truth and eternal rewards and the threat of eternal punishment motivate true believers more than any other aspect of society. Religious leaders with the Leadership feat find their association with the divine increases their ability to attract large numbers of the faithful. However, such leaders run the risk of their flock abandoning them should they appear to transgress against the will of the deity.

The following modifiers to the character's effective Leadership score apply with respect to the character's religious community.

The Leader Is ...	Leadership Score Modifier
Archbishop or Hierophant	+4
Bishop or Speaker	+2
Disciple of Darkness <sup>CR</sup>	-2
Favored of the Companions <sup>BE</sup>	-2
Heretic of the Faith <sup>1</sup>	-2
Knight of Stars <sup>BE</sup>	-2
Miracle worker	+1
Prophet	+1
Relic holder	+1
Saint <sup>BE</sup>	+2
Scion of Sorrow <sup>CR</sup>	-2
Servant of the Fallen <sup>LE</sup>	-4
Servant of the Heavens <sup>BE</sup>	-2
Shaper of the divine	+10
Sinner	-1
Speaker of tongues	+1
Thrall to Demon <sup>CR</sup>	-2
Prophet of the Divine <sup>2</sup>	+2
Voice of the deity	+1

1 New feat described on page 46.

2 New feat described on page 49.



Becoming an archbishop, bishop, or hierophant is detailed below. The process of becoming a saint is detailed in *Book of Exalted Deeds*. The criteria for being considered a miracle worker, relic holder, sinner, shaper of the divine, speaker of tongues, or voice of the deity are detailed on the following pages.

## HOW TO RUN RELIGIOUS COHORTS AND FOLLOWERS

Cohorts and followers who are members of the faith follow you because of their faith. They see in you a leader who is one step closer to the divine—and therefore one step closer to truth and eternal reward. You are their exemplar, their teacher, and their commander. Unlike regular cohorts and followers, those of a religious bent are more willing to sacrifice for their faith and more willing to accept your words as true. However, with this greater trust comes a greater risk of disillusionment. If you stray from the teachings of your faith, your cohort and followers will be quick to judge you and unlikely to forgive.

You should establish an abbey, shrine, temple, or cathedral in which your followers can live and gather to worship, and you should preach to them at least once a month. When not asked to serve their faith directly, religious cohorts and followers spend their days proselytizing, studying religious texts, and praying. They can support themselves on a subsistence level through communal craftwork or modestly if they receive regular tithes from the community.

With rare exceptions, you should only call on religious cohorts and followers to serve the faith. They expect you to send them into battle against the faith's traditional foes, to dispatch them as missionaries, and to act in accordance with the teachings of the divine. Your religious cohorts and followers become more valuable if you work to place them in positions of influence, giving you indirect control over the levers of power.

## playing the religious game

Even in a world wrapped in the Weave, religion and the nature of the divine remain enigmas to the mortal world. Faerûnian philosophers are uncertain as to why the actions of a small number of mortals assume great significance in the epic conflicts of the gods and the actions of a large number of other mortals do not. Many religious myths seem to reflect the history of the mortal world, yet the cause and effect between the two is often unclear. For example, did the betrayal of Corellon by Araushnee (Lolth) and her subsequent banishment to the Abyss trigger the descent of the drow, or did the internecine battles of the Fair Folk that resulted in the descent trigger a similar transformation among the Seldarine?

What is known is that victories, large and small, associated with the divine can and do play an important role in the epic conflicts of the gods. Through the actions of spiritual leaders and their flocks, gods wax and wane in power, acquire and lose portfolios, and evolve in philosophical outlook. By playing the

religious game, you seek to influence the course of the gods, whether through growth of the faith, defeat of a rival faith, or the introduction of new teachings.

## YOU ARE A RELIGIOUS LEADER—NOW WHAT?

As a religious leader, you must first determine what you believe. Are you a defender of the status quo? If so, seek out and suppress malcontents among the faithful and watch for the development of heresies. Do you seek a return to forsaken traditions? If so, seek out the lost lore of a previous era to discover the truths that have been lost. Do you see weaknesses in the faith that must be changed or expanded on? If so, build a following for your ideas among the faithful and risk being branded a heretic.

Next, you must determine what your faith needs. Are there many who might be receptive to your faith's teachings? If so, marshal the ranks of the faithful to proselytize. Is your faith threatened by a powerful enemy? If so, muster support for a holy war against the infidels. Is your faith poised for increased influence? If so, lay claim to the levers of power and build the strength of your church.

## COMMUNING WITH THE GODS

Powerful spellcasters can speak directly with their deity by means of a *commune* or *contact other plane* spell or by traveling to the deity's realm in the planes to speak with him or her directly. Druids can speak with the natural forces around them (which is seen as an indirect form of communication with the gods) by means of spells such as *commune with nature* and *stone tell*. While this can often be personally beneficial to an adventuring spellcaster in need of divine guidance, it also enables a spiritual leader to speak with absolute assurance to the faithful about the wishes of the divine. Spiritual leaders who have spoken with their god or the natural world by means of such magic are considered to be a voice of the deity for the purpose of their effective Leadership score.

Likewise, spiritual leaders who can speak the language of the divine are said to be speakers of tongues for the purpose of their effective Leadership score. For good-aligned spiritual leaders, the language of the gods is usually Celestial. For evil-aligned spiritual leaders, the language of the gods is usually Abyssal or Infernal. For druid spiritual leaders, the language of the gods is always Druidic.

## MANIFESTATIONS AND VISIONS

On occasions, spiritual leaders are given glimpses into the future by their god, allowing them to better tend to their flock. Such visions might or might not come to pass, depending on the actions of the prophet. At other times, the actions of a spiritual leader are given the deity's stamp of approval in the form of a visible manifestation of divine power. In general, such manifestations and visions are granted at the whim of the deity. However, spiritual leaders with the Prophet of the Divine feat (see below) are more effective at prompting visible displays of their deity's power to augment the effectiveness of their spiritual message.



*A cleric receives insight from an emissary of her god*

Illustration by Ron Lemen

### NEW FEAT: PROPHET OF THE DIVINE

Your communications with the divine manifest in a public fashion.

**Prerequisite:** Any initiate feat, ability to speak a divine language (Abyssal, Celestial, Druidic, or Infernal, as appropriate)

**Benefit:** When you communicate with your deity using spells such as *augury*, *commune*, *commune with nature*, or *divination*, you receive an answer in the form of a loud booming voice accompanied by a visible manifestation of the deity's power, such as a nimbus of colored light in a hue favored by the deity.

In the 3 rounds after such a display, you receive a +4 sacred bonus (or profane bonus, for followers of evil deities) to the DC of compulsion spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities.

### Miracle workers

Powerful spellcasters can perform miracles by means of a *miracle*, *raise dead*, *reincarnation*, *resurrection*, or *wish* spell. To be considered a miracle worker for the purpose of his effective Leadership score, a spiritual leader must perform such a miracle in front of one or more witnesses who are members of his faith. The effects of the miracle must be perceptible by the witnesses and be beyond the power of any of them to create.

### Relic holders

Relics<sup>BE, CD</sup> are magic items that function only when worn or held by a character who believes in the deity to whom the relic is dedicated. Relics are created by the gods, not mortals, and cannot usually be bought or sold. In addition to their actual abilities, relics play a strong symbolic role within a faith. One

who possesses a relic of his faith is considered especially blessed by the gods and is considered a relic holder for the purpose of his effective Leadership score.

### Earning Rank

Church hierarchies vary widely from faith to faith and even from sect to sect. Monastic orders and lawful faiths tend to have a fairly rigid hierarchy of church-specific titles that reflect the teachings of the faith. More chaotic faiths typically have fewer formal ranks, and often allow unique individual titles. Nevertheless, a few common practices stand out across the majority of religions.

A loose correlation exists between character level and rank within a church. Ecclesiastical hierarchies tend to reward those most able to defend the faith and advance its goals; after all, its objectives are most easily accomplished by powerful individuals with a full arsenal of spells and abilities to use in the advancement of their faith. However, it is possible to achieve a level of ecclesiastical power beyond the norm for a specific character level by building up a web of influence and command that permeates the church hierarchy. Likewise, characters who concentrate strictly on adventuring might find their rank within the church hierarchy to be notably less than others who have focused on advancement within the faith.

### Bishops and Archbishops

Clerical and monastic hierarchies generally recognize two general classes of leader, but the precise titles vary between and

within faiths. Bishops (or elder brothers) are religious leaders who command a specific seat of the faith generally known as a temple or monastery. Alternatively, they might command an affiliated religious order. Archbishops (or abbots) are religious leaders who command multiple temples (or monasteries) and/or multiple affiliated religious orders. The temple (or monastery) in which an archbishop (or abbot) is based is known generally as a cathedral or abbey.

The only guaranteed means of obtaining the rank of bishop (or elder brother) is to found a new temple (or monastery) or affiliated order and staff the structure or order with your followers. Alternatively, you could achieve the rank of bishop (or elder brother) through promotion (or, in some religions, by seizing the title by force). It is up to the DM to adjudicate when you receive such a promotion, but building your effective Leadership score to 25 or more and your Influence modifier to +5 or more are reasonable milestones.

The only guaranteed means of obtaining the rank of archbishop (or abbot) is to found multiple new temples (or monasteries) and/or affiliated orders and staff the structures and/or orders with your followers. You could also achieve the rank of archbishop (or abbot) through promotion (or, in some religions, by seizing the title by force). It is up to the DM to adjudicate when you receive such a promotion, but building your effective Leadership score to 40 or more and your Influence modifier to +15 or more are reasonable milestones.

## speakers and hierophants

Druidic hierarchies generally recognize two classes of leaders, speakers and hierophants. Speakers, as discussed on page 24 of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*, speak for a druidic circle but do not command it. Although members always have an unofficial pecking order based on age, wisdom, and druidic power, the circle as a whole decides on its policies by consensus.

Hierophants (not to be confused with the prestige class of the same name) have moved beyond the standard druidic circles to affiliate themselves individually with a specific natural region (usually a forest, desert, mountain range, swamp, or body of water) many square miles in scope.

Even founding a circle does not guarantee a druid the rank of speaker. However, most such founders do indeed hold the title of speaker for as long as they wish. Hierophants must seek out and defeat the hierophant (if any) of a region they wish to bond with. They must then reach out to the land through the repeated casting of spells such as *commune with nature*. Only if the land accepts a druid, as adjudicated by the DM, can he be accorded the status of hierophant.

## guiding the flock

The primary role of a religious leader is to shepherd the faithful, instructing lower-ranked religious leaders and lay followers in the tenets of the faith and interpreting appropriate responses to the world in the context of the faith's teachings. Depending upon the faith, such instruction might take the form of leading by example, peaceful sermons, harsh indoctrination, or involuntary conversions backed by magical and/or physical might.

## giving edicts

Every religious faith has a core set of tenets espoused by the deity and recorded in either tomes (in the form of religious scriptures) or oral traditions. Although such tenets form the basis of the faith, they do not cover every problem worthy of religious introspection that might come up in the practice of daily life. Religious leaders are expected to interpret the existing religious scriptures, interpolate the appropriate faith-based response to thorny situations, and promulgate edicts, when appropriate. Over time, the religious

## life with many faiths

Beings of Faerûn worship many gods; only zealots and clergy venerate just one deity. For example, a farmer might mainly revere Chauntea, but also pray to appease Talos (to keep crop-damaging storms away or at least infrequent and as gentle as possible), Malar (to keep beasts from attacking him or his folk in the fields and to send vermin elsewhere), and so on.

Any mortal of any race can worship any deity. Nevertheless, interests, professions, alignment, and upbringing make some matchups of faith and individual highly unlikely; most unusual combinations result from an individual searching for the "right" calling or ascribing an important life event's outcome to the influence or direct action of a particular deity. However, some priesthoods don't welcome worshipers of particular races, genders, or professions. Only a few deities deny the polytheistic way of things and demand that their faithful worship them and only them.

Most folk in Faerûn embrace (or drift into) primary worship of one deity above—even if only slightly above—all others. Many carry a token, holy symbol, or remembrance of their primary, or patron, deity.

Folk often pray (and make offerings) to divinities other than their patron deity, in appeasement. For example, a sailor might pray, "We must take ship across the Neck in a boat, so Umberlee please don't sink us, and Talos send no storms!" If the body of water is larger, voyagers might pray to Selûne and Shaundakul for navigational aid as well. No gods are to be treated disrespectfully. Their worshipers and clergy might be denounced, shunned, or even fought, and sometimes—as in the case of persons opposed to human sacrifice or what they see as other "unholy" religious practices—their altars shattered as well. The gods themselves, however, are considered very real; while thwarting a deity's mortal servants, it is always best to not personally defame the god.

edicts of one or more religious leaders are collected and gradually incorporated into the holy scriptures of the faith.

Players are encouraged to proclaim their own religious interpretations and edicts in accordance with their understanding of their faith. Alternatively, a mechanical substitute for issuance of an interpretation or edict is a Knowledge (religion) check. The DC of the check depends on whether it is an interpretation or an edict and, in the case of the latter, the importance of the edict. The result indicates whether the interpretation or edict was correct or not.

Interpretations are religious rulings based on clear and straightforward scripture. Minor edicts are religious rulings based on ambiguous scripture. Major edicts are religious rulings based on contradictory scripture. Tenets are religious rulings wholly separate from the existing body of religious scripture.

Knowledge (religion) DC	Edict Class	Infraction Type
10	Interpretation	Lesser
20	Minor edict	Moderate
30	Major edict	Major
40	Tenet	Heresy

Religious edicts are judged by higher-ranking religious leaders. In the case of a supreme leader of the faith, religious edicts are judged by the deity or nondivine entity playing that role. If the edict is judged improper, then certain penalties fall on the edict issuer. The penalties for lesser, moderate, and major infractions are given in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*, pages 232–233. The penalty for heresy is, at a minimum, excommunication. In many faiths—particularly evil ones—the penalty for heresy is death.

## spreading the faith

In a world of competing faiths with deities that demonstrably exist, all religious faiths must constantly seek new converts not only to grow but to keep from losing ground to the proselytizers of other faiths. In most faiths, all believers are expected to proselytize, from the head (or heads) of the church to the newly converted.

Proselytization rarely leads to a discussion of the need for faith. The ranks of those who will become the Faithless or the False are small, particularly in the aftermath of the Time of Troubles in which many persons visibly witnessed the avatars of one or more gods. Instead, proselytizers usually focus on the moral clarity provided by their belief structure, the earthly rewards of the faith in the here and now, and the rewards of the afterlife. Churches locked in conflict with a natural antithesis often point to the worst aspects of their rivals as well, both as a motivator and as an implicit threat. Religious leaders in particular are encouraged to reach out to large numbers of individuals and attempt to convert them.

Players are encouraged to role-play attempts at proselytization. Alternatively, a mechanical substitute for proselytization is a Diplomacy check. The DC of the check depends on the NPC's attitude toward the faith or the proselytizer, whichever is worse. Use the Influencing NPC Attitudes sidebar on page 72 of the *Player's Handbook*, but add 10 to the DC because religious beliefs

are deeply held. A friendly reaction means that the NPC is willing to attend a church service, and a subsequent check can be made after such a service. A helpful reaction means that the NPC is willing to convert.

## obligations and duties of a spiritual leader

Religious leaders are obligated to be living exemplars of the faith. Whereas members of the church commonly live their lives within the letter or the spirit of the faith's religious teachings—or at least attempt to do so—spiritual leaders are expected to always live their lives within both the letter and the spirit of the faith's religious teachings.

Moreover, the penance required for even minor sins (as detailed in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*, pages 232–233) is greater for religious leaders because they are held to a higher standard. What might be a lesser infraction for an acolyte is a moderate infraction for a religious leader. Likewise, what might be a moderate infraction for an acolyte is a major infraction for a religious leader. A major infraction by a religious leader might require the individual to retreat into the wilderness as a hermit for a year or more in addition to the normal penalties.

The responsibilities of a religious leader lie first and foremost with the church. The church and the deity are paramount, and all other concerns are secondary, even when there is great risk to those close to the religious leader, to other members of the church, or to the religious leader himself. In practice, this means that a religious leader must be sufficiently strong in faith that he can offer up not only himself but his family, friends, and followers as martyrs to the religious cause, should the situation demand—and whether they wish to or not.

A religious leader is also expected to be a very hands-on leader. Daily duties typically involve preparing and giving a sermon to the faithful, prayerful reflection and study, meeting with members of the faith to offer guidance, and meeting with secular leaders and the leaders of other faiths. Whereas a secular lord must simply see to his subjects' health and security and mediate disputes that arise, a religious leader must do all that as well as tend to the moral fiber of his followers. The path (in accordance with church teachings) is just as important as the result (a safe and happy flock). As a result, religious leaders often find it difficult to set aside their daily religious duties to go adventuring as they did in their younger days. However, the wisest religious leaders realize that they must continue to serve their deity and inspire their followers, even if it means periodically delegating their primary responsibilities to their lieutenants in the faith. This does mean that as a religious leader advances in power, he must become more and more selective as to the nature of the adventures he pursues, for it becomes increasingly important that each one be closely tied to the service of the faith.

Finally, a religious leader must ultimately judge who is or is not a true servant of the god. This judgment might range from giving a warning, such as with a *mark of justice*, to declaring an individual excommunicated, such as with *anathema*<sup>CR</sup> or *mark of the unfaithful*<sup>CR</sup>, to readmitting an individual to the faith, such as with *atonement*.

## conflicts

In their search for universal truths and the promise of eternal rewards, religions are inherently pitted against themselves, against each another, and against other, nondivine centers of authority.

### church vs. state

Although once dominated by great empires of the Creator Races, the Fair Folk, the Stout Folk, and humanity, Faerûn is now largely a continent of kingdoms and city-states separated by large tracts of lightly held lands. Many power groups have arisen to fill this void, including powerful churches and followers of particular creeds. Lawful and mercantile faiths typically support the state, while chaotic and druidic faiths usually oppose the state, working on behalf of the governed to loosen the grip of government. Creeds directly tied to the appropriate form of governance, such as those espoused by the clergies of Bane, Horus-Re, Tyr and the late, unlamented Gilgeam, are most inclined to actually become the state.

In Waterdeep, for example, paladins of Tyr, but not the church of Tyr, play a critical role in the governance of the city. The church of Bane has long dominated the cities of the Moonsea, and the Tyrant of the Moonsea, Fzoul Chembryl, now governs the entire region in the name of the Black Lord. In the Vilhon Reach, the power of the state is curtailed by the defiance of the Oakfather's Emerald Enclave.

A spiritual leader can play a key role in defining the relationship of the church to the state. Should you support the current system of local governance, given the risk that the state might co-opt or corrupt the church? Should you oppose the current system of governance, given the risk that such a conflict might distract the church from its larger mission? Given the vast

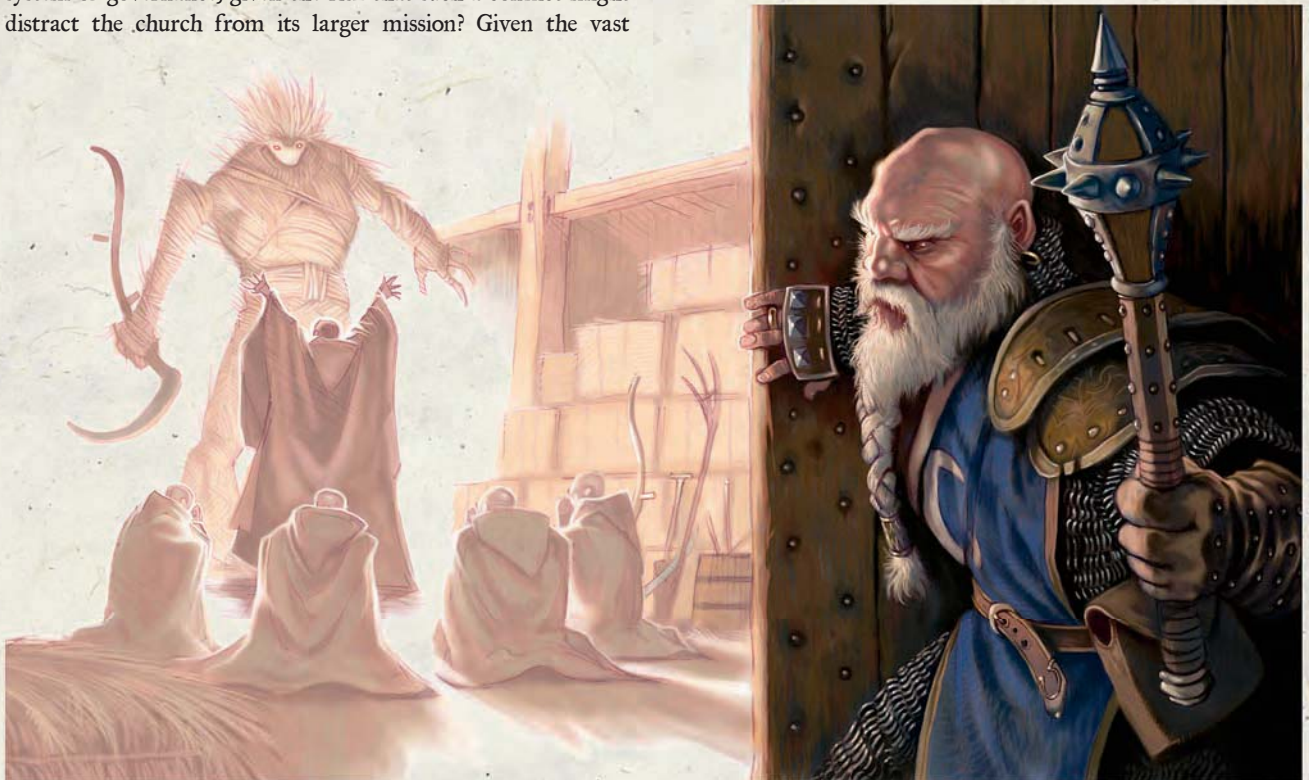
number of issues on which the church and the state might have drastically different positions, a spiritual leader must ask these questions quite often.

### rival faiths and cults

In the context of almost universal polytheism across Faerûn, religious leaders must defend their church's "turf" by ensuring that worshipers of other faiths give homage to the deity within the sphere of the deity's portfolio(s). For example, while the church of Umberlee lacks large congregations of the faithful who regularly turn out for worship services in the Bitch Queen's churches, her servants work tirelessly to ensure that every sailor has Umberlee's name on the tip of his tongue while at sea and that no ship leaves port without making a sacrifice to the Bitch Queen who rules the waves.

Another form of religious rivalry involves the followers of deities from different pantheons whose portfolios overlap. For example, the area of influence of the Faerûnian pantheon is beginning to encroach on the traditional lands of the Mulhorandi pantheon. Likewise, the collapse of the Untheric pantheon is an opportunity for both the Faerûnian and the Mulhorandi pantheons to expand their influence. In both cases, the Church of Anhur and the Church of Tempus are finding themselves in competition for worshipers who wish to follow a martial god. Although the two churches are not too dissimilar in philosophy, there is a real risk that Ao the Overgod might decide that the geographic area of influence of the two pantheons is sufficiently overlapping that they should be considered a single pantheon. When this scenario eventually unfolds, there can be only one deity above the rank of demipower with a specific portfolio within the pantheon. In

Illustration by William O'Connor



*A dwarf crusader infiltrates a makeshift temple of evil*

other words, the day is coming when Anhur and Tempus will battle for supremacy, and the loser of that conflict will either be slain or reduced to the status of a demipower. In preparation for that day, which could be years or even centuries off, the two churches are battling for influence and control.

A spiritual leader can play an influential role in such rivalries through active proselytization, by invoking the deity's power in public and miraculous ways, and by completing epic quests pledged in service to the god.

## interfaith conflict

Sometimes the very nature of the gods pits them against one another, reflecting opposing currents in the culture and in their espoused tenets. For example, the churches of Selune and Shar have long been opposed to one another, reflecting the never-ending tension between light and good (Selune) and darkness and evil (Shar).

Such divine conflicts are inevitably replayed in the mortal world, pitting churches against one another in never-ending war. Such battles can never be won unless one deity or the other is defeated, but they do ebb and flow, reflecting the waxing and waning of power between the two gods. Conflict between faiths is as much a battle of symbols and ideals as it is a military exercise. What might not make sense on the battlefield (such as the sacrifice of large numbers of followers in order to seize and desecrate a relic of the rival faith) might have important symbolic import (such as undermining the ranks of the faithful within a community, opening it up to inroads by the rival faith).

Spiritual leaders are expected to wage such traditional battles with complete and utter dedication. There is no greater calling than to die a martyr in battle with a faith's traditional foes. While other activities are permitted, they should not serve as distractions but to support the primary effort, even indirectly.

### NEW FEAT: BANE OF INFIDELS

In a church locked in eternal conflict with followers of another faith, you have learned to fight effectively against the infidels. You know their ways and how to beat them.

**Prerequisite:** Worship of a specific deity.

**Benefit:** You acquire a favored enemy. This benefit functions like the ranger class feature of the same name, except that the exact type of creature you oppose, usually followers of another deity, is determined by your faith. See *Player's Guide to Faerûn*, page 50, for a list of appropriate enemies of your deity.

## fractious sects within the church

Conflict among members of the same church is more common than most realize. While true heresies are effectively small cults outside the church, many divisions just short of heresy can provoke conflict within a faith.

In most religions, such battles are waged for the hearts and minds of the faithful, for the strength of a sect is usually linked to the strength and fervor of its followers within the faith. For example, the Orthodox Church of Procampur holds that the

last pontiff of the faith, Grand Patriarch Cullen Kordamant of Procampur, has ascended to semidivine status, while the Oghmanyte Church of Sembia claims that the Binder himself recently selected Undryl Yannathar, high cleric of Sembia, to be the Great Patriarch. Both factions are now actively engaged in a race to convert all other churches of Oghma to their cause. Although the conflict is far from breaking into open hostilities, there is little doubt that many of the Binder's followers are actively undermining the works of the rival group.

In some faiths, particularly among the worshipers of chaotic and evil gods, open strife within the church is actively encouraged. For example, Cyric draws strength from the never-ending battles between his followers, even though such battles weaken the church with respect to other faiths. Likewise, Bane (and Iyachtu Xvim before his return) draws strength from the ceaseless struggle among his faithful to dominate their fellow believers.

In churches where intrafaith conflict is expected, a spiritual leader can only rise to power and keep his position by actively working against his rivals in the faith. In churches where interfaith conflict or conflicts with the established tenets of the faith are unwelcome, spiritual leaders might find themselves in one of three roles: defending the status quo, battling a perceived injustice in the heart of the church, or mediating between two factions whose rivalry is undermining the faith as a whole. Those who successfully battle a perceived injustice in the heart of the church, at the risk of being branded a heretic, are considered shapers of the divine for the purpose of their effective Leadership score, for by their success they have changed the nature of the church.

## military threats

While many faiths build their centers of worship within major population centers, others prefer the isolation of lightly claimed or unclaimed territory and the independence from political leadership this gives the faith. In the former case, churches often find it useful to contribute directly to the defense of the state and thus indirectly to their own defense. Sometimes this contribution comes in the form of funds or assigning of divine spellcasters to bolster the ranks of warriors in times of war. Other times this contribution comes in the form of a church militia that fights alongside and in support of the secular army. In the latter case, isolated abbeys, monasteries, and groves must defend themselves against organized military threats, relying only on themselves.

As a result, many faiths, particularly those of a martial or lawful nature, sponsor church armies or monastic orders. The former are made up of templars (usually blackguards, clerics, cleric/fighters, and/or paladins), while the latter are made up of monks. Faiths rarely use church armies and monastic orders to conquer territory except when that is a tenet of the faith (such as in the church of Bane). Instead, most faiths employ them to defend abbeys, temples, and sacred sites against rival faiths and general threats (such as orc hordes) or to attack the abbeys, temples, and sacred sites of infidels. A few churches, such as the churches of Anhur, Garagos, Red Knight, and Tempus, effectively rent their church armies out as mercenaries because the pursuit of warfare is a core tenet of the faith.

Spiritual leaders of a more martial disposition might find themselves leading an army of the faithful. Such leaders are responsible for the defense of the faith and the execution of the military aims of the church. They must constantly watch for threats to the faith and then determine the appropriate strategic response; because most faiths are spread thinly across large areas, the defense of the church is far more difficult than defending a contiguous geographic region.

## Insidious Threats

Perhaps the greatest threat to most churches is the chance that a trusted individual's crisis in faith leads to apostasy and that the apostate continues to act from his trusted position within the faith. An apostate might be a heretic who seeks to change the faith from within, or an infidel who embraces the worship of a rival deity. In either case, a secretive apostate can subtly threaten the mission of the church by confusing what is preached to the faithful, by destroying the physical manifestations of the church's traditions (altering holy works, replacing relics with fakes, and so forth), or by betraying the church's tenets in deed (branding innocents as heretics, self-aggrandizing behavior in the name of the church, or communicating hidden weaknesses in the church's defenses to rival faiths).

Spiritual leaders must keep a close eye on the faithful, particularly those who are members of the church hierarchy and therefore in positions of great influence within the faith. The challenge is not to confuse constructive dissent with apostasy.

## Rewards

Although some philosophers claim that a life lived in strict accordance with one's faith is its own reward, most inhabitants view an afterlife in the service of one's deity as the reward for being faithful (as opposed to being one of the Faithless or the False, as detailed in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*, page 259).

An agent of one's deity collects the souls of the dead who lived faithful lives and brings them to the deity's divine realm

where they serve the deity in whatever capacity required. Such souls become petitioners<sup>MP</sup>, at least initially. Those who sell their souls to devils in this life (by taking the Disciple of Darkness<sup>CR</sup> feat) or who end up on the Fugue Plane usually start the afterlife as lemures, a diabolic form of petitioner. Those who sell their souls to yugoloths in this life (by taking the Scion of Sorrow<sup>CR</sup> feat) or worship the deities resident in the Barrens of Doom and Despair usually start the afterlife as larvae, a wormlike form of petitioner. Those who sell their souls to demons in this life (by taking the Thrall to Demon<sup>CR</sup> feat) and members of the Faithless or the False who are captured on the Fugue Plane by fiends from the Abyss usually start the afterlife as manes<sup>BV</sup>, a demonic form of petitioner.

Spiritual leaders and others who provide great service to the gods are often promoted to positions of great importance in the afterlife. For example, Selûne transforms select petitioners into eladrins, lillends, and shards (planetars). See *Player's Guide to Faerûn*, pages 142–165, for additional suggestions of what elite petitioners might be transformed into.

## Religious Strongholds

Religious strongholds include simple shrines, small chapels, rural churches, city churches, monasteries, and large or fortified cathedrals. The nature and size of such strongholds varies from faith to faith and sect to sect. Two examples, one a great city church and the other a large fortified cathedral, are described below. Further details about typical religious strongholds can be found in *Magic of Faerûn*.

### Spires of the Morning

The Spires of the Morning (C1 on the map found in *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*, page 99) is a grand temple of the Morninglord that stands proudly at the end of the northern spur of Mount Waterdeep along the northern edge of Castle Ward. Built of pink marble, this three-story structure is capped by seven spires of copper, gold, and silver that shine with the reflected glory of dawn's first light.

## Temple Guards

Except in the few cities and towns of Faerûn openly ruled by a single faith, the norm in any urban temple is that the local watch or lawkeepers (police force) do not guard holy ground (temple interiors). They might or might not have the right to enter and enforce secular laws within church buildings or enclaves, but the daily (and nightly) guarding of temple property and holy purity is performed by (usually armed and uniformed) individuals trained, chosen, and controlled by the clergy. All rural temples have some sort of guard; some faiths even define an unguarded temple as a mere "shrine."

Such guardians bear a huge variety of solemn and sometimes fanciful titles, but they are collectively known as temple guards (or in everyday slang terms, "holy hands").

If a temple is large or grand enough, a paladin or blackguard might command its temple guards. As a general rule, however, paladins and blackguards work "out in the world" to defend believers and further the faith instead of performing guard duty in a temple (with the exception of special occasions such as particular holy rites). With that said, priests of most faiths can call on paladins or blackguards to render appropriate-to-the-faith military aid whenever the need arises.

Most temple guards are accomplished or at least disciplined warriors with devout faith in their deity. Priests of the temple closely supervise them, sometimes testing or spying upon them. They might be trained and occasionally tested by paladins, and even possess unusual skills (prestige classes).

Work began on a temple and abbey of Lathander outside Waterdeep's walls in the Year of Much Iron (998 DR). The Spires of the Morning was dedicated thirteen years later in the Year of the Defiant Mountain (1011 DR). As both the temple and city grew, the Spires of the Morning became one of the preeminent temples of the Morninglord along the Sword Coast. Waterdeep's walls enveloped the temple in the Year of the Maelstrom (1101 DR), and the structure now lies in what is considered the heart of the city.

The Spires of the Morning is led by High Radiance Ghentilara (LG elderly female Chondathan human cleric 6/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 10 [Lathander]). Church leaders include Prior Bamaal Dunster (NG male Tethyrian human cleric 6 [Lathander]) and Ghentilara's ambitious underling, Prior Athosar (LG male Tethyrian cleric 5/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 3). More than 300 clerics of the Morninglord are based at the temple, most of them housed in church-owned dormitories within a few blocks of the cathedral.

In addition to the regular clergy, the Spires of the Morning is an important base for the Order of the Aster. The church army's local commanders include High Dawnknight Tlinthar Regheriad (LG male Illuskan paladin 16), Dawnknight Alaura Cartier (LG female Tethyrian paladin 14), and Dawnknight Haurier Brightshadow (NG male Tethyrian fighter 5/cleric 5/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 6 [Lathander]). The order's barracks are located one block from the main cathedral and hold 80 templars.

### LAYOUT OF THE SPIRES OF THE MORNING

**1. Great Hall:** This large open hall is the cathedral's central gathering place. The Morninglord's followers are found herein at all hours of the day, eating, drinking, and debating on the way of the world. Visitors are welcome even if they are not (yet) followers of the Morninglord, but all should expect a heavy dose of religious discourse and debate during their stay.

**2. Kitchen:** This large room is used at all hours to prepare meals for the clergy and the less fortunate. The clergy of Lathander also brew their own beer herein, for Aster Ale is quite popular in the taverns of the Castle, Sea, and North Wards.

**3. Chapterhouse of the Aster:** In this simple room, the leaders of the order (noted above) meet in council and monitor ongoing operations. The walls of the room are notable for the score of shields that bedeck them, each a relic of a great battle won against the order's foes.

**4. Dawn Towers:** These rooms are usually empty, used only by followers of the Morninglord in need of a quiet place to walk and think. Before the church purchased dormitories in the neighborhood, they were used as barracks for the clergy.

**5. Library:** This small chamber holds the church's most valuable tomes. Two monks attend to the tomes at all times and ensure that they are read only by those authorized to do so.

**6. Hall of Innovation:** This large, sprawling chamber is used as a workspace for the clergy. New ideas are experimented upon herein, including craft projects, books, and sermons.

**7. Chambers of Radiance:** These two tower bases house the elders of the church. Ghentilara's room is in the northern tower, while Bamaal and Athosar reside in the southern tower.

**8. Hall of the Faithful:** This large chamber is used to administer the church's sprawling holdings, including investment properties and outlying churches that report to the High Radiance.

**9. Hall of Rest:** This chamber is used as a dormitory by a sizable percentage of the local clergy. The lack of privacy prompts most clergy to seek quarters in the nearby church-owned dormitories, but for those who want to be surrounded by the life of the church, this is the place to stay.

**10. Choir Spires:** During dawn worship services, the Morninglord's choir assembles in the galleries atop the cathedral's lesser spires to sing praises to Lathander. At other times of the day, these rooms are used by the clergy for prayer, quiet discussion, and study.

**11. Cathedral of Dawn:** This cathedral is nearly three stories in height. Four sets of pews face a central altar. The Morninglord's followers gather here at dawn each day to hear the hymns of Lathander's choir and listen to the sermon of the day.

**Undercroft:** The undercroft can be reached by way of the stairs in area 1. The temple's treasures, including coins, religious artifacts, and magic items, are housed herein, as are the bones of the fallen.

## The house of firehair

The House of Firehair is a great fortified cathedral that sits atop a pastoral hill in the center of Daerlun. Walls surround the entire hill, making it wholly separate from the city proper. The House of Firehair is older than the city of Daerlun; in fact, the city grew from the small village that sprang up to serve the temple's inhabitants.

The House of Firehair is led by High Priestess Thauna Maskalar (CG female Chondathan human cleric 11/heartwarder<sup>FP</sup> 10 [Sune]). A total of 48 clerics, all humans and half-elves, and 336 lay followers tend to this sprawling cathedral and sacred ground.

The central structure consists of several buildings linked with those nearby by flying stone bridges, kept warm and habitable during the winter months and festooned with hanging and creeping plants to encourage beautiful birds (which the priests raise and tend) to perch there. The graceful arches of these spans are famous across Faerûn as the crowning glory of a place of gentle beauty.

**1. Firehair Cathedral:** This great soaring structure resembles three cylindrical towers merged into one graceful whole. From inside one can see straight up to the roof of red and orange glass that glows as with fire when the sun is in the sky above. Inside the great cathedral, concentric pews surround a massive porcelain lady's hand, carved so as to appear to emerge from the cathedral floor and bend back, forming a platform for whomever is giving the sermon.

Each of the three towers holds a spiral staircase and a series of balconies overlooking the main hall, allowing minstrels and choristers to fill the chapel with music.

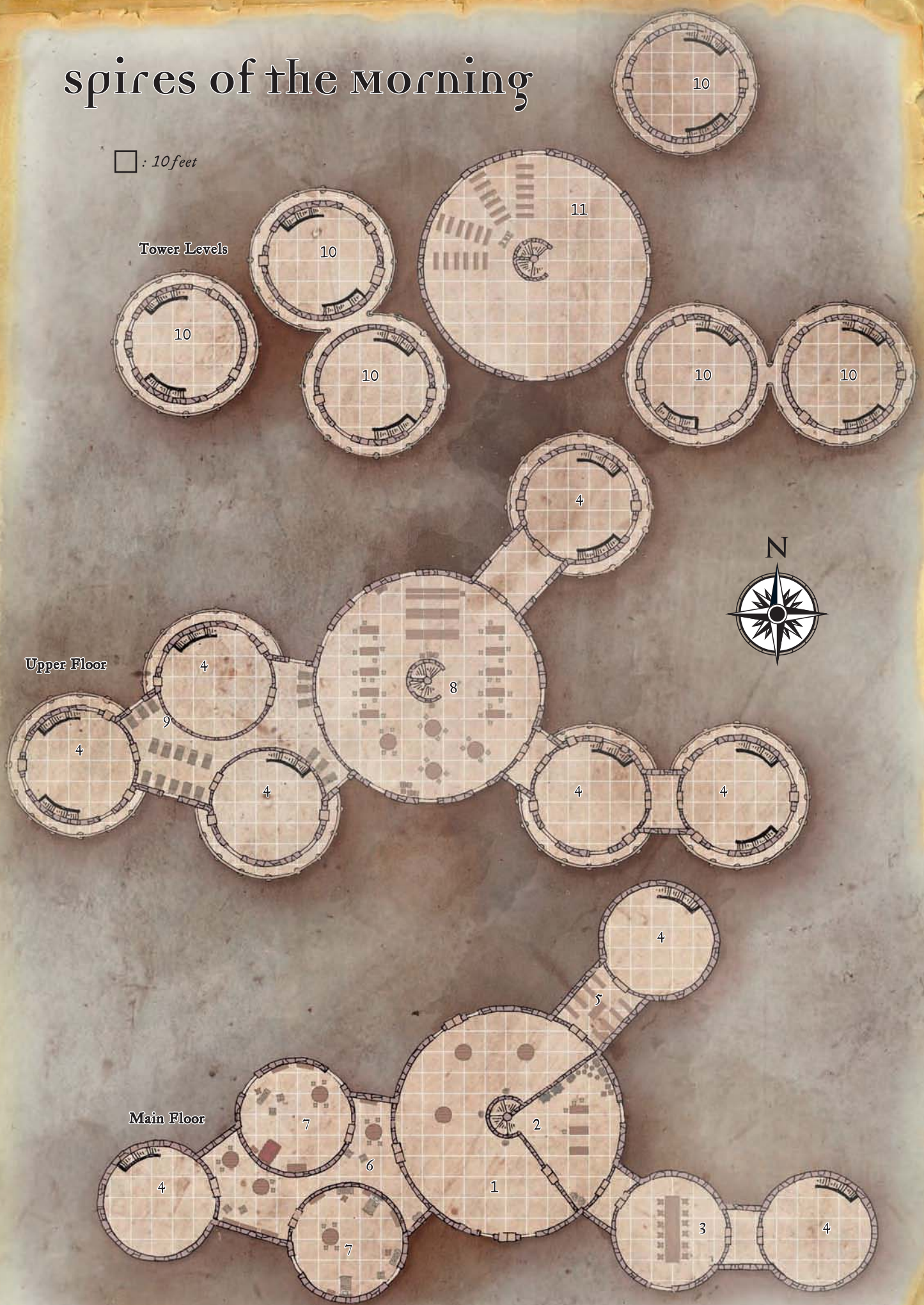
**2. Hall of Beauty:** This great two-story structure, the finest museum in Daerlun (and arguably the finest in all of Sembia), stands nearly 40 feet high, with a great sloping roof. Inside, each



# spires of the morning

□ : 10 feet

Tower Levels



## The House of Firehair



— : 250 feet



floor has a series of rooms lined with paintings and other works of art. Some of the artwork celebrates Sune or her fellow deities on the plane of Brightwater, but most of it is simply inherently beautiful. During the early evening, wealthy Daerlunians gather here to stroll, entertained by wandering musicians and fed delicacies by an always attentive wait staff. Of course, those who patronize such events are expected to donate heavily to the temple and its galleries.

**3. Hall of Passion:** This hall is so named for the passionate, metaphorical embrace of the goddess made by clerics of Lady Firehair. This three-story structure is capped by a great sloping roof. Inside, vaulted corridors open into individual apartments for the temple's junior clerics. Outside, the ground-floor apartments—reserved for visitors to the temple—each have their own doors, leading through small stone gazebos into the gardens.

**4. Hall of Love:** This area houses the temple's lay followers along four floors of apartments. In design, the Hall of Love is similar to the Hall of Passion, but the accommodations are smaller and plainer.

**5. Radiant Tower:** This tower stands four stories high and is built of a distinctive reddish-orange marble. Inside, this edifice houses the individual apartments of the senior-most clerics of the temple, including the chambers occupied by Thauna on the top floor of the tower. The roof of the tower, accessible only by way of Thauna's apartment, is a gorgeous rooftop garden and private sanctuary for the temple's high priestess.

**6. Artisan's Quarters:** This three-story hall, identical to the Hall of Passion, was built for the temple's resident artists, including musicians, painters, and sculptors. The third floor is

given over to administrative tasks, for the temple's high priestess oversees all of Sune's temples in Sembia and the southern Dalelands.

**7. Sune's Playground:** Known as the Wild Woods to the citizens of Daerlun, Sune's Playground is a wooden garden of carefully pruned trees, bowers, fountains, romantic paths and glades, and the like for use in night-long revels. Several dryads dwell on the grounds, and sylphs lair atop the greatest of the trees.

**8. Brightwater Pool:** This large pool is always clear and sparkling, with a hint of golden light dancing across its waters. Although the water is normal and nonmagical, Sune's faithful believe it to be sacred holy water, filled by the ever-overflowing waters of Evergold. Three mermaids, all skilled and capable clerics of Sune, make their home within these waters.

**9. Dryad's Copse:** The largest of the wooded areas within Sune's Playground is known as Dryad's Copse. These woods are mostly great old oaks, and most of the resident dryads on the temple grounds are thought to dwell herein.

**10. Temple Walls:** The House of Firehair once stood alone in the western wilderness of Sembia in the early days of the Merchant Kingdom. In those days, a stout wall was needed to defend the temple from orc hordes and other threats from the Vast Swamp and the Thunder Peaks. The walls still stand, as proud and beautiful as ever, but now they serve to keep the temple grounds separate and distinct from the surrounding city.

**Undercroft:** The undercroft can be reached by way of the stairs in the Radiant Tower. The dead are interred herein in beautifully sculpted sarcophagi whose lids are carved to represent the fallen at their peak of beauty.

## example: Ascension of Amaunator

This campaign arc unfolds in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR), culminating on Midsummer's Day and centered on a heretic of Lathander who has embraced the Risen Sun heresy. If the player characters get involved, they might work for or against the Risen Sun heretics. If a follower of Lathander is in the PCs' group, he might replace Sunlord Daelegoth Orndeir as the leader of the heresy.

### Background

Like most faiths, the Church of Lathander has always been divided into sects and factions. The Order of the Aster is an affiliated order of templars that acts as the army of the church. The Brotherhood of the Glorious Sun is a sect within the church of Lathander that believes that the Morninglord is the living reincarnation of Amaunator, the long-vanished sun god who stood high in the ancient Netherese pantheon. The Order of the Sun Soul is a monastic brotherhood with ties to the churches of Lathander, Selûne, and Sune, although the tie with the Morninglord's faith is strongest. Sun soul monks trace their history back to another Amaunatori order, the Brotherhood of the Sun. The Church of Lathander is not without its notable heresies as well, including the Risen Sun heresy and the Three-Faced Sun heresy, both of which are detailed earlier in this chapter.

The leader of the Brotherhood of the Glorious Sun, Sunlord Daelegoth Orndeir, has embraced the Risen Sun Heresy and now seeks to make it the orthodox sect of the church of the Morninglord. Toward that end, Daelegoth has conceived the idea of an eternal sun shining down upon the land. The sunlord is convinced that such a display would convince the majority of the faithful in the church of Lathander that the time of the Morninglord's transformation into Amaunator is nigh as well as bring many new converts to the reborn church of Amaunator. In effect, by creating the belief that the transformation is imminent, Daelegoth hopes to precipitate an actual transformation.



*Sunlord Daelegoth Orndeir*

You have been initiated into the greatest secrets of Amaunator's faith.

**Prerequisite:** Cleric or paladin 4th, Heretic of the Faith (Risen Sun), Heretic of the Faith (Three-Faced Sun), or Servant of the Fallen (Amaunator).

**Benefit:** You can spontaneously cast any spell on your spell list that has the fire descriptor. This ability works like spontaneously casting *cure* spells does.

In addition, you can add the following spells to your cleric or paladin spell list:

2nd—*augury*; 3rd—*baste*; 4th—*order's wrath*; 8th—*sunburst*; 9th—*time stop*.

## sunlord daelegoth orndeir

Sunlord Daelegoth Orndeir stands over 6 feet tall with a willowy build and a long mane of coal-black hair. His pale skin is laced with orange veins that seem to burn with inner fire. He speaks with a burning intensity that draws in the listener and conveys a deep understanding of mystical truths.

The only child of Morninglord Hathala Orndeir, high priestess of the Tower of the Morn in Elversult, Daelegoth is a rare fire genasi, one of several in his maternal lineage's recorded history, who can trace his heritage back to the Netherese clergy of Amaunator. Daelegoth's youth was spent in the company of

Lathanderite priests drawn to his mother's ambition of transforming the Tower of the Morn into the dominant temple of the Dragon Coast region.

After joining the clergy of Lathander at a young age, Daelegoth led small companies of the Morninglord's followers to recover sacred relics of the church from sacred sites of ages past. The recovered relics were used to expand his mother's power base among the ranks of the Morninglord's church, broadening the strength and number of her flock. Over the course of several expeditions, the fire genasi began to deduce a strong correlation between the age of the holy site and the number of intermingled legacies of the church of Amaunator. This in turn led him to the nontraditional, but nonheretical, conclusion that Lathander was Amaunator reborn and drew him to the Brotherhood of the Glorious Sun.

Illustration by Francis Tsai

As a sunmaster<sup>LE</sup>, Daeleoth rose rapidly in power, eventually rising to lead the brotherhood and command a large following within the church of Lathander. Following his mother's death in the Year of the Tankard (1370 DR), Daeleoth inherited her position as archbishop of the Dragon Coast and high priest of the Temple of the Morn. Long welcome at the Temple of the Morn, Brothers of the Glorious Sun soon assumed most of the leadership positions within the church of Lathander in the region.

Over the past year, Daeleoth has gradually strayed beyond the bounds of tolerable dissent that the church of Lathander allows the Brotherhood of the Glorious Sun, and he risks dragging the entire order of sunmasters into embracing the Risen Sun heresy. There is now quiet talk among the most senior prelates of the faith that Daeleoth must be excommunicated, although they fear doing so could rupture the church.

**SUNLORD DAELEOTH ORNDEIR CR 25**

Male elite fire genasi cleric 10/sunmaster<sup>LE</sup> 10/evangelist<sup>CD</sup> 5  
LN Medium outsider (native)

**Init** +3; **Senses** Listen +6, Spot +6

**Languages** Common, Chondathan, Ignan, Loross, Tethyrian

**AC** 20, touch 9, flat-footed 20

**hp** 111 (25 HD)

**Resist** fire 15

**Fort** +17, **Ref** +7, **Will** +24; +4 racial bonus on saving throws against fire spells and effects

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +3 *flaming burst shadowscourge\* light mace*  
+22/+17/+12 (1d6+4 plus 1d6 fire)

\*New weapon special ability described below

**Base Atk** +18; **Grp** +19

**Special Actions** *control flame*, convert the unfaithful, *glaring eyes*, inflame the righteous, inspire hope, *sunform*, turn undead or water creatures 4/day (+2 turn checks), greater turning against undead 1/day

**Combat Gear** Corona of Amaunator (*helm of brilliance*), *elemental gem (fire)*, various minor potions and scrolls

**Cleric Spells Prepared** (CL 20th):

- 9th—*miracle*, *prismatic sphere*<sup>D</sup> (DC 25), *storm of vengeance* (DC 25), *summon monster IX*, *time stop*
- 8th—*discern location*<sup>D</sup>, *fire storm* (DC 24), *greater spell immunity* (DC 24), *shield of law* (DC 24), *sunburst* (DC 24)
- 7th—*destruction* (DC 23), *dictum*, *fortunate fate*<sup>Mag</sup>, *greater scrying* (DC 23), *sunbeam*<sup>D</sup> (DC 23)
- 6th—*banishment* (DC 22), *fire seeds*<sup>D</sup> (DC 22), *heroes' feast*, *bold monster* (DC 22), *sun scepter*<sup>LE</sup>, *undeath to death* (DC 22)
- 5th—*commune*, *detect scrying*, *dispel chaos* (DC 21), *flame strike*<sup>D</sup> (DC 21), *greater command* (DC 21), *righteous might*, *true seeing* (DC 21)
- 4th—*aura of the sun*<sup>LE</sup>, *divine power*, *fire shield*<sup>D</sup>, *freedom of movement* (DC 20), *Ncbaser's glowing orb*<sup>PG</sup>, *order's wrath* (DC 20), *tongues* (DC 20)
- 3rd—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*<sup>D</sup>, *continual flame*, *haste*

- (DC 19), *magic circle against chaos* (DC 19), *prayer*, *remove blindness/deafness* (DC 19), *searing light*
- 2nd—*augury*, *calm emotions* (DC 18), *consecrate*, *enthrall* (DC 18), *beat metal*<sup>D</sup> (DC 18), *shield other* (DC 18), *status* (DC 18), *zone of truth* (DC 18)
- 1st—*bless*, *command* (DC 17), *deathwatch*, *detect undead*, *endure elements*<sup>D</sup> (DC 17), *protection from chaos* (DC 17), *ray of resurgence*<sup>LE</sup> (DC 17), *vision of glory*
- 0—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *guidance* (DC 16), *light* (2), *read magic*

**D:** Domain spell. Deity: Amaunator (Lathander).

**Domains:** Fire, Sun, Planning. Daeleoth can prepare any Law or Sun domain spell as if it was on his cleric spell list. The spell uses a slot of a level equal to its level in the Law or Sun domain, respectively.

**Abilities** Str 13, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 23, Cha 12

**SQ** fast talk, great orator, skills mastery

**Feats** Epic Spellcasting<sup>EL</sup>, Extend Spell<sup>B</sup>, Heretic of the Faith (Risen Sun)<sup>1</sup>, Leadership, Improved Initiative, Initiate of Amaunator<sup>2</sup>, Overcome Shadow Weave<sup>CV</sup>, Persuasive, Rulership<sup>3</sup>, Spectral Strike<sup>EL</sup>

1 New feat described on page 46

2 New feat described on page 58

3 New feat described on page 158

**Skills** Bluff +11, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +1 (+3 in character), Gather Information +6, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (geography) +6, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (religion) +28, Perform (oratory) +7, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +27

**Possessions** combat gear plus +2 *breastplate of command*, gold holy symbol of Amaunator, *periapt of Wisdom* +2, Shadowsmite (+3 *flaming burst shadowscourge light mace*), Sunshield (+2 *blinding mithral heavy shield*).

**Control Flame (Sp)** Daeleoth can cause a nonmagical fire within 10 feet of him to diminish to the level of coals or flare to the brightness of daylight and double the normal radius of its illumination. This ability does not change the heat output or fuel consumption of the fire source, lasts 5 minutes, and can be done per day. Daeleoth uses this ability as a 5th-level sorcerer.

**Fast Talk (Ex)** Daeleoth can make a rushed Diplomacy check as a full-round action at only a -5 penalty.

**Glaring Eyes (Sp)** Daeleoth's eyes glow with the brilliant orange color of the sun. He can produce a *searing light* effect from his eyes 3/day (caster level 21st). Additionally, he can never be blinded or dazed by spells or effects with the light descriptor, or by natural light of any kind.

**Great Orator** Daeleoth can use the great orator ability three times per day to inspire hope, inflame the righteous, or convert the unfaithful.

**Inspire Hope (Su)** This mind-affecting ability gives the evangelist and all allies within 30 feet who can hear his oratory a +4 sacred bonus on Will saves. Delivering this oratory requires a full-round action to activate and requires concentration each round to continue the

effect. The effect lasts as long as Daeleloth speaks and for 3 rounds thereafter.

**Inflame the Righteous (Su)** Daeleloth can use this ability to wreath himself and any of his allies within 30 feet in divine flame. Each beneficiary of this ability gains the benefit of a *fire shield* spell (caster level 10th). The damage caused by the spell is, however, purely divine and not subject to a creature's resistance or immunity to fire. This oratory requires a full-round action to perform and requires concentration each round to continue the effect. The effect lasts as long as Daeleloth speaks and for 3 rounds thereafter.

**Convert the Unfaithful (Su)** Daeleloth can attempt to convert a single enemy within 30 feet. As a full-round action, he delivers an impassioned speech on the righteousness of his beliefs to a single enemy, who must attempt a DC 16 Will save. If the creature succeeds, it is shaken for 1 round. If the creature fails its saving throw, it converts. Creatures with an alignment subtype (such as angels and devils) are immune to this ability. A converted creature is effectively *charmed* by the evangelist (similar to a *charm monster* spell). In addition, a converted creature temporarily assumes the alignment of the evangelist and acts accordingly. This might mean some of the creature's class abilities, spells, or other abilities are unavailable to it for the duration of the spell (a paladin converted to something other than lawful good, for example, loses her class abilities for the duration).

When the duration elapses, the creature then has a choice. It can continue to act according to its new alignment, or it can shift back. If the creature chooses to permanently change its alignment to the evangelist's, it acts as if a cleric of the appropriate alignment had cast *atonement* on it. If the creature chooses to change back, it must make another saving throw (with the same save DC as before). If it fails this saving throw its alignment changes back but it needs an *atonement* spell to gain back any abilities lost due to its temporary alignment change.

**Skill Mastery (Ex)** Daeleloth can take 10 on checks involving Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive, even if stress and distraction would normally prevent him from doing so.

**Sunform (Sp)** Daeleloth can become an insubstantial ball of bright, glowing light the size of a Medium creature. This effect is identical to that of a *gaseous form* spell, except as follow: In *sunform*, Daeleloth radiates daylight as the spell, gains a fly speed of 120 feet (perfect), and has immunity to fire, light, and air effects. In addition, Daeleloth gains a melee touch attack that deals 6d6 points of fire damage. He can remain in *sunform* for up to 10 rounds. *Sunform* is the equivalent of an 8th-level spell that can be used 1/day.

**Hook** "Look to the risen sun; Amaunator is ascendant."

## NEW MAGIC WEAPON SPECIAL ABILITY:

### SHADOWSCOURGE

A shadowscourge weapon excels at attacking creatures with ties to the Plane of Shadow. Such creatures include, but are not limited to, gloamings<sup>Und</sup>, krinths<sup>CR</sup>, malaugrym<sup>Mon</sup>, nightshades<sup>MM, LE</sup>, shadar-kai<sup>FF</sup>, shades, shadows, shadowswyfts<sup>Pla</sup>, shadow asps<sup>FF</sup>, shadow dragons<sup>Dra</sup>, shadow mastiffs, shadow spiders<sup>MM2</sup>, shadurakul<sup>FF</sup>, and creatures with the shadow template<sup>MP</sup>. Against such foes, its effective enhancement bonus is +2 better than its normal enhancement bonus (so a +1 *longsword* is a +3 *longsword* against its foe). It deals an extra 2d6 points of damage against the foe. Bows, crossbows, and slings so created bestow the shadowscourge quality upon their ammunition.

Moderate conjuration; CL 8th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *daylight*; Price +1 bonus.

## NEW EPIC SPELL:

### AMAUNATOR'S ETERNAL SUN

Evocation (Fire)

**Spellcraft DC:** 36

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 11 minutes

**Range:** 12,000 ft.

**Area:** 150-mile radius, centered on you

**Duration:** Permanent

**Saving Throw:** Reflex half

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

**To Develop:** 603,000 gp; 13 days; 24,120 XP; **Seeds:** delude (DC 14), energy (DC 19). **Factors:** increase mass by 600% (+24), increase range by 4000% (+80), thermal aspect (+2), permanent (×5). **Mitigating Factors:** increase casting time by 10 minutes (-20 DC), 176 additional participant 1st-level spell slots (-176 DC), 12 additional participant 2nd-level spell slots (-36 DC), 4 additional participant 3rd-level spell slots (-20 DC), 1 additional participant 4th-level spell slots (-7 DC).

When this spell is cast, it creates a miniature sun more than 2 miles above the point of casting and hides the true sun from anyone able to see the false sun (anyone within 150 miles of the caster's location at the time of the casting). The sun's apparent size (the same as the real sun, subtending about 0.5 degrees in the sky) stays the same regardless of a viewer's distance from it. This has the effect of making it seem to be permanently as bright as high noon within the spell's area (although the actual position of the false sun in the sky is gradually lower in the sky as a viewer moves away from the point of casting, eventually sinking below the horizon once the viewer is more than 150 miles away).

## Leadership and influence

Daeleloth's base Leadership score is 25. Given his reputation, he is considered a leader of great renown (+2) who is known for his fairness and generosity (+1). He is considered to be a bishop of the faith (+2) with a stronghold (+2), albeit a heretic (-2) who has

spoken with Amaunator (Lathander) (+1). As such, and given his Influence modifier of +3, his effective Leadership score is 34.

Daelegoth could have a 19th-level cohort, but his actual cohort is Righteous Brother Hronkil Elgredsson of Waterdeep (LN male Illuskan human paladin 8/Sun Soul monk 8), one of the top two lieutenants of Monastic Abbot Hanor Kichavo (LG male Tethyrian human monk 10/Sun Soul monk 10) at the Monastery of the Sun in Waterdeep. Daelegoth has 260 1st-level followers, 26 2nd-level followers, 13 3rd-level followers, and 7 4th-level followers, 4 5th-level followers, the majority of whom are single-classed clerics and all of whom are based at the Tower of the Moon in Elversult. Daelegoth has 2 6th-level followers and 1 7th-level follower, who are cleric/sunmasters.

Given his followers (+434), rulership position (+100), placement of six followers in positions of influence within the Order of the Aster (+10), placement of one cohort within a position of leadership within the Order of the Sun Soul (+10), placement of 8 additional followers in positions of influence within the Order of the Sun Soul (+16), and three more significant, public victories than defeats (+30), Daelegoth has a base Influence modifier of +600, and an actual Influence modifier of +3.

## Timeline

The following timeline outlines the events of the Ascension of Amaunator campaign arc in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). Depending on their relationship to Daelegoth, the PCs can lead, assist, undermine, or observe this campaign arc, sparking a series of related adventures, ensuring its success or preventing its successful conclusion.

**Deepwinter:** Daelegoth completes the development of his first epic spell, *Amaunator's eternal sun* (see page 60).

**Alturiak 17:** Daelegoth leads an elite company of the Brotherhood of the Eternal Sun in a surprise assault against an encampment of shades exploring the ruined city of Karse in the depths of the High Forest. The shades suffer severe casualties, and Prince Brennus Tanthul (NE male shade diviner 12/lorekeeper 8/shadow adept<sup>PG</sup> 6) is gravely injured and forced to flee. (This event is a significant, public victory of Daelegoth, once word spreads throughout the North and the Heartlands.)

**Ches 28:** Edicts issued in the name of High Radiance Durneth Seafarer, at the Tower of the Morning in Telpir (a large port town located at the northwestern end of the Gulthmere Forest) are perceived among the Morninglord's faithful as giving credence to the teachings of the Risen Sun heresy. (This event, which takes several weeks to unfold as word spreads among the faithful, reflects the declining health of Durneth and Daelegoth's successful recruitment of several leading clerics among the temple clergy.)

**Tarsakh 16:** Daelegoth's research leads him to conclude that the *Shard of the Sun*<sup>CD</sup>, a holy relic of Amaunator, lies within Hulrundrar's horde. Daelegoth leads a bold assault on the Smokespire, the westernmost peak of that arm of the Troll Mountains that shelters the upland forests of Amn (north of Eshpurta). The Smokespire is one of the lairs of Balagos "the Flying Flame," who captured it in turn from the old red dragon Hulrundrar. Although Balagos is not present during the raid,

Daelegoth and his followers defeat the Flying Flame's defenses and servitor dragons left behind to guard the Smokespire. (This event accords Daelegoth the status of relic holder, boosting his effective Leadership score and bringing new followers to his fold. It is also a significant, public victory.)

**Tarsakh 19:** The leaders of three leading churches of the Morninglord, High Radiance Ghentilara of Waterdeep (LG very old female Chondathan human cleric 6/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 10 [Lathander]), High Morninglord Chansobal Dreen of Marsember (NG male Chondathan human cleric 12/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 2 [Lathander]), and High Morninglord Orbital Duskroon of Ordulin (NG male Chondathan human cleric 10/morninglord of Lathander<sup>PG</sup> 7 [Lathander]) meet in secret at Morningmist Hall in Marsember to discuss Daelegoth and the Risen Sun heresy.

**Mirtul 5:** Word reaches Daelegoth of the secret meeting.

**Mirtul 6:** Daelegoth performs a public *miracle* atop Temple Hill in Elversult, requesting that Amaunator (Lathander) spare the city and the surrounding farmlands from the effects of the melting of the High Ice in far-off Anauroch. Over the course of the next month, word spreads along the Trade Road of bountiful fields, abundant rainfall, and perfect weather. New converts flock to the church of Lathander and the Tower of the Morn. (This event accords Daelegoth the status of miracle worker and is a significant, public victory for him.)

**Kythorn 19:** Daelegoth preaches that he has seen a vision of an eternal sun rising high above the land, heralding the rebirth of Amaunator. The service is interrupted by an attack by three princes of Shade, but Daelegoth and his followers drive them off, despite significant casualties. In the wake of the attack, Daelegoth requests and receives a second *miracle*, healing all the wounded and raising most of the dead. (This event does not change Daelegoth's status. Although it is a significant, public victory, it is also a significant, public defeat, making the event a wash.)

**Flamerule 12:** The three high priests of the Marsember Conclave issue an edict reiterating that the teachings espoused by Daelegoth are heresy and that he risks excommunication from the faith.

**Flamerule 14:** Righteous Brother Hronkil Elgredsson of Waterdeep openly endorses Daelegoth and urges the Order of the Sun Soul to proclaim its belief in the Risen Sun heresy.

**Flamerule 21:** Emissaries from the temples of the Morninglord in Waterdeep, Marsember, and Ordulin attempt to meet with Daelegoth in Elversult but are rebuffed when they refuse to acknowledge imminent ascension of Amaunator.

**Flamerule 30:** Daelegoth calls the faithful to Elversult to witness the first sign of Amaunator's ascension.

**Midsummer:** Daelegoth successfully casts *Amaunator's eternal sun*. Word quickly spreads across Faerûn, and would-be converts begin showing up at the doors of the Morninglord's temples, seeking to convert to the "church of Amaunator."

**Eleiasis 6:** The leaders of the Marsember Conclave announce their intent to "further study" Daelegoth's teachings. Behind the scenes, the leaders of the faith are hesitant to act, seeking a sign from the Morninglord about whether or not there is some truth behind the Risen Sun heresy. In the meantime, converts continue to flock to the Church of Amaunator in Elversult.

# PLAY THE MARKET

**A**lthough Faerûn was once dominated by great empires, from Aryvandaar to Mulhorand and from Netheril to Mhairshaulk, their day has largely passed. In their wake has arisen a new form of mercantile empire, which seeks dominion over wide swaths of economic activity. From the far-flung magic emporiums of Thay to the merchant houses of Waterdeep and from the caravans of the Zhentarim to the shipping empire of the Rundeen, the great economic powers of Faerûn battle for dominion over the lifeblood of trade.

Characters best suited to a leadership role in the marketplace are usually highly skilled in their area of expertise, including bards, experts, and rogues. Characters best suited to a leadership along trade routes are usually skilled at transporting goods, either by avoiding or defending against hazards. The former niche is usually occupied by sorcerers and wizards, while the latter falls more to fighters and rangers. Alternate routes to leadership in the marketplace include adopting prestige classes such as assassin, dread pirate<sup>CA</sup>, fatemaker<sup>Pl</sup>, goldeye<sup>FP</sup>, Thayan slaver<sup>UE</sup>,

wayfarer guide<sup>CA</sup>, windwalker<sup>FP</sup>, or merchant prince (see page 71). Mercanes<sup>MP</sup> are members of an alternate race with a strong economic component.

Rulership in the economic sphere has a strong political and social component. The marketplace is far more meritocratic than most courts or churches, but it also inspires far less loyalty than most armies or faiths. Advancing to a leadership position within a marketplace requires a willingness to take risks and the ability to assess the risk-to-reward ratio. This chapter focuses on leadership in the economic sphere and the unique challenges and rewards of pursuing such a role.

## The Business Leader

A business leader is an individual who leads a business or guild and attempts to make money through economic activity. A business leader is not simply a high-level character who plundered a dragon's hoard and now has plenty of coins to spend. However, if that character spent his coins investing, purchasing, or founding one or more businesses and then spent time and energy supporting such businesses when problems inevitably arise, he might eventually become a business leader.

In game terms, a business leader is an individual who runs a business (as defined in *Dungeon Master's Guide II*) with one or more employees or who has the Guildmaster feat. Most business leaders earn a steady stream of income from their activities outside the normal adventuring sphere, while some occupy business-related posts within another organization, such as a kingdom's minister of trade.

## What Do Business Leaders Do?

Business leaders concern themselves with investing and earning money. They look for new business opportunities, from new, untapped markets to existing, ill-served markets. Some business leaders focus on the production of raw materials, establishing mines, building fleets of fishing ships, or establishing large farms. Other business leaders focus on craftwork, transforming raw materials into finished products. A third group of business

### Rules for Mercantile Campaigns

Mercantile campaigns require a style of roleplaying different from that of the prototypical D&D adventure. *Dungeon Master's Guide II* outlines rules and approaches for running a business or guild. This chapter assumes access to *Dungeon Master's Guide II* and uses terms and concepts defined in that supplement.

leaders concerns itself with the transport of raw material and/or finished goods from one locale to another.

All business leaders look for an advantage over potential and existing rivals, seeking the edge that will allow them to command high profits. Typically, a successful business leader either builds a reputation for quality, reliability, and/or low prices. Some business leaders seek to control a strategic chokepoint for trade, which might be a well-positioned *portal* network, a narrow mountain pass, a strategic waterway, an important oasis, or a small caravan city along a major trade route. Other business leaders seek to dominate the production of a limited resource, such as by purchasing most or all of the known mines producing a particular metal or gemstone. Many unethical business leaders seek advantage over their rivals by bribing corrupt officials to give them favorable tax treatment or hiring bandits or monsters to disrupt their rivals caravans or ships.

## How to use the Leadership feat

Loyalty only extends so far in the market because, by definition, business relationships are based on creating a profitable relationship for all participating parties. Inevitably, when some of the participants find a relationship unprofitable (or not profitable enough), the relationship eventually dissolves. Cohorts and followers of a business leader trust that leader to reward them well over the long haul, and they are willing to trust them despite apparent short-term reversals of fortune. Such relationships strengthen through trust in a proven track record.

The following modifiers to the character's effective Leadership score with respect to the character's economic community:

The Leader Is ...	Leadership Score Modifier
Owner <sup>1</sup> of a profitable <sup>2</sup> business	+1/ 200 gp of average monthly profit
Owner <sup>1</sup> of additional profitable <sup>2</sup> businesses	+1 each
Owner <sup>1</sup> of unprofitable <sup>2</sup> businesses	-2 each
Business Savvy	+1
Favored in Guild	+1
Guildmaster	+1
Member of guild <sup>3</sup>	+1
Monopolist <sup>3</sup>	+5
Oligarch <sup>3</sup>	+3

1 An owner is defined by the percentage of ownership. Leadership score modifiers based on ownership are multiplied by the percentage of ownership. For example, a business leader who owns 50% of a profitable business that makes an average of 600 gp per month would have a Leadership modifier equal to +1.5, not +3. Retain fractions when calculating the bonuses provided by ownership, then round down when determining your final leadership modifier.

- Determine the average monthly profit for a business using the last 12 months of activity. A business is considered profitable if its average monthly profit is greater than zero, and it is considered unprofitable otherwise. In other words, a short-term reversal of fortune does not make a business unprofitable, but a long-term reversal of fortune might.
- Guild members, oligarchs, and monopolists are defined later in this chapter.

## HOW DO YOU RUN business cohorts and followers?

Cohorts and followers who work for you follow you because it is in their best economic interest. You are their employer or at least the source of their economic well-being. Although such cohorts and followers are willing to trust your ability to analyze the market and make profitable investments, over the long term they are comparing the economic security of their current position against the risks of trying something else. You can earn a great deal of goodwill from your cohorts and followers by acting as an economic safety net through timely gifts or loans, rewarding them fairly, and allowing

them to earn their own windfall profits if they do not come at your expense.

You should establish a guildhall, grand house, mansion, or set of grand houses and towers from which to run your business or guild. When not asked to serve the business directly, business followers and cohorts spend their time seeking out new business opportunities, researching rivals, networking, or looking for ways to make your economic activities more efficient.

With rare exceptions, you should only call on business cohorts and followers to serve the business or guild. If you require them to assist you in other activities, you are in effect lowering their wages by forcing them to work a side job without additional remuneration. You should also pay close attention to the degree of economic risk a particular follower or cohort is willing to stomach. Calling on an employee in a medium-risk business to work in a high-risk endeavor or vice versa is acceptable in the short run, but not in the long run.

## playing the economic game

Faerûn is crisscrossed by trade arteries, from the Trade Way to the shipping lanes of the Sea of Fallen Stars to the *portal* networks that hopscotch across the continent by way of the Weave. Powerful alliances such as the Runden and the Zhentarim seek economic hegemony while merchants dominate all aspects of life in countries such as Amn and Sembia. Craftsmen from



Illustration by Rick Drennan



## Trading terms and phrases

**Backers:** Persons sworn to conduct or wind up your affairs in accordance with your written instructions (or, failing that, best business practices) in the event of your death, sudden mysterious absence, or known kidnapping or illness.

**Coinring:** A small and usually secretive cabal of investors working together (in terms governed by detailed written contracts) to pool coins they can spare to purchase cargoes or properties they can't individually afford. Subtle inequalities in such contracts are the best way of getting other persons to lend their coins to your profit.

**Cointossing:** Quietly making informal short-term loans (without paperwork, at interest typically as high as one-quarter of the principal). Shopkeepers with cash-flow troubles often have no choice but to try to find someone to lend them coins for a few days, to get goods (particularly perishables such as food) they couldn't otherwise afford, that they must buy right now. Borrowers accept such terms because they can largely conceal how desperate their personal finances are, and because such interest rates might be as little as half what licensed moneylenders charge for short-term, high-risk loans.

**Coster:** An alliance of small, independent companies formed into a traveling caravan group for safety. (See the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*, page 91, for further details.)

**Deed-claim:** A written agreement to pay a set sum within so many days after a service is rendered. The agreement stipulates that the service-renderer is entitled to take possession of specific property if payment isn't made. Most authorities frown severely on persons who try to refuse or become unavailable to receive payment so they can instead seize property they want.

**Factor:** Trade agent who buys, sells, and sees to the safe storage, delivery, and transport of cargoes (a "traveling factor" is a trade agent who habitually moves from city to city while acting for clients).

**Few little forgotten things:** Secret business dealings, often illegal (and very profitable).

**Fire bond:** Surety against building fires. Guarantors must fight fire or, more often, pay value of lost goods.

**Grudgecoins:** A moneylender or moneylenders.

**Hardtar:** Trade goods that are difficult to sell or, by their nature, hard to store.

**Healshield:** A "healing bond" or prepayment with a local temple for the casting of spells on the bond purchaser or designate for healing, poison- and disease-quelling, or raising from the dead. Most bond purchasers pay the entire sum for lesser spells, and post deed-claims with temples for more expensive magics.

**Merchant company:** A partnership of three or more merchants (usually six or so) who jointly own and operate a business together. Most merchant companies are based in several cities and were formed by the merchants currently leading the company. (Few merchant companies survive the deaths of the majority of original partners.) Most merchant companies specialize in the production and sale of certain types of items, finding efficiency (and hence profits) by working together to acquire the base resources, create a finished good, and bring it to market.

**Merchant house:** A family-run business spanning multiple generations with a broad range of investments and a narrow range of specialized activities. Most merchant houses are led by a single matriarch or patriarch who controls the family purse strings and might be titled (in places such as Amn, Sembia,

and Waterdeep). Some family members contribute significantly to the family business, while others live on a monthly allowance.

**Metal enough:** The swiftly spreading Sembian term for "street credit," from a line in an old, largely forgotten play, *Morlos the Mad Merchant*: "There's metal enough in his bottom for him to hold down *that* throne."

**Missed top coin:** Failed to learn about or take advantage of an opportunity to make wealth.

**Priakos:** A large caravan company, usually created by the permanent amalgamation of smaller caravan companies in several geographical areas, which controls a trade route or strategic area.

**Scrip-trading:** Buying and selling paper documents rather than real goods: ship captains, fleet owners, or trading coster officials sell redeemable "scrips" (written notes) for amounts of specific goods (describing origin, construction, and quality, and stating a season or a month for their arrival). If a merchant no longer wants (or can no longer afford to wait for) this incoming ship or caravan cargo, he sells the scrip for ready money (less than he paid for it). The buyer of the scrip can resell it for a higher amount, or gather it with other scrips in hopes of cornering a market in a specific good so as to arrange "shortages" and drive up prices. Some traders make a living just on the difference between what they pay for a scrip and what they sell it for, without ever actually handling any goods. Scrip-trading is the daily grease that keeps Sembian commerce running, and thus substantial profits can be made there.

**Small-merchant:** A worker employed by someone else, who buys and sells items "on the side," and so typically trades hand-to-mouth, in small amounts and for few coins.

**Sundries:** Relatively nonperishable, everyday Faerûnian items and supplies (such as lanterns, blank ledger books, inks, and decorative locks and latches).

**Surety:** A written, filed-with-government agreement compelling its guarantors to act (insurance).

**Tallies:** Palm-sized electrum plaques marked with hard-to-counterfeit magical seals, issued by the government of Sembia as official notes of indebtedness. Tallies can only be redeemed by the person to whom they were issued, in the presence of any government banker, anywhere in Sembia, and so are worthless if stolen. When large debts are to be paid (particularly if the debtor wants witnesses to the payment being made), debtors often take a tally for the correct amount to a government banker with the creditor, and the banker cancels the first tally and issues a second one to the creditor. Tallies make possible the transfers of large monetary sums without the need for assembling chests of coins.

**Traders' clubs:** Establishments in Sembian cities, Westgate, Scornubel, and Amn where merchants can make deals in privacy. All have door guards and entry rules, and they seek to keep government officials and spies out. Many serve food and provide entertainment or "hiding places for hire." Traders' clubs replaced the less private and safe taverns used by merchants for such purposes elsewhere.

**Tumbledown surety:** Also known as windstorm surety, this surety compels guarantors to pay for the raising of a new building, and compensate for lost contents, if a "covered" building collapses.

**Watch-money:** Fees paid to hire business spies.

Neverwinter to the Great Rift and from Lantan to Thay churn out low- and high-quality wares built from raw materials harvested from the deepest mines of the Spine of the World to the depths of the Mhair Jungles.

Whereas most adventurers seek to plunder the ruins of ancient kingdoms for coins, gems, and items of value, in effect harvesting the detritus of past economic activity, business leaders seek to create new wealth through production, craftwork, and trade. By playing the economic game, you seek to amass great wealth through the selling of goods and services. You choose your battles based on the balance of risk and reward, fighting not for glory but for economic power and the defense of your investments.

## YOU ARE A BUSINESS LEADER— NOW WHAT?

As a business leader, you must first figure out your line of work. Do you wish to produce resources? If so, purchase or seize control of a resource-rich area, find workers and equipment to produce the resource, find markets that will consume the resource, and develop trade routes to ship the resource to those who will develop it. These steps become much harder if you have found a new resource that lacks an existing market, such as Amn's merchants had to do with cocoa beans from Maztica. The rarest resources come from the most challenging environments, from the deepest mines that snake down into the Underdark to distant lands across monster-infested waters. Your success or failure will depend on how you defend your holdings against those who would seize them and how far you will go to find new resources.

Do you wish to transport goods? If so, decide whether your trade routes will go over land, over water, or through a *portal*. If the latter, seek out a lost *portal* or have your own built and then decide how to defend it, whether through obscurity or powerful defenses. Decide what

goods you wish to ship. Assess the competition and seek out allies, perhaps forming a *priakos* or *cofter*. All manner of threats bedevil the transportation of goods, from bandits to rampaging dragons, from natural disasters to invading armies. Your success or failure will depend on how you deal with inevitable setbacks and how much confidence your customers have in your ability deliver the goods.

Do you wish to create finished goods? If so, assess what raw materials you need and how you will procure them. Seek out skilled craftsmen, determine where they are willing to live, and create a place for them to work. Determine who will sell your goods and how to get them to market in a timely fashion. Your success or failure will depend on the quality of your craftwork, your ability to secure a steady flow of resources, and your ability to open new markets in the face of well-established rivals and unwieldy or corrupt bureaucracies.

Do you wish to sell goods at the market? If so, determine what to sell and how to sell it. Seek ways to undercut your rivals or to outdo them on quality of service. Look for areas in which to establish a monopoly. Your success or failure will depend on your ability to secure a steady flow of wares and to keep your customers happy.

## controlling vital trade arteries

While the production of raw materials and finished goods require their own defenses, trade routes are by definition far more difficult to secure due to the large geographical distances they span. Traders gamble their lives and/or cargo with every trip because a rolling wagon or sailing ship is much more difficult to secure than a well-armed warehouse in a well-defended city.

Illustration by Eric Deschamps



*The leaders of a merchant guild toast their success*

Successful traders employ a small number of basic strategies to increase the odds that their shipments will reach their market in a timely fashion.

First, every trader must make a trade-off between the risk of attack and the cost of getting goods to market. It makes little sense to employ a thousand-strong army of mercenaries to guard a herd of sheep, even if there is a risk of attack by a hungry predator. On the other hand, a wagon filled with mithral has little chance of getting from Mithral Hall to Silverymoon without a large retinue of defenders.

Second, good traders look at potential attackers as a cost of doing business. In other words, often the best way to send caravans through orc-held territory is to reach an agreement with the orc chieftain. Most sentient beings are sufficiently self-interested and wise as to understand the value of a deal, so long as it is to their economic advantage. While the aforementioned orc chieftain will invariably continue to attack caravans passing through his territory, he might be quite willing to avoid caravans flying a certain flag in exchange for a steady stream of income. Even nonsentient monsters can be bribed after a fashion by distracting them with offerings of their preferred food while a caravan passes through their territory.

Third, on any trade route of reasonable length, traders must take time to rest, resupply, and gather information on the path ahead. Good traders look for locations along a trade route that can serve as intermediate way stations. On established routes, such way stations are often well-established trade towns, ports, *portal* nexuses, or oases. On lesser routes, such way stations might

be little more than a low hill with a commanding view of the countryside, a flyspeck of an island that barely reaches above the waves, or a *portal* terminus that ends in a defensible locale.

## Roads

Countless trails link the settled and wild lands of Faerûn, but most trade is concentrated on a few major arteries such as the Golden Road, the Golden Way, the Moonsea Ride, the Tethir Road, and the Trade Way. Overland trade accounts for over half of all trade in Faerûn, primarily concentrated in areas lacking easy access to rivers and seas. The most profitable routes are also the most dangerous, passing through regions ungoverned by any large kingdom and therefore commanding premiums for the danger they pose. The North, the Western Heartlands, the Cold Lands north of the Moonsea, the Shaar, and the Endless Wastes are home to some of the most dangerous routes, for these are large, lightly settled regions plagued by bandits, monsters, and worse. In such regions, the competition between rival traders is often brutal and plagued by skirmishing, for the lack of laws (or at least enforcement of such) can lead to nigh-open warfare between rival traders.

Overland trade routes in Faerûn typically fall in one of three categories. Roads (marked by solid lines on maps) are hard-packed or paved with cobblestones. They see regular traffic and have the infrastructure to support such. Cities, towns, and fortified inns are spaced along such routes to match the expected travel distance for a slow-moving caravan. Most roads are patrolled either by the kingdom in which they lie or

## Handy common tongue words for traders

**Badaulder:** The swiftly spreading western Heartlands word for “hogwash!” (more jocular than deadly insulting; much used in mercantile negotiations).

**Brightstar:** Great, exciting, pleasing, marvelous, superb.

**Darburl:** Angry (As in “I’m right darburl, just now,” or “He makes me proper darburl, that one”); a socially polite way of signaling displeasure).

**Darkblade:** A hiresword (mercenary) lacking in principles or loyalty to those who hired him.

**Galad:** The current Heartlands equivalent of “Zooks!” (or any nonsense word meaning “I’m astonished” or “I’m impressed”).

**Glim:** Flashy, or beautiful in an eye-catching way.

**Gulletfire:** Bad beer or wine (watery, bad-tasting, or nausea-inducing).

**Kell:** Try (only used when whatever is being tried is unfinished, nigh-impossible, tricky or dangerous, or there’s some doubt as to whether whoever’s trying it will ever accomplish it), as in “You’re not going to kell stealing that, are you?” Sometimes used in place of “done,” e.g. “Kell such feats often, have you?”). Polite speech sticks to “try,” “tried,” and “done,” leaving “kell” for cynical, disbelieving, or openly derisive speech. (“Kings always say they’ll clean all monsters out of the woods.

Oh, and they kell, too, for a tenday, each of them, sometimes sending more than one disfavored knight to do it, too.”)

**Nandra:** “Could be better” or “Looks mediocre to me” (also used when dickering over prices of perishable goods, to mean they’re close to spoiling or not of the best quality).

**Scorchkettle:** Someone (usually female, and usually quick-tempered) who berates someone fiercely in public, or: someone of either gender who engages in too many tiresome histrionics when negotiating a purchase or sale.

**Spurnarmor:** A spectacularly beautiful male or female, as in: “If’n I looked like that, I’d be a spurnarmor too!” or: “Galad! What a spurnarmor!” (Also used to describe a trade deal that’s too good to be true—even if it is true.)

**Thael:** Glad, pleasant, or heart-lifting (as in: “I’m always thael to see her,” or “That feast was right thael” or “I always get that moment of thael, when I look down from the ridge and see . . . home.”)

**Throatlake:** Any drinkable that quenches thirst without causing illness, but isn’t particularly pleasant (as in “Well, it’s throatlake, but I’ll take it—at not more than a copper a bottle”).

**Waelo:** “Hey there, I want to make a deal!” or “I’m interested in your wares!” or “Anyone want to do a little business?”

by the city-states and towns that lie along their path. Patrols are usually interested only in maintaining the free flow of commerce, not in policing minor disputes or protecting small bands of travelers. Only deep snow or some other form of severe weather closes roads.

Trails (marked by dotted lines on maps) are hard-packed for at least part of the year. Most trails see regular traffic as well, but few are patrolled to any degree. Small towns, fortified inns, and defensible campsites are spaced along such routes to match the expected travel distance for a slow-moving caravan. In addition to deep snow and severe weather, trails might be closed for as much as a tenday by reports of a rampaging monster or the like that no one has yet managed to subdue.

Unmarked routes are used by a surprising number of smaller caravans. Usually led by an experienced guide, such caravans seek an advantage over their rivals by traversing short-cuts that pass through wilderness or remote agricultural regions. Few see any amount of traffic, for most are the "personal secret" of the local guide. Such routes have the advantage of usually avoiding bandits and monsters needing a regular source of food or coin, for it is far more profitable for them to haunt higher-traffic regions. On the other hand, support services for such unmarked routes are generally nonexistent, and merchants run the risk of crossing paths with wandering predators.

### SEA ROUTES

Ship traffic in Faerûn is concentrated in the Moonsea, the Sea of Fallen Stars, the Sea of Swords, the Shining Sea, and along the coast of the Great Sea. Barge and small ship traffic is concentrated along the River Dessarin, the River Delimbiyr, the River Chionthar, the River Esmel, the River Ith, the River Scelptar, the

River Talar and in bays and lakes such as the Akanamere, Lake Esmel, Lake Halruaa, the Lake of Steam, the Golden Water, and the Thingulph. Overwater traffic accounts for nearly half of all trade in Faerûn despite the risk of pirates, dangerous sea monsters, and storms.

Sea routes fall in one of two general categories. Most ships hug the shoreline, particularly along the Sword Coast and the waters of the Great Sea. Direct routes across open water are usually restricted to somewhat sheltered seas, such as the Moonsea, the Shining Sea, and the Sea of Fallen Stars. Pirates and sentient sea monsters usually prey on such traffic near natural chokepoints—such as Asavir's Channel, the Neck of the Dragonmere, or the mouth of the Lake of Steam—or where they pass lawless lands, such as an archipelago of unclaimed islands.

Open waters pose their own risks, such as fierce storms that cannot be avoided by pulling into port, random predators from the depth, and the threat of getting blown far off course.

Inland waterways present a different sort of risk. Rivers are much like roads, attracting brigands and sentient monsters in unclaimed regions. Most rivers have fewer rest stops or other support services, for it is assumed that most crews moving riverborne traffic simply sleep aboard their ship and the vessel keeps moving at all times, assuming a large enough crew. Barges with small crews must tie up at night along the shore and rarely at a well-established campsite. Large lakes are usually fairly safe because shipborne traffic can travel far enough from shore to avoid bandits and the like, and yet reach shore in time to escape a dangerous storm. As a result, the greatest threat to lake traffic is usually alliances of water-dwelling creatures and land-dwelling bandits who work in concert to trap ships close to the coast.

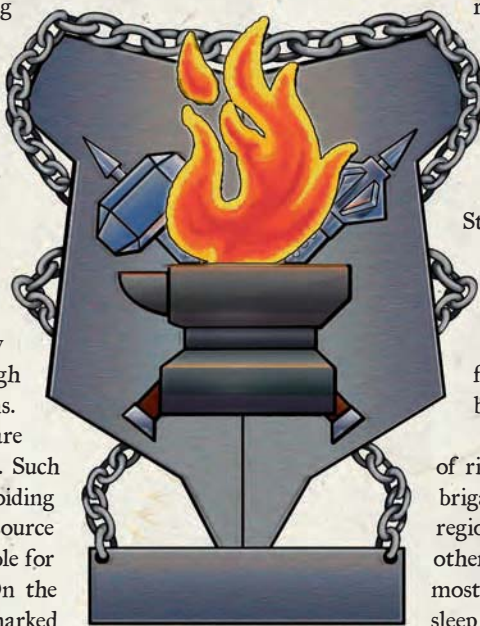


Illustration by Rick Drennan

## The shipping business

*Dungeon Master's Guide II* has rules for running a variety of businesses. One type of business not covered but of particular importance in Faerûn is that of a shipping company.

Shippers make their money by shipping goods from one settlement to another, employing ships, *portals*, wagons, and other forms of transport. Shippers require a great deal of resources, because they must anchor their business in two or more settlements and secure passage through dangerous wilderness regions as well. Rangers and rogues generally make the best shippers, although spellcasters specializing in teleport magics or the creation of *portals* excel in this line of work as well.

Although they usually spend the majority of their time on the road (wilderness), shippers use the highest cost settlement

on their routes (see Table 6–3, page 183 of *Dungeon Master's Guide II*) to calculate profit modifiers and initial investment. Furthermore, shippers must construct a combination of warehouses and towers worth 100,000 gp or more instead of using the standard building type and cost options for high resource businesses (see Table 6–4, page 183 of *Dungeon Master's Guide II*).

Primary Skill: Profession (merchant)

Secondary Skills: Diplomacy, Knowledge (geography).

Capital: High.

Resources: High.

Risk: High.

## portals

Magic *portals* link many places across Faerûn. Sometimes *portal* builders construct a chain of portals, where the terminus of one *portal* is relatively near the origin of the next. Other *portal* builders prefer to create a *portal* nexus, where multiple *portals* link to a single (usually out-of-the-way) spot. *Portals* are extremely expensive to create; they usually cost at least 50,000 gp to craft (or 75,000, for two-way *portals*) and often much more. Adding special properties—such as keys, variable destinations, racial restrictions, impassibility<sup>Und</sup> (but visibility), nonliving-only<sup>Und</sup>, transparent<sup>Und</sup>, or drifting<sup>CS</sup>—can add significantly to the cost. *Portal* chains (sometimes called series *portals*) and *portal* nexuses can cost hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of gold pieces to construct. Many existing *portals* were built by the great empires of Faerûn, including Netheril, the Shoon Imperium, Imaskar, and the great elf kingdoms up through Eaclann and Cormanthor. However, such *portals* sometimes malfunction due to age, and the secrets of their use are often lost.

Given the cost, few merchants can afford the capital investment to construct a new *portal*, let alone a *portal* chain or *portal* nexus; the cost of defending a newly constructed *portal* can be as much on an annual basis as it was to construct the *portal* in the first place. Moreover, few population centers want to host a *portal* terminus, fearing (appropriately) that it might be used to smuggle spies, assassins, or even an invading army into the city's heart. As such, working, reliable, sufficiently large, little-known

*portals* linking regions near cities of the current era are incredibly valuable to traders for the promise they hold of prompt, safe delivery of goods.

Because powerful merchants would pay or do almost anything to acquire such a *portal*, *portal* chain, or *portal* nexus, those who know of their existence take great care to keep them secret. Someone with such knowledge rarely writes down the exact location or even existence of a *portal*, instead passing it from parent to child or lover to lover with the greatest of secrecy. Merchants regularly employ spies to calculate whether a rival's cargo made a trip in "too fast" a time, meaning that those "in the know" must take care to disguise the speed of their progress, even if that means conceding some of the advantage a *portal* provides.

In addition to the chance of a *portal* malfunction (detailed in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS CAMPAIGN SETTING*, pages 60–61) and *portal* seepage (detailed in *Underdark*, pages 52–53), *portals* evince other problems as well. *Portals* must be defended by either obfuscation or great power. The former restricts the number of goods that can pass through the *portal*, while the latter adds significantly to the cost of transport. Locally known *portals* often draw predators who seek to prey on those passing through. Random *portals* and creature-only *portals* are particularly dangerous in this regard, since they can restrict the size of a group passing through a *portal*. *Portal* drakes<sup>Und</sup> also lurk around *portals* as well, threatening travelers.

Illustration by Francis Tsai



*Well-paid mercenaries prove their worth by defending a merchant's wagon*

## goods

All manner of goods are traded across Faerûn, from precious metals to exotic foodstuffs and from finished craftwork to beautiful works of art. A map depicting the flow of trade goods in Faerûn is found in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS CAMPAIGN SETTING*, pages 88–89. Excluding magic items (which can command exorbitant prices), most caravans, ships, and *portal* networks rarely see cargo trains worth more than 10,000 gp or less than 1,000 gp. This range seems to be the economic sweet spot, balancing the cost of defending the cargo against the risks of being attacked.

The most commonly shipped items are various foods, including fruits, grains, livestock, salt, and vegetables, and finished craftwork. Although most food and drink is locally grown or made and then consumed, many regions have started to supplement their citizens' diets with foodstuffs from more distant regions. Likewise, most clothing is locally made, although certain fashions have spread across Faerûn in recent years. Regional population centers tend to specialize in certain forms of craftwork, necessitating the exchange of such goods with other regional centers. Caravans carrying such cargoes are usually lightly guarded and occasionally attacked by humanoid tribes seeking basic necessities or slaves. Livestock drives are notorious for attracting dragons and other flying predators.

Simple luxuries—books, coffee, clothes, furs, glass, herbs, leather goods, incense, oil, pipeweed, fine pottery, rugs, spices, and the like—are usually lightly guarded as well, for, despite the value of such cargoes, they are of little interest to most humanoid tribes or monsters. The greatest danger to such caravans comes

from brigands hired by rival merchants who seek to create and profit from a shortage of such goods.

Rare luxuries—ambergris, artwork, gems, ivory, pearls, perfume, silk, and rare woods—are usually heavily guarded, for the value of such goods is such that it is sufficiently lucrative to seize them, finish transporting them, and then sell them on the black market (often in the city for which they were originally intended anyway). Bandits and dragons often target such cargoes, the former for plunder and the latter to line their hoards.

Military goods, including weapons and armor, are heavily guarded as well. Many humanoid tribes depend on raiding such caravans to replenish their store of arms, and kings justly worry that lost weapons might find their way into the hands of revolutionaries. Mercenaries are a unique form of military good, being quite capable of defending themselves. However, the movement of mercenary companies is heavily tracked, for their actions often hint at coming battles and future employment, and knowledge of such can be sold for a great deal of coin.

Precious metals, lumber, and other natural resources are guarded, but not as heavily as some might expect. Most are heavy enough that they are difficult to move in significant quantities. As a result, it is cheaper to pay fast-moving mercenaries to recover such goods after they have been stolen than it is to defend them in the first place.

Magic items are perhaps the most precious commodity, and merchants moving such items spare no expense to defend such cargoes. The Red Wizards of Thay are the only great power actively shipping magic items in recent years, for most beings involved in the magic item trade, such as the drow wizards of Sshamath, force their customers to come to them.



Illustration by Rick Drennan

## salt and spices

The salt trade is very important, but salt is not as expensive in Faerûn as it was historically in the real world. This is due to other preservatives being readily available (so salt serves primarily as a seasoning), and because salt has never been scarce. Salt can be had fairly cheaply from a nearby source almost everywhere in settled Faerûn, so shipping great amounts of it isn't vital.

Salt is gleaned from many salt marshes—such as the Flooded Forest between the Moonsea and the Dragonreach, the Adder Swamp in Chessenta, the Spider Swamp, and Rethild (The Great Swamp)—by lading the water out on large, flat, sunbaked rocks or rocks over which expanses of black cloth have been spread. It is also mined from natural rock-coating deposits around the shores of the Lake of Steam and Azulduth the Lake of Salt, and from vast salt plains in Anauroch and Raurin where there were once large seas.

Salt mines are also located in Chult, Calimshan, under certain islands in the Korinn Archipelago and north of Mintarn, in the mountains girdling Amn, in the Orsraun Mountains, and so on. Given the various aquatic and subterranean races present in Faerûn, gleaning salt is seldom difficult. Many gnome families make good livings mining small salt deposits and trundling the results to the nearest human town or village market, so salt caravans are unheard of (though individual salt wagons are often found in mixed-goods caravans). Much of the price of salt comes from transporting this heavy commodity.

Like salt, spices are produced from local plants (usually dried, ground up, and mixed together in secret proportions) in many locales. In recent years, increasing distances habitually traveled by merchants have spread local spices widely, and trade in various bulk dried, powdered spices is steadily increasing.

## forming a Trade Consortium

Market activity across Faerûn is divided into three broad categories: individual merchants, partnerships, and trade consortiums. Trade consortiums encompass a broad range of activities including guilds, caravan companies, merchant companies, and merchant houses. In some cities and kingdoms, trade consortiums are recognized by the government and accorded certain rights and privileges. In other regions, their power is more informal but no less potent.

Although anyone can found a trade consortium, there are many informal requirements for building a successful one. First, the founders must own several businesses among themselves. Second, there should be some degree of overlap among the interests of those businesses, for only by achieving economies of scale can such businesses achieve windfall profits. Third, a merchant consortium must dominate (or at least lead) an important aspect of the economy, forcing other consortiums, the local government, and other organizations to recognize their influence. Fourth, regions in which merchants hold positions of particular influence (such as Amn, Sembia, and Waterdeep) might have additional requirements, limiting access



to the merchant elite. Such restrictions can be overcome if a merchant is successful enough, but doing so usually involves a great deal of effort and an indirect rewarding of the existing elite.

For example, an up-and-coming merchant might marry into an established but declining house, merging his fortune with theirs, or extend numerous loans on favorable terms to members of the merchant aristocracy.

Once these basic steps are achieved, new business opportunities begin to manifest, as other organizations recognize the trade consortium's growing influence. If these opportunities are skillfully exploited, a trade consortium can grow in power and status until large swaths of the local economy fall under their control. Merchants who achieve such exalted status are known as merchant princes (see page 71), for they can command the ear of kings and archbishops who depend on their largesse to further their rule.

## personnel: filling positions

Trade consortiums rise and fall based on the skills and talents of their partners and employees and their willingness to contribute to the shared enterprise.

First, you must recruit partners and employees with the necessary talents to help the consortium succeed. From a game perspective, you should focus on recruiting NPCs who have

Illustration by Rick Drennan

## illicit trading

The highest profits, of course, are made by selling unlawful and in-demand goods, legal but smuggled goods on which the merchant avoids paying taxes or tariffs, and legal but stolen goods for which the merchant pays far below the normal market price (if at all).

Almost all realms in Faerûn pay no attention whatsoever to what residents, visitors, or official citizens do outside the country, concentrating only on what they do inside the borders of the realm. Unscrupulous traders (notably from Amn, Sembia, and Westgate) openly slave-trade, hire brigands and even private armies, and break all manner of laws outside their home territories; of course, their homelands' courts and society care nothing about this unless or until such activities spread to harming other citizens anywhere, or take place (even partially) within the home realm.

Common illicit merchant activities include trading in smuggled, stolen, or illegal goods (such as slaves or certain drugs and religious items), torturing or holding kidnapped-for-ransom trade rivals, participating in trade swindles and organized thievery, and forging trade agreements and government documents. Very common shady merchant activities include paying

low tax or import fees by misrepresenting the amount, quality, or nature of goods (concealing sacks of gems under sacks of grain) or "forgetting" to declare entire shipments at all.

All "good traders" (the swiftly spreading Sembian term for anyone with a head for business) make themselves aware of government fees, taxes, and trade rules, and arrange their affairs to escape or minimize most of them. This of course includes always keeping their own doings as private as possible, shielding them from the authorities, trade rivals, strangers, neighbors looking to make a few silver by selling information about what they've seen and heard, and even family members. Such traders use guilds, blockades, and boycotts against governments who try to expand the reach of existing taxes or levy new taxes.

The wisest good traders limit such evasions to modest levels, knowing it's the overly greedy or high-profile merchants who get caught. In most lands, the authorities are so overwhelmed by ongoing business deceptions all around them that—unless ordered to make an example of a particular individual—they tend to let the small and subtle pass, in favor of pouncing on the "big ones" (a practice that earns the most approval from superiors).

maximized the primary and/or secondary skills of your guild or business. Above and beyond the base skill allocation, look for NPCs who have taken feats such as Business Savvy, Favored in Guild, or Skill Focus (in an appropriate skill) or taken ranks in general business-related skills, such as Appraise, Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Knowledge (local), and Sense Motive.

Second, you must recruit partners and employees with sufficient loyalty to the business that they will sacrifice in order for it to succeed. Unlike religions, few businesses can recruit employees or partners based on ideology. The three general approaches to engendering such loyalty include familial bonds, fair rewards, and coercion. Faerûn's economy is dominated by wealthy, powerful merchant houses. Such merchant houses demonstrate a keen sense of loyalty to the family by members of the family, above and beyond the tensions that exist within the family. Successful merchant companies typically recognize merit, rewarding employees for their contributions in a predictable fashion and giving them a sense of ownership in the business. This approach works well even under the rule of cruel and demanding partners, so long as they are honest in their assessment of performance. Loyalty can also be compelled, through threats and physical intimidation or through coercive enchantments, such as *charm person* or *dominate person*.

## Merchant prince

A merchant prince (known as a merchant princess if female) is a member of the merchant nobility who has acquired his position and wealth either by being born into a wealthy family or by earning every last coin himself. Merchant princes dominate economic activity across Faerûn, using their great fortunes to acquire almost anything imaginable and to defend the foundations of their mercantile empires.

### Becoming a merchant prince

Most merchant princes are rogues, literally and figuratively, although aristocrats, experts, clerics of Waukeen, and clerics of Shaundakul are not uncommon. Few fighters have the skill to become merchant princes, although fighter/rogues often do. Bards are well equipped to become merchant princes, although surprisingly few have the inclination. Those rangers who become

merchant princes usually make their fortunes as caravanners. Wizards and sorcerers rarely seek material gain at the expense of furthering their magical talents. Barbarians, clerics of other deities, druids, paladins, and monks rarely, if ever, become merchant princes.

Your key abilities support the primary and secondary skills of your profession. Intelligence impacts many of your class skills and might provide additional skill points. Charisma impacts many of your class skills as well.

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

**Skills:** Appraise 4 ranks, Bluff 4 ranks, Diplomacy 4 ranks, Profession (merchant) 8 ranks, Sense Motive 4 ranks.

**Feats:** Business Savvy, Favored in Guild, Skill Focus (Profession [merchant]).

**Languages:** Common, any two others, must be literate.

**Special:** You must own a business. If you no longer own a business, you cannot advance further in this class.

### class features

As you advance in level, you gain abilities that reflect the blessing of the gods who oversee commerce and your innate ability to make a profit. In addition, you learn enough magic to assist you in your daily trade.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** You are proficient with all simple weapons and light armor.

**Spellcasting:** You have the ability to cast a small number of arcane spells. To cast a merchant prince spell, you must have an Intelligence score of at least 10 + the spell's level, so if you have an Intelligence of 10 or lower, you cannot cast these spells. Bonus spells are based on Intelligence, and saving throws against these spells have a DC of 10 + spell level + your Int modifier. When you get 0 spells per day of a given level (for instance, 1st-level spells for 1st level), you gain only the bonus spells you would be entitled to based on your Intelligence score for that spell level. Your spell list appears below. You prepare and cast spells just as a wizard does.

You must study your spellbook each day to prepare your spells. You cannot prepare any spell not recorded in your spellbook, except for *read magic*, which all merchant princes can prepare from memory.

TABLE 4—I: THE MERCHANT PRINCE HIT DIE: D6

Level	Base				Special	Spellcasting		
	Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save		1st	2nd	3rd
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Master of commerce, mercantile knowledge	0	—	—
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	Lliira's heart	1	—	—
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Gond's forge	1	0	—
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Shaundakul's cloak	1	1	—
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Waukeen's coin	1	1	0

**Class Skills (6 + Int modifier per level):** Appraise, Bluff, Concentration, Craft, Decipher Script, Diplomacy, Forgery, Gather Information, Handle Animal, Knowledge (any), Profession, Ride, Sense Motive, Speak Language, Spellcraft, Use Magic Device, Use Rope.



At 1st level, you have a spellbook (often disguised as a business ledger) containing two spells from the merchant prince 1st-level spell list. You learn two new merchant prince spells of any spell level you can cast at each merchant prince level thereafter. There is no limit to the number of these spells you can learn from this list. At any time, you can also add spells found in other spellbooks or scrolls to your own.

**Master of Commerce (Ex):** Merchant princes have mastered the art of commerce. You receive a +2 insight bonus on your profit modifier (see page 183 of *Dungeon Master's Guide II*) per class level and a 10% reduction in your capital costs per class level.

**Mercantile Knowledge (Ex):** Like a bard, you have a knack for picking up odds and ends of knowledge. This ability works like the bardic knowledge class feature. If you have bard levels, your merchant prince levels and bard levels stack for the purpose of using bardic knowledge.

**Lliira's Heart (Su):** At 2nd level, you receive the favor of the Joydancer, who held Waukeen's portfolio in trust for over a decade. Lliira grants you a +2 sacred bonus on saves against compulsion and fear effects.

**Gond's Forge (Su):** At 3rd level, you receive the favor of the Wonderbringer, who oversees artifice, craftwork, construction, and smithwork. Gond grants you a +2 competence bonus on Craft checks.

## Trading secrets

A typical merchant has two sorts of trade secrets: legal and illicit. Both sorts can be sold to outlanders, citizens in need, or beginning merchants, but merchants are wary of admitting they know about shady matters, for fear someone asking is a government spy.

Legal secrets include:

- business contacts
- sources of advance or insider information (about demands for goods, events that will cause shortages, fads and fashions, and when new goods or new shipments will become available)
- sources of rare and quality goods
- knowing the market (building up experience in knowing local politics, local shortages, wants, and needs, so buying and selling hunches will be correct or profitable far more often than mere random decisions, which often bring little profit or even financial disaster)

Illicit secrets include:

- knowing whom to bribe
- knowing who to hire for specific "shadywork" (forgery, intimidation, "arranged delays" to befall trade rivals, thefts, vandalism, piracy, arson), as well as how much to pay and how such hires can be controlled

**Shaundakul's Cloak (Su):** At 4th level, you receive the favor of the Rider of the Winds, who oversees the caravan trade. Shaundakul grants you a +2 resistance bonus on saving throws against cold effects and a +1 competence bonus to Survival checks.

**Waukeen's Coin (Su):** At 5th level, you receive the favor of the Merchant's Friend. Waukeen gives you a +1 insight bonus and a +1 luck bonus on all your class skill modifiers (for a total bonus of +2).

## MERCHANT PRINCE SPELL LIST

**1st Level**—*alarm, charm person, comprehend languages, create water, cure minor wounds, detect magic, erase, expeditious retreat, feather fall, know direction, mage armor, mage hand, message, mount, prestidigitation, purify food and drink, read magic, shield, unseen servant.*

**2nd Level**—*arcane lock, continual flame, cure light wounds, detect thoughts, endure elements, identify, locate object, obscure object, Leomund's tiny hut, Leomund's trap, make whole, misdirection, Nystul's magic aura, Nystul's undetectable aura, protection from arrows, Tenser's floating disk, undetectable alignment, whispering wind.*

**3rd Level**—*analyze portal, create food and water, eagle's splendor, fool's gold (see below), fox's cunning, gembomb, knock, Leomund's secure shelter, magic mouth, owl's wisdom, phantom steed, resist elements, secret page, see invisibility, speak with animals, tongues.*

## NEW SPELL: FOOL'S GOLD

Illusion [Glamer]

**Level:** Bard 2, merchant prince 3, sorcerer/wizard 2

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Metal objects of up to 10 cu. in. in volume/level

**Duration:** 1 hour/level

**Saving Throw:** Will disbelief (if interacted with)

**Spell Resistance:** No

This spell makes metal objects, such as a bronze statue or a handful of copper coins, appear to be made of gold. You can affect 10 cubic inches of metal—the equivalent of about 150 coins or 3 pounds—per level. If you want to affect multiple objects, such as a chest full of coins, you only need to touch one of the objects, providing that all of the other objects to be affected are in contact with one another.

*Material Component:* A powdered gem of at least 5 gp in value sprinkled over the object(s).

## playing a merchant prince

You are a master of commerce, amassing piles of wealth by controlling and manipulating the levers of production and trade. Your efforts are the economic lifeblood of your community, giving you great influence over the common folk of Faerûn. You look at adventuring as a means to grow your business, whether as a source of new capital or as a way to remove impediments to your business.

Most merchant princes begin their careers by founding, inheriting, or purchasing a business. Successful merchant princes concentrate on growing their business, vanquishing commercial rivals, and maximizing profits.

### COMBAT

Your greatest weapon is your coin purse, for it gives you to the power to hire defenders and bribe potential foes. Master your chosen profession and seek every advantage available to you to increase profits. Then use those profits to bury your enemies under an onslaught of attacks by those in your employ without personal risk to you.

### ADVANCEMENT

Qualifying for the merchant prince class requires a significant commitment of skill points and feats. As you gain levels, you probably want to focus on the primary and secondary skills of your chosen profession and increasing your profit modifier as high as possible. Skill Focus feats in your primary and secondary skills allow you to master your craft. You might want to select the Leadership feat, for careful placement of your followers can give you a significant advantage over rivals.

### RESOURCES

Thanks to their business income, merchant princes have access to significant piles of coin, allowing them to purchase nearly anything they desire. Their established position in mercantile society gives them regular access to “sweetheart deals.” In a region in which you own one or more successful businesses, you can purchase any nonmagical item at 75% of the normal cost.

## merchant princes in the world

Merchant princes can be found across the length and breadth of Faerûn. Most dwell in cities, but a sizable minority wanders the roads, seas, and *portal* networks of Faerûn, knitting the continent together through commerce. Merchant princes tend to live in the wealthiest districts of their homeland or in isolated estates surrounded by their retainers. Although some are frugal, most are relatively ostentatious, given to dramatic demonstrations of personal wealth.

### NPC REACTIONS

Merchant princes are well known to commoners and aristocrats from across Faerûn, inspiring a mixture of envy, disdain, respect, and fawning admiration. Most merchant princes are seen as grasping, conniving scoundrels who would rather hire another individual to do their dirty work than risk danger to themselves, particularly among those who live in other communities. Among their fellow citizens, merchant princes are generally perceived to fall into one of two extremes—greedy profiteers or noble benefactors—with few shades of grey in between.

## MERCHANT PRINCE LORE

Merchant princes are well known in the region in which they are based, but little known elsewhere. Characters who succeed on a Knowledge (local) check can learn the following information, including the information from lower DCs.

**DC 10:** Any noncriminal business in which the merchant prince has a significant investment.

**DC 15:** Any criminal business in which the merchant prince is rumored to have a significant investment.

**DC 20:** Average monthly profit of any non-criminal business in which the merchant prince has a significant investment.

**DC 25:** Average monthly profit of any criminal business in which the merchant prince is rumored to have a significant investment.

**DC 30:** Important deals under way whose success or failure could make or break the merchant prince’s business.



## merchant princes in the game

Characters who establish businesses, rise to leadership positions within a guild, or emphasize lucrative skills are well suited to become merchant princes.

This prestige class appeals to players who like their characters to amass wealth through role-playing and social interaction rather than “dungeon crawling.” It works well in campaigns set in settled regions with thriving economies, where monsters are few but rivals and villains hide behind the public faces of civility.

NPC merchant princes occupy positions of great prominence in powerful trading cities and are usually members of the upper class, second only to the titled aristocracy (if such exists). Many merchant princes were born into (or even founded) powerful merchant houses. Others lead powerful guilds or wide-ranging trading costers. A few occupy positions in government with a great deal of influence over economic activity, particularly in cities where one or more aspects of trade are controlled by the government.

### ADAPTATION

The merchant prince works well in mercantile societies such as Amn, Sembia, and Waterdeep. If you replace the spellcasting abilities with “+1 level of existing spellcasting class” at each level, add a requirement of “any item creation feat,” add a requirement of “member of Red Wizards,” and reduce the base attack bonus progression to that of a wizard, this prestige class could be called “enclave master” and retargeted at members of the Red Wizards who run Thayan enclaves in cities across Faerûn.

### ENCOUNTERS

Merchant princes are most commonly encountered as potential employers, looking to hire adventurers to complete a specific task in exchange for a specified sum of money. Merchant princes

also work well as foes, using their monetary resources and connections to cause problems for PCs who threaten the success of a business venture.

A sample merchant prince, Dabron Sashenstar, is detailed at the end of this chapter.

## controlling a market

All merchants seek to establish an oversized presence in a segment of their chosen market(s). By controlling a large fraction of a particular raw resource, type of finished good, or trade route, a business leader can maximize his profit margin. In game terms, this is reflected by the following additional modifiers to the profit check (supplementing Table 6-5, page 184 of *Dungeon Master's Guide II*).

The Merchant Is . . .	Profit Modifier
Favored in Guild	+1
Guildmaster	+1
Monopolist	+5
Oligarch	+3

## Running a guild

A guild is defined as a group of merchants who collectively control 80% or more of the economic activity within a particular market sphere, but individually control less than 20% of the market each. In many realms, including Waterdeep, guilds are chartered by the state, and membership in the guild is required to legally engage in the types of commerce covered within the guild's charter.

Guilds are inherently fractious organizations, since guild members must work together to establish market dominance while competing with one another for market share. Although some guilds manage to maintain an equitable organizational structure, in most guilds those in leadership positions wield oversized influence and benefit more than their fellow guild members. (In game terms, this is reflected in the stacking profit check modifiers given to guild members, those with the Favored in Guild feat, and those who are Guildmasters.)

The greatest threats posed to guilds stem from the inequities between the rank-and-file and the leadership. If members of the leadership overreach, benefiting far more than their fellow guild members, they risk shattering the guild. Such a course hurts everyone, for rival consortiums might move quickly to dominate the newly competitive environment from a position of strength.

## Running an oligarchy

An oligarch is defined as a business leader who dominates a particular resource, finished good, market, or trade route by controlling 20% or more of the economic activity within a particular market sphere and colludes with other oligarchs to control 80% or more of the total economic activity within that same particular market sphere.

Oligarchies are more profitable than guilds because the smaller number of participants and the larger role each plays creates a more level playing field within the organization. (In game terms, this is why the profit check modifier given to oligarchs is greater than that given to guild members or even those who are Favored in Guild.) Although oligarchs continue to compete among themselves, oligarchs face strong internal pressure to secretly divide a market among themselves and then enforce that decision among themselves.

The greatest threats posed to an oligarchy derive from grasping oligarchs who seek even more control. Oligarchies present a finite list of targets for a would-be monopolist and more than one oligarch has attacked his fellows in a brazen attempt to seize complete control.

## Running a monopoly

A monopolist is defined as a business leader who dominates a particular resource, finished good, market, or trade route by controlling 80% or more of the economic activity within a particular market sphere.

Monopolies are very profitable, for a single individual effectively controls an entire market. (In game terms, this is why monopolists receive the highest profit check modifier.) Monopolists face no internal pressures, allowing them to focus their efforts on maintaining and exploiting their monopoly.

The greatest threats posed to a monopolist stem from his very success. Other centers of power, including governments and religions, find merchant princes wielding monopolist powers to be a great threat. By concentrating control of a market, a monopolist makes himself a tempting target for those who depend on the monopolist's market and wish to reduce their costs.

## obligations and duties of a business leader

Business leaders are obligated to their backers, who invest in the business through loans, ownership shares, or favorable trade deals. Business leaders must make a profit or risk losing their livelihood. In some regions of Faerûn, a business leader's debts might be enforced by strong rule of law. In other areas, backers in a failed venture take matters into their own hands, hiring assassins, thieves, or magic-wielding spellcasters to enact their vengeance.

Business leaders can never rest on their laurels or the market will move out from under them. They must seek out new business opportunities, invest in new ventures, and assess their competition on a regular basis. They must be innovative and open to new ideas, looking for new ways to extract raw resources, new manufacturing processes, and new trade routes that give them the advantage over their competitors.

## conflicts

Economies are arenas of conflict in which economic forces strive against one another to maximize their profits. While such divisions rarely spill over into direct hostilities, merchant rivals employ all manner of indirect attacks on their trade rivals in hopes of building a competitive advantage.

## rival trade consortiums

Individual merchants and small partnerships rarely have much time to think and act beyond the day-to-day drudgeries of running their own businesses. Although they compete with one another, such conflicts are largely confined to the arenas of efficiency and quality. On the other hand, rival trade consortiums often devote as much time and energy to undermining their rivals as they do to competing against them.

Most trade consortiums benefit to some extent from the rule of law; thus, they tend to battle within the general confines of the law and eschew open warfare. Moreover, most trade consortiums view rivals more as targets to be acquired than targets to be destroyed, limiting the amount of direct damage they tend to inflict on one another. Common tactics include hiring bandits or monsters to attack a rival's caravans or to interfere with the shipment of critical resources or finished goods, striking deals with suppliers to "freeze out" a rival, bribing corrupt officials to harass a rival with petty applications of the law, causing incidental damage to stored goods to increase a rival's costs, hiring away key personnel, and spreading rumors about inferior goods and services.

## costers and priakos of the heartlands

Most trade travels in caravans for safety, and the great majority of caravans are run by independent caravan masters who often display no badge or colors at all. Some caravans are sponsored or directly manned by a city or alliance, and they usually bear the sigil of that place. The caravans of Amn, Sembia, and the Zhentarim are so marked, while caravans and ships backed by the Runden are not.

In addition to the major lines detailed below, a number of other trading organizations are active in the Heartlands, ranging from one-shot operators, to seasonal family operations, to independent merchants, to specialists in small package trade (smuggling). All are regularly looking for strong sword arms and wise wand-wielders to enhance their chances of making it to market.

**Dragoneye Dealing Coster:** Originally based in the Vilhon Reach area, the Dragoneye now operates more often out of Irieabor and Elturel. This oldest of the costers was begun by two merchant brothers, Iltraven and Chethar, who were tired of

shipping things overland to avoid the Inner Sea pirates only to lose them to bands on the long land routes west of Westgate, and also reluctant to pay incredibly stiff fees to the merchant houses of Westgate to have their cargoes accompany the well-guarded caravans of that city. The brothers still run the coster, but they have taken on two lesser partners: the Mhalogh of Mordulkin (a minor noble) and Bezenttar of Suzail.

**Firehands Group:** Founded in the Year Prince (1357 DR) out of Daerlun, the Firehands had a rough go of it in its early years trying to establish itself in a market with many other trading operations, but it is now an established concern catering fully to the Waterdeep to Sembia run. Its representative is Dhellart the Night Blade (LN male Chondathan human fighter 12). The Firehands Group has competitive rates, but raids and sabotage are common, often launched by its longstanding rival, the Iron Throne.

**Highmoon Trading Coster:** Headed by Guldelph Maremmoon (N male Tethyrian warrior 9), this flourishing concern dominates the Sword Coast overland routes from its bases in Scornubel and Waterdeep (surprisingly, it does not reach the Dalelands). The coster carries everything but has exclusive rights to kaorph (blue wine) and certain spices—arispeg, marka, and delph—that originate somewhere far to the south and east. Its colors are a white crescent on a black, star-studded oval.

**Iron Throne:** The Iron Throne is a secretive merchant company with the publicly stated aim of controlling trade of transportation and commerce-related equipment and weapons in the Heartlands, from Hillsfar to Baldur's Gate. The Iron Throne's founder, a tiefling named Sfena, vanished three years ago, and her remaining lieutenants have struggled to maintain the company's commanding position in the weapons trade.

**Merchant's League:** Based in Baldur's Gate, the League promotes merchant safety through good roads, regular patrols, defensive way stations, as well as strong, well-run, and well-guarded caravans. Prominent members of the League are Irlentree, Zorl Miyar, and Dabron Sashenstar (see page 81). All are successful merchants who reside in Baldur's Gate. For nearly two decades, the League has been an organization in decline as the rise of the various costers has largely replaced its functions and sapped its traditional support. However, Dabron Sashenstar—who recently succeeded his late uncle, Aldeth Sashenstar—has brought new life to the Merchant's League, reinventing it as a priakos. With the backing of the ruling dukes of Baldur's Gate, the Merchant's League has begun challenging the Iron Throne for control of weapons shipments throughout the Heartlands.

**Red Shields:** Bronthar Helmbrind (N male Tethyrian human fighter 7) has transformed the Red Shields from a mercenary company into a well-armed merchant company that runs its caravan operations out of Scornubel, making regular trading runs between Neverwinter, Waterdeep, Amn, and Scornubel. The Red



Illustration by Rick Drennan

Shields also serve as Scornubel's official army and police force, performing the former job professionally under the leadership of Vuldán (LN male Tethyrian fighter 5) and the latter job to the company's benefit under the leadership of Miftat (CN male Chondathan human fighter 6).

**Seven Suns Trading Coster:** The name of this group refers to the widely separated partners who formed the group, converting their own small merchant companies into regional bases and providing horses, draft oxen, and wagons, and hiring local guards. The seven partners are Jhasso of Baldur's Gate, Shield of Everlund, Pomphur of Almráiven, Chond of Calaunt, Alvund of Ormpetarr, Dzunn of Sheirtalar, and Namna of Milvarune. This coster usually provides the leanest guards and the worst wagons, and is inclined to be slow and often bandit-struck as a result; however, it also undercuts competitors on most routes.

**Six Coffers Market Priakos:** Named for the six wealthy merchants who sponsored it, this priakos is run by Thelvé Baruinheld of Berdusk and has bases in that city as well as Waterdeep, Silvermoon, Priapurl, and Selgaunt. It is large, efficient, and prosperous, but only four of the original six partners still live (the survivors are Ultramm of Selgaunt, Syntel of Iriabor, Maftan of Waterdeep, and Szwentil of Marsember).

**Stags Caravan Company:** This is an older, somewhat-fallen-from-former-greatness outfit of rugged adventurers (now mostly dead or gone on to other adventures elsewhere) now taken over by merchants who are constantly dealing in large and small matters everywhere. The company's aging trail general, Black Tómm Bharhinn, has lost effective control of day-to-day operations to Scorm, Hlevel, and Dindar Pel, all young merchants of Amn who despair of making their fortunes within that kingdom of mighty merchants but are determined to make money with the company.

**Surefeet Trademasters:** Headed by a council (the merchants Pheng Thelombur, Aramma Dulve, and Prist Thelmip) and based in Scornubel, the Surefeet specialize in providing expert guides, escorts, guards for all concerns, not only their own caravans but also those of any overland travelers. Their rates are high, their employees good. It is rumored that the Surefeet have gained much wealth through several rich tomb and temple ruin finds made by guide members.

**Thousandheads Trading Coster:** Run by the former adventurer Bharavan Bhaerkantos (N male Tethyrian human rogue 9) from his stronghold east of Riatavin, this coster operates only along a single route: from Waterdeep to Hillsfar via Scornubel, Berdusk, Iriabor, Proskur, Arabel, and Essembrá. Its name refers to the "thousands" of small one- to twelve-wagon outfits that benefit from this coster—Bharavan recruits retired adventurers to guard his caravans, and he offers cut rates to small merchants. His guards are tough, hard-nosed, and tireless. They have instructions

to go after and kill any caravan raider, so few casual raiders tangle with Thousandheads caravans twice.

**Trail Lords:** A mysterious, pompous outfit recently revealed to be backed by the Red Wizards of Thay, the Trail Lords have the exclusive contract for goods shipped between enclaves that cannot be sent by magic (due to cost, volume, or magical restriction). The group also ships nonmagical cargo between cities home to Red Wizard enclaves. The Trail Lords have been known to hire half-orcs (or worse) as guards, but they have deep pockets and can muster a small army or two to guard especially valuable clients and cargo in a very short time.

Mherég Ssar (N male Thayan human illusionist 7/Red Wizard 1) directs the group's operations.

**Trueshield Trading Priakos:** Based in Telpir on the Dragon Coast, this professional organization builds its own wagons and also equips and trains its own guards—and it does both of these things very well. Few bandits tangle with its caravans. Even orcs leave them alone on most trips. The group's rates are expensive, but its agents almost always deliver; thus, money has been pouring into the priakos's coffers since its founding in the Year of the Serpent (1359 DR). The master merchant of the Trueshields,

Dzentraven Thiomtul, is credited with the idea of sealed destination wagons into which the goods of many small shippers intended for a common destination are packed together, rather than the traditional "peddler" packing method where goods are packed by assorted weight and bulk considerations.

**Windriders Trading Coster:** The Windriders are young merchants with a wild reputation for fierce competition, but they have learned the hard way about how to run a coster in the past few years. All wear shields adorned with a white Pegasus, wings outstretched, and they are much used for swift, discreet carrier service around the North. The sixty or so members of this coster prefer to remain anonymous and are represented through their office and leader, Torshilm Firetel (CN male Chondathan human fighter 7), formerly of Westgate.

## Brigands and pirates

Brigands and pirates operate beyond the reach of the law in weakly policed kingdoms and unclaimed territories. The bane of merchants across Faerûn, such outlaws are economic parasites who prey on the shipment of goods for profit. They seize cargoes through force of arms and resell them on the black market. Oftentimes, their market overlaps with the originally intended recipients, thus making their thievery even more frustrating to the merchant who suffers the loss. Both brigands and pirates receive significant support from merchants seeking to undercut their rivals, and some priests of Waukeen openly preach that such outlaws could not sustain themselves without the steady flow of coins from such mercantile patrons.



Illustration by Rick Drennan

Brigandage in Faerûn is concentrated along major roads in regions where the rule of law is weak and the terrain allows small armed groups to raid and retreat with impunity. Historically, ethnic Tethyrians have a long history of brigandage because it is culturally identified with resistance to Calishite satraps and the Shoon Imperium. Roving groups of armed brigands are found in large numbers in the Western Heartlands, in the wild lands between the Caravan Cities and along the western edge of the High Moor. In the North, orc tribes usually play the role of brigands, while gnolls and ogres play that role in the Moonsea area. The nomadic human tribes of the Endless Wastes, the Lands of the Lion, Narfell, and the Shaar are seen by some as little more than brigands; however, they rarely steal shipments solely to resell them. Ghostwise halfling tribes are also prone to banditry.

Piracy is concentrated along major shipping routes in regions that don't aren't vigorously patrolled, and small bits of unclaimed territory (usually islands) can be used as pirate ports. The most infamous pirate ports include the town of Skaug in the Nelanther Isles; the town of Immurk's Hold on the Dragonisle (amid the Pirate Isles of the Sea of Fallen Stars); Narubel, the City of Seasnakes, on the coast of the Shining Sea north of Samarach; Mhairhetel, City of Renegades, at the southeastern tip of the Mhair Jungles; and the hamlet of Yaulazna in the Bay of Pirates between Halruaa and Dambrath.

## division of natural resources

Faerûn is rich in resources, despite millennia of exploitation by the great empires that once spanned the continent. The Proud Peoples (elves and dwarves) took care to husband such resources during their reign over the world, and their human-ruled successors have often focused more on the exploitation of the Weave than mining, hunting, or lumbering. Nevertheless, the presence of many dangerous monsters and armed groups outside the law means that harvesting natural resources in wilderness regions and transporting them to market is a dangerous job, so shortages can and do develop.

Conflict over natural resources usually stems from one of two root causes. Sometimes, there is a real scarcity of a resource, at least within the economic region in which it is in high demand. In such situations, trade consortiums, governments, and other power groups seek economic advantage through physical control of the natural resource. Many humanoid tribes, ill-equipped to compete in the production of finished goods, supplement their existence by controlling resources within their own territories. In some regions, the tribes are bribed to direct their attacks elsewhere, while in other regions they harvest the natural resource themselves.

In other cases, the scarcity is deliberately created. For example, if two silver mines are within easy shipping distance of a city, the owner of one mine can drastically increase his profits if he prevents shipments from the rival mine from reaching their intended market. Methods to achieve this goal include destroying the resource (starting forest fires, causing cave-ins),

driving off the workers (orchestrating attacks by humanoid tribes or other monsters), or cutting off the shipment route (destroying roads, diverting streams). More than one young dragon has built its hoard by striking a deal in which it gets half the gold dug from a mine in exchange for attacking shipments from a competitor's mine.

## overcoming natural disasters

When merchants speak of the Sword of Talos hanging above their heads, they refer to the threat of natural disasters—blizzards, cave-ins, earthquakes, fires, flooding, landslides, hurricanes, and so forth—that can disrupt commerce without notice. Natural disasters create a change in the competitive landscape by altering the status quo. Goods might be destroyed, causing scarcities. Trade routes could be blocked, adding to transportation costs. The death or displacement of inhabitants can both drive up the price of labor (as workers are lost) and drive down demand for some goods (as customers are lost and/or have more important things to buy). New resources might be revealed, or existing resources might be blocked or destroyed. Successful merchants must deal with natural disasters as an irregular cost of doing business. The most successful prepare contingencies for such occasions and look to profit from them. Several trade consortiums have even employed priests of Talos to create natural disasters, using the resultant chaos as a wedge to attack a new market or bring down a trade rival.

## insidious threats

Business leaders spy on trade rivals as a matter of course, seeking competitive advantage. Some trade consortiums take things a step farther, hiring a rival consortium's employees to undercut the business for which they work. A successful business leader must keep a close eye on his employees—making sure they cannot engage in sabotage undetected—and keep his trade secrets close to his vest.

Another form of insidious attack employed by trade consortiums is of an economic nature. Some trade consortiums actually invest in a rivals business through a third party, hoping to set up terms that allow them to call the loans due under certain circumstances. The attacking consortium can then employ other parties to create such conditions, giving them a wedge whereby they can bankrupt or establish control over a rival.

## Rewards

Merchants compete against each other in the economic arena for financial reward. Members of a business or guild are rewarded through profits, which they can then spend or reinvest. Moreover, such rewards pay off indirectly through increased influence with other power groups and additional business opportunities unavailable to the less fortunate.

## Money

Most transactions in Faerûn involve barter, but anyone seeking to acquire wealth or trade in any port or city will inevitably have to use currency. Coins are by far the most widely accepted means of currency, and there's a bewildering variety of coinage in the world. The familiar copper, silver, and gold pieces sport many different local names, too.

"Common coinage" means that almost everyone will accept a given coin at face value, without question. (Merchants who travel often will generally accept a wider variety of coins, but are better at detecting counterfeits.)

In general, except for the harbor moon and the taol (or toal; either name is correct), the money of Waterdeep is common coinage all over the Sword Coast lands, the Sword Coast North and its offshore isles, and lands from Calimshan north. The coins of Cormyr and Sembia are common coinage throughout the Dales, the Moonsea, the Vilhon, the Dragon Reach (the Vast included), and along the Dragon Coast.

In Chessenta and most locales to the south of it, the authokh and the belbolt serve as common coinage, in addition to bit/bits (copper pieces), dir/dirham (silvers), and deen/dinars (gold).

Authokhs and belbolts (see the sidebar) are generally accepted in Amn, Scornubel, and Westgate, but not in Cormyr, Sembia, the Dales, the Dragonreach, the Moonsea, the Sword Coast lands, or Tethyr. In Calimshan and Waterdeep, an authokh is considered simply a silver piece, and a belbolt is classed as a "heavy" (a gold piece worth 2 gp rather than just one).

### The Authokh and the Belbolt

The authokh and the belbolt (usually known merely as the bolt) began as the coins of a single city in Chessenta; just which one is now forgotten.

An authokh is a square coin stamped out of delmed silver, with a small central hole to allow it to be strung onto a pay-thong or wire loop. On one face, it bears an engraved ring of twelve leaves encircling the hole, and on the other a ring of twelve radiating daggers.

Although originally worth 12 gp in Chessenta, authokhs today are universally valued at 5 gp.

"Delming" is the practice of preventing silver from tarnishing by alloying it with copper and certain white metals in precise proportions. Delmed silver turns a translucent green and is incapable of taking a high shine, no matter how much it is polished.

Belbolts are thick, heavy gold coins of curious shape: a circle with two shallow, matching cut-outs in its edges. The result resembles two axe-heads fused back-to-back with curved blades outermost.

Belbolts are worth 20 gp.

Cormyrean coins are of very pure metal and heavy weight, and age well, Sembian coins slightly less so. The mintings of Amn, Cormyr, Luskan, Mirabar, Sembia, Silverymoon, Tethyr, and Waterdeep are considered the best-made in Faerûn, and are most highly valued in trade.

Acceptance of older or unfamiliar coins depends on condition and metal. Gold coins are accepted everywhere unless broken, unusually small, or obviously impure. Silver coins that have tarnished to black are seldom accepted, but if cleaned without abrasives (these would remove most of their markings) will probably be accepted unless broken, impure, or small. To make use of coins of other metals or conditions, folk must go to a moneychanger; most cities on any coast or major trade route have several.

The use of paper records of indebtedness (outside of direct dealing with royal treasuries) is recent in Faerûn and restricted to traveling merchants and trading cities. Large amounts of wealth traditionally change hands in the form of gemstones (steadily losing favor because different folk might appraise the same stone at widely different values. Middling amounts of wealth are usually exchanged either in the form of bulk goods, or by using tradebars.

## Tradebars

Tradebars are very widely accepted because they must conform closely to a given size and weight. They are the best way to melt down and reuse "suspicious" coins, because an existing tradebar can easily be pressed into handy riverbank clay to make a mold for a new one.

A 25-gp tradebar is a brick with rounded corners measuring just over an inch thick, three inches across, and six inches in length. Calishite tradebars (also used in Tharsult, Tashluta, the Tashalar, and other Southern trade) are seven inches long, but both long sides bow smoothly inward half an inch on each side, making the bar easier to grip.

A 50-gp tradebar has the same dimensions around its bottom as a 25-gp bar, but is three inches thick, and tapers inward so the top surface is a half-inch smaller, all around. No (legal) bow-sided 50-gp tradebars exist.

A 75-gp tradebar is an inch thicker (taller) than a 50-gp bar, with no taper to its sides at all.

A 100-gp tradebar is two inches thick, three inches across, and nine inches long, with a central hole (for carrying or for passing a cord through, to tie into bundles). The hole shouldn't be much more than an inch across.

Proof and ownership marks are commonly stamped into the bottom surface of a tradebar, and don't affect value.

Tradebars minted more than two centuries ago vary widely in dimensions and value, but are either weighed (and valued on the spot) when traded today, or melted down when they must be transferred from one owner to another.

Most tradebars found in hidden "treasure" hoards are hasty burials in the face of advancing foes or fierce weather, and they are soon snapped up when nature or chance digging shifts enough earth to reveal them.

## Local coinage

Most realms and independent cities issue copper, silver, and gold coins. Aside from those of Waterdeep, the following are most widely found in circulation.

**Amn:** A wide variety of earlier city-based mintings are being actively replaced (old ones collected and melted down) by a new currency that has also been officially adopted in Tethyr.

These “new glint” are all finely stamped and identical, though they retain the names of the earlier coins: fandar (copper), taran (silver), and danter (gold). (In Tethyr they are referred to as *donsar*, *paxar*, and *aenar*, respectively, with both realms retaining their slang terms for all coins.) Foreface: a circle of six tiny four-pointed stars. Obverse: an eight-spoked wagon wheel, side-on.

**Cormyr:** Copper pieces are referred to as thumbs, silvers are falcons, gold are lions, and platinum coins are tricrowns. Modern Cormyrean coins bear the monarch’s face and name on the foreface as well as a date, denomination, and mint mark on the obverse. The mark is almost always that of the Royal Mint in Suzail (a full-on bearded, hatless wizard’s face, colloquially known as “Old Vangey”). About ten percent of coins bear the mark of High Horn minting (two parallel crescent moons, horns to the right).

There has only been one minting since the death of Azoun IV, and these Regency coins bear the Purple Dragon royal arms with five parallel horizontal bars across its body, rather than the face of the regent, Alusair, or the infant Azoun V.

Elder Forest Kingdom coins (those more than eighty years old) are identical to modern ones except that instead of dates they bear the words “first minting,” “second minting,” and so on. These numbered mintings denote occasions during the reign of a particular monarch that coins were issued (there were eight mintings in the reign of Azoun IV, but most early kings had three mintings at most).

**Sembia:** Steelpence (of iron, and square) are used in place of copper, silver coins (triangular, with blunted corners) are called ravens, and gold coins (five-sided) are nobles.

All Sembian coins have the raven-and-silver arms of Sembia on the foreface, and the denomination stamped above (for example, “ONE NOBLE”) and the date (in DR) below—always curving, regardless of the shape of the coin—around a “proof stamp” (minting mark) on the obverse.

Sembian coins often have a bluish tinge, from the grease acquired during minting being burned off in a flame. This grease is deliberately cooked into all steelpence to inhibit rust (it does a fair, not foolproof, job).

**Zhentil Keep:** A trading center since its founding, and brief home to a continuous flow of gems and metals (in the form of rough-smelted tradebars) from the mines north of the Moonsea, Zhentil Keep has minted various coins down the years. (Persistent

rumors tell of vast amounts of smelted gold buried under or near the Citadel of the Raven.)

Most Zhent coins are rough-edged and irregular, bearing crude stampings of a portcullis gate on one side and a diamond-shaped gemstone on the other.

Since the most recent rebuilding of the Keep, a few copper and silver coins and many gold coins have been minted. The copper and silver are mere coatings on iron, deemed worthless by most folk outside Zhentil Keep, but the gold coins are the real thing (the slightly reddish gold found mainly northeast of Glister).

The copper coin is squarish, pierced by a central hole to allow stringing, with the four sharp corners snipped off. Foreface: the Wingless Dragon (scaled serpent with fanciful head facing counterclockwise) biting its own tail, curling around central hole. Obverse: ten tiny four-point stars encircling the central hole. Known as a fang to Zhents and in the Dales, but as “dung-pieces” elsewhere.

The silver coin is triangular, also pierced with a central hole for stringing, but with the corners not clipped (the silver coating usually wears off quickly in those areas). Both sides:

six four-pointed stars encircle the central hole. Known as a talon or a naal in the Keep and the Dales, but everywhere else as a “dung-flea bit” or just a “flea-bit.”

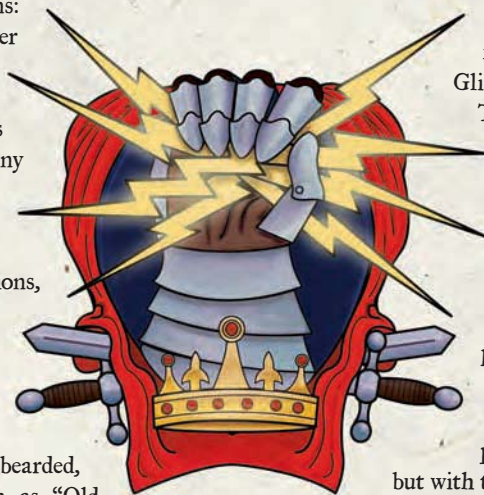
The gold coin is square, with corners untrimmed. Two parallel sides bow inward symmetrically (concave), for easy grasping by thumbs (no central hole). Foreface: three crenellated castle turret-tops, central one slightly taller than the others. Obverse: wolf head, side-on with nose to the right and with three drops of tears or blood falling away beneath it. Known formally as a glory, but called a weeping wolf everywhere.

## Economic strongholds

Economic strongholds range from fortified warehouses to great manor houses and from guild halls to isolated watch towers along a caravan route. The nature and size of such strongholds varies according to the nature of the business and the environment in which it is based.

### ulbrinter villa

The Ulbrinter Villa (N18 on the map found in *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*, page 97) is typical of the grand manor houses of Waterdeep’s merchant nobility. The villa lies in Waterdeep’s North Ward, on the southeast corner of the intersection of Delzorin Street and Vhezozar Street in the center of a walled enclosure. The main villa is two stories tall, with a tall attic (not shown) acting as a third-floor storage area. The walls are made of mortared stone and the roof is made of wood. In homage to





the family's maritime interests, the rounded roof is shaped like the upside-down hull of a ship and most of the wooden beams are made from ships' masts.

Two additional buildings (not shown on the map) are linked to the main villa by one-and-a-half-story stone walls, forming a rough square. The northeastern building also serves as the family stables, while the southwestern building acts as a gatehouse to the whole compound. The upper floors of the two outbuildings house servants and guards in the family employ.

House Ulbrinter is led by Lord Nomus Ulbrinter (LN male Tethyrian aristocrat 12/merchant prince 5), a retired sea captain who inherited the mantle of leadership from his father nearly two decades ago. He lives at the villa with his wife, Lady Karya, and eldest daughter and heir Lady Patrisa, who has never married. His five other children live nearby in rowhouses of their own with their families. House Ulbrinter has two dozen guards on retainer at any time, largely culled from the elite of retired seafarers who sailed on Ulbrinter ships as youths. Six servants attend the family's daily needs and keep the house in order, and the same number serve the family's business interests.

### LAYOUT OF THE ULBRINTER VILLA

**1. Hall of Maps:** This great hall is used both to welcome guests to Lady Karya's legendary dinner parties and to welcome visitors seeking business with House Ulbrinter. During the day, either Lord Nomus or Lady Patrisa can be found in this room along with a half dozen "coincounters" and scribes. They entertain a steady stream of merchants seeking to make deals to transport cargo on ships in the Ulbrinter fleet. The walls are lined with great tapestries depicting the Sea of Swords and beyond. Ribbons representing various ships are hung on the tapestries based on where they are scheduled to be at the current time.

**2. Scribes Quarters:** Four scribes are housed in this room, employed to keep track of the family's business dealings.

**3. Storage:** This chamber is used to store business records, written on longscrolls and stored in locked, metal coffers. A back door, kept carefully guarded and locked, provides a secondary exit from the villa.

**4. Coincounters Quarters:** A married couple, employed by House Ulbrinter as coincounters, resides herein, along with additional coffered business records.

**5. Beer Vault:** This barrel-vaulted chamber is used to hold great casks of beer and bottles of wine. Lord Ulbrinter expects would-be clients to bring a fine wine with them as a gift on their first visit.

**6. Hall of Winds:** This great hall serves as the main dining hall for the villa. A minor permanent evocation creates an endless series of zephyrs that flit about the room.

**7. Kitchen and Pantry:** This large chamber is used for food storage and preparation. It is dominated by a large hearth on the south wall.

**8. Seneschal's Quarters:** This chamber houses the villa's seneschal and his wife.

**9. Guest Quarters:** As area 12 (below), this chamber is used to house visitors who are not members of the family (although it sometimes serves that purpose during family gatherings).

**10. Common Room:** This chamber serves as the common room for the merchant house's employees. Servants and guards can be found here at nearly any time of day during their breaks, gossiping and wagering.

**11. Storage:** This chamber is used for storage.

**12. Guest Quarters:** As area 9 (above), this chamber is used to house visitors who are not members of the family (although it sometimes serves that purpose during family gatherings).

**13. Storage:** This chamber is used for storage.

**14. Storage:** This chamber is used for storage.

**15. Antechamber:** This chamber demarks the family quarters from the rest of the villa. It also doubles as an armory and fencing chamber. A trapdoor in the ceiling leads up to the attic.

**16. Hall of Ancestors:** This great hall acts as private common room for members of House Ulbrinter. The family often takes its meals in this room. The walls are lined with portraits of long-dead Ulbrinter ancestors and shelves filled with books and treasures from distant lands.

**17. Guest Chambers:** This chamber once housed the younger members of House Ulbrinter, but now serves as a guest chamber available during their frequent visits.

**18. Master's Chambers:** This chamber is used by Lord and Lady Ulbrinter.

**19. Heir's Chambers:** This chamber is used by Lady Patrisa.

## example: sundered throne

Although this campaign arc has its roots in the daring exploits of the legendary explorer Dabron Sashenstar and the rise of the Iron Throne in the Year of the Prince (1357 DR), it deals with events of the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). After many years of decline, House Sashenstar has been revitalized by the return of its favorite son. In an attempt to rebuild the family fortunes, Dabron leads the Merchant's League, also long in decline, to challenge the Iron Throne's stranglehold on trade in weapons throughout the Heartlands.

## background

In the Year of the Prince (1357 DR), Dabron Sashenstar, favored scion of House Sashenstar, braved the perils of the frigid north to reach the fabled kingdom of Sossal, which lies beyond the Great Glacier on the shores of the Icy Sea. His exploits caught the fancy of bards across the Heartlands and their recountings of the tale briefly propelled the Merchant's League, which had sponsored the expedition, to a position of prominence among the merchant consortiums of the Western Heartlands. Three years later, Dabron vanished while leading one of House Sashenstar's first caravans across Damara, a loss that nearly bankrupted the Merchant's League.

In the same year as Dabron's famed expedition, a newly formed merchant company calling itself the Iron Throne announced its existence in a set of letters addressed to rulers across

# ulbrinter villa



## Main Floor



the Heartlands. The Iron Throne claimed the exclusive right to trade in weapons and certain other equipment, despite long-standing claims on that trade by a host of other consortiums. In the years that followed, the Iron Throne grew in strength and influence, despite the active opposition of groups such as the Firehands Coster and the Zhentarim.

In the Year of the Banner (1368 DR), agents of the Iron Throne nearly sparked a war between Baldur's Gate and Amn by "poisoning" the iron mines above the Amnian town of Nashkel. Although the plot unraveled, both Duke Eltan and his lieutenant Scar were killed and had to be *resurrected*. Both Amn and Baldur's Gate vowed revenge, but they quickly became swept up in other events. The following summer, agents of the Iron Throne began attacking caravans from Baldur's Gate bearing iron in any form, leading to an escalating series of trade wars along the main caravan routes of the Western Heartlands.

In the Year of the Unstrung Harp (1371 DR), a lieutenant of the Iron Throne, Maready (NE male half-moon elf wizard 13/rogue 3), engineered the disappearance of Sfena, the tiefling who led the Iron Throne, by revealing her whereabouts to her devil lord father. This precipitated a battle between Sfena's lieutenants that ended with Maready and Krakosh (CN male storm giant sorcerer 10) in command. However, the infighting weakened the Iron Throne, giving its competitors the opportunity to make inroads in the Heartlands weapons trade.

## dabron sashenstar

Dabron Sashenstar stands over 6 feet tall, with piercing green eyes, an aquiline visage, dusky-hued skin, and wavy, jet black hair that he keeps loosely bound in a long braid. His skin is always deeply tanned, and the first wrinkles of long exposure to the sun and middle age are beginning to appear on his face. Dabron has a ready laugh, a charming wit, and a hearty grip or backslap, allowing him to make friends easily and inspire the trust of others.

Born into the merchant aristocracy of Baldur's Gate and sponsored by the Merchant's League, Dabron Sashenstar is legendary for "discovering" the far northern kingdom of Sossal in the Year of the Prince (1357 DR), an event that was widely heralded by bards across the Heartlands. Dabron vanished in the Year of the Turret (1360 DR), while leading one of House Sashenstar's first caravans across Damara toward Sossal. Thought dead by his family for nearly a dozen years, Dabron actually survived capture by the Tuigan and lived with them in the Endless Wastes, first as a slave and later as an adopted member of the tribe.

Dabron returned to Baldur's Gate in the Year of Wild Magic (1372 DR), after receiving a vision from Shaundakul indicating the imminent collapse of House Sashenstar. His return was greeted with great relief by members of House Sashenstar and the Merchant's League, for it followed the death of his uncle, Aldeth Sashenstar, by less than a day. Within a tenday, Dabron succeeded his uncle, Aldeth Sashenstar, as patriarch of House Sashenstar and senior member of the Merchant's League, intent on rebuilding the family fortunes.

## DABRON SASHENSTAR

CR 23

Male elite middle-aged Tethyrian human ranger 10/fighter 8/merchant prince\* 5

\*New prestige class described on page 71

CG Medium humanoid

**Init** +5; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +5

**Languages** Common (including Calant and Skaevrym dialects), Chondathan, Damaran, Dwarven, Illuskan, Tethyrian, Tuigan

**AC** 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19

**hp** 110 (23 HD); DR 5/magic

**Resist** cold 30, evasion

**Fort** +14, **Ref** +14, **Will** +9; Lliira's heart, Shaundakul's cloak

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares), woodland stride, swift tracker

**Melee** +3 *evil outsider bane flaming burst longsword* +29/+24/+19/+14 (1d8+8/19–20 plus 1d6 fire) or

**Melee** +3 *evil outsider bane flaming burst longsword* +27/+22/+17/+12 (1d8+8/19–20 plus 1d6 fire) and +2 *thundering handaxe* +24/+19 (1d6+3/×3)

**Ranged** +1 *animal bane distance composite longbow* +23/+18/+13/+8 (1d8+4/×3)

**Base Atk** +21; **Grp** +24

**Atk Options** Ride-By Attack, favored enemy giants +4, favored enemy humans +6, favored enemy magical beasts +2

**Combat Gear** necklace of fireballs (Type VII)

**Ranger Spells Prepared** (CL 5th, needs periapt to cast):

2nd—*cat's grace*

1st—*hawkeye*<sup>CA</sup>, *longstrider*

**Merchant Prince Spells Prepared** (CL 5th):

3rd—*tongues*

2nd—*detect thoughts*, *whispering wind*

1st—*charm person*, *unseen servant*

**Abilities** Str 16, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 15

**SQ** animal companion (none at present), bardic knowledge +7, wild empathy +12 (+4 magical beasts)

**Feats** Business Savvy, Cosmopolitan<sup>PG</sup>, Endurance<sup>B</sup>, Favored in Guild (House Sashenstar), Greater Weapon Focus (longsword), Guildmaster (House Sashenstar), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting<sup>B</sup> (light or no armor), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Mounted Combat, Negotiator, Skill Focus (Profession [merchant]), Ride-By Attack, Track<sup>B</sup>, Two-Weapon Fighting<sup>B</sup> (light or no armor), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

**Skills** Appraise +10, Bluff +9, Climb +13, Concentration +7, Craft (any) +7, Decipher Script +6, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +2 (+4 to act in character), Forgery +5, Gather Information +9, Handle Animal +14, Heal +5, Hide +6, Intimidate +4, Jump +13, Knowledge (geography) +15, Knowledge (nature) +15, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Profession (merchant) +27, Ride +15, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +7, Spot +5, Survival +10 (+12 in aboveground natural environments, to avoid natural hazards, or to keep from getting lost), Swim +13, Tumble +5, Use Rope +3

**Possessions**

Icemail of Orloebar (+5 *greater cold resistance invulnerability mithral shirt*), Grayflame (+3 *evil outsider bane flaming burst longsword*), Snowbeard's avalanche axe (+2 *thundering handaxe*), Misthunter (+1 *animal bane distance composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus]), boots of the winterlands, Heward's handy haversack, headband of intellect +2, periapt of Wisdom +2, stone horse figurine of wondrous power (drestrier), adventuring gear, 17,500 gp worth of coins, gems, jewelry, potions, and investments

**Master of Commerce**

(Ex) Dabron receives a +10 insight bonus on his profit modifier and a 50% reduction in his capital costs.

**Lliira's Heart (Su)**

Lliira grants Dabron a +2 sacred bonus on saves against compulsion and fear effects.

**Shaundakul's Cloak (Su)**

Shaundakul grants Dabron a +2 resistance bonus on saving throws against cold effects and a +1 competence bonus (included above) on Survival checks.

**Hook** "I've shared a fire with the Sossrim, ridden with the Tuigan, and crossed blades with the Iron Throne. There's no horizon I won't cross and no creature I won't hunt on this world or the next."

**Leadership, influence, and profit**

Dabron is a leader of great renown and well regarded for his fairness and generosity. His base Leadership score is 25. He has a reputation for fairness and generosity (+1) and great renown (+2). As the head of House Sashenstar, he is the effective owner



*Dabron Sashenstar*

of a profitable merchant house (+7) and a profitable merchant company (the Merchant's League) (+1). He has the Business Savvy (+1), Favored in Guild (+1), and Guildmaster (+1) feats and is a guild member of the Merchant's League (+1). Given this and his Influence modifier of +8, his effective Leadership score is 48.

Dabron's business is anchored in the metropolis of Baldur's Gate (+4), is high risk (-4) and high resource (-4). Dabron is a 5th-level merchant prince (+10), has five or more ranks in Diplomacy and Knowledge (geography) (+1), is a member of the Merchant's League (+1), spends more than 40 hours per week assisting the business (+2), has the Business Savvy feat (+2), has the Favored in Guild feat (+1), and has the Guildmaster feat (+1). He employs several specialists, ensuring that he always receives the benefit of an aid another check (+2). His base profit modifier is +16, assuming the previous profit check failed. By taking 10, he achieves a profit check result of 53 and a gains monthly profit of 1,400 gp.

Dabron has a 21st-level cohort, his wife Eishaera Sashenstar (NG female Tethyrian human expert 16/merchant princess 5). Dabron has 1,000 1st-level followers, 100 2nd-level followers, 50 3rd-level followers, 25 4th-level followers, 13 5th-level followers, 7 6th-level followers, 4 7th-level followers, 2 8th-level followers, and 1 9th-level follower. Most of

Dabron's low-level followers are humanoid merchants (usually commoners, experts, rogues, or warriors), while his

higher-ranking followers tend to be humanoid experts, fighters, and rogues.

Given his followers (+1,631), placement of eight followers in positions of influence in the Seven Suns Coster (+12), placement of thirteen followers in positions of influence in the Firehands Group (+17), and four more significant, public victories than defeats (+40), Dabron has a base Influence modifier of +1,700 and an actual Influence modifier of +8.

Illustration by William O'Connor

# TAME THE FRONTIER

**L**arge swaths of Faerûn have always laid unclaimed by the “civilized races,” although the exact location of such tracts has shifted with the rise and fall of empires. The frontier is wherever civilization hangs by a thread, its continued existence threatened by fearsome beasts and powerful monsters. It lies between the uncharted depths of wilderness and the comforting cloak of an established kingdom with its attendant political, economic, and cultural infrastructure.

Characters best suited to a leadership role on the frontier usually have a good deal of martial prowess and an ability to survive and thrive in the absence of the comforts of civilization, including barbarians, druids, fighters, rangers, and rogues. Alternative routes to leadership on the frontier include adopting prestige classes such as cavalier<sup>CW</sup>, dread commando<sup>HB</sup>, highland stalker<sup>CA</sup>, hordebreaker<sup>SM</sup>, knight protector<sup>CW</sup>, orc scout<sup>SM</sup>, or wild scout<sup>SM</sup>. Scout<sup>CA</sup> is an alternative class with the appropriate frontier spirit.

Rulership on the frontier involves all aspects of society and culture in their earliest stages. Advancing to a leadership position on the frontier requires a willingness to build a society from the ground up and to create societal norms where before there was only survival of the fittest. This chapter focuses on leadership in this environment as well as the unique challenges and responsibilities of pursuing such a role.

## The frontier leader

A frontier leader is an individual who leads a settlement in an area largely uninhabited by members of his race or culture and with only minimal infrastructure or ties to civilization. He is

actively involved in recruiting new settlers, making the region self-sufficient, and displacing the prevailing power structure. A frontier leader is not simply a high-level character who builds or owns a stronghold in a wilderness region, but one who uses such a stronghold as a nucleus around which a new settlement can form.

## what do frontier leaders do?

Frontier leaders play a significant role in the growth of existing kingdoms and/or the founding of new kingdoms. They seek to transform a region of wilderness into an outpost of civilization by establishing their authority, attracting new settlers to the region, and building the infrastructure of civilization.

As no corner of Faerûn is entirely devoid of inhabitants, would-be settlers of wilderness regions must first displace the existing power structure. Most wilderness regions are dominated by powerful predators such as animals, dragons, magical beasts, undead, or vermin. Sometimes it is enough for a frontier leader to displace or destroy the top of the food chain. For example, in a region long dominated by a powerful red dragon, a frontier leader might seek to slay that dragon and use its hoard to build a new stronghold. This approach works well if the former power was unchallenged in its dominance over the region. However, if multiple creatures or groups were locked in an uneasy balance of power, removing one such individual or band is likely to simply shift power to a rival. Often times, a frontier leader must eradicate much of the existing hierarchy before it can then be replaced by a new hierarchy within the civilization. For example, it might not be enough to remove the gray render that stalks a newly claimed vale if it is but one of a chain of predators including bears, manticores, wolves, and a nest of giant ants.

Some frontier regions are uninhabited only in the eye of the beholder. Alien cultures built by aberrations, extraplanar invaders (such as elementals and outsiders) and “uncivilized” tribes (made up of fey, giants, primitive humanoids, or monstrous humanoids) often do not count in the eyes of would-be settlers. In such areas,

a frontier leader is effectively trying to conquer a territory by breaking the back of the existing but unacknowledged culture and replacing it with one of his own choosing. For example, humans in a nearby kingdom might consider one of the various serpent kingdoms (such as Najara amid the Western Heartlands, or Serpentes deep within the jungles of the Chultan Peninsula) or a region ruled by feuding tribes of goblinoids (such as the Stonelands north of Cormyr) to be a frontier worthy of settlement. In such a case, a frontier leader might seek to shatter the existing tribal structure and replace it with a town of humans.

Once a frontier leader has established himself, he must begin attracting new settlers to the region. Although this task is made simpler if there are strong population pressures driving settlement of a culture's frontiers, most frontier leaders must mix personal charisma with an array of incentives in order to draw settlers to the frontier. A frontier leader's personal appeal must be centered on his ability to defend the new outpost of civilization. Potential settlers are taking a significant risk, and they rely on the frontier leader to keep them reasonably safe in the face of dangers far beyond those encountered in most "civilized" regions.

Some frontier leaders expend their personal fortunes as an investment in building a new settlement. For example, after slaying a powerful dragon and seizing its hoard, a would-be frontier leader might then offer to split the cost of any new structure built within the frontier region he hopes to settle. However, more often than not, it is more effective to offer a stake in the newly claimed territory to anyone brave and hardy enough to hold it for a period of time. For example, a frontier leader might offer miners a share of the take from a newly established mine or give anyone who can establish and hold new farmland title to the newly cleared fields.

It helps if the frontier leader is offering an alternative to life in the heart of civilization, such as freedom from discrimination for a persecuted faith, race, or sub-culture, freedom from tyranny for those who chafe under the heavy hand of rulership in a civilized region, or even the opportunity to escape poverty. In other words, the frontier can be a compelling alternative to life within the relative safety and comforts of civilization if the frontier leader can promise the absence of a strongly disliked aspect of civilization.

## How to use the Leadership feat

The frontier offers both the promise of untapped wealth and the risk of operating outside the infrastructure of civilization. Frontier leaders serve as the focus around which a new community can coalesce, as would-be settlers flock to their newly established banner. Frontier leaders with the Leadership feat are able to attract a nucleus of settlers on which a community can be built. Cohorts and followers of a frontier leader trust that their leader has the vision and the power to carve a new community out of the wilderness and therefore willingly take on the risk of his endeavor.

The following modifiers affect the character's effective Leadership score with respect to the character's frontier community:

The Leader Is . . .	Leadership Score Modifier
The preeminent power within the claimed region	+2
Able to bequeath resources to those who come and work the land	+2
Offering a positive alternative to a disliked aspect of an existing culture	+1
In command of trade links to civilization	+1

The Leader's Community Is . . .	Leadership Score Modifier
Self-sufficient in defense	+1
Self-sufficient in basic necessities	+1
Self-sufficient in raw resources	+1
Self-sufficient in crafted goods	+1
Self-sufficient in services	+1
Self-sustaining in population	+1

## HOW DO YOU RUN frontier cohorts and followers?

Cohorts and followers who settle on the frontier follow you because they believe you can keep them safe and offer them a chance to build a new life. You are their liege lord, granting them a stake on the frontier in exchange for their willingness to sacrifice and work together to build something new. You can earn a great deal of goodwill from your cohorts and followers by recognizing the risk they have assumed and rewarding them with ownership of the fruits of their labors. They look to you to safeguard what has been built already and to seek out new settlers who can build on what they have already established.

You should establish a fort or manor that can serve as the center of community life and a defensive fortification into which your community can retreat in times of war. When not asked to defend the community against external threats, frontier cohorts and followers spend their time working the land, seeking to establish viable homesteads in an untamed land.

With rare exceptions, you should only call on frontier cohorts and followers to contribute to growth of your community. Such tasks might range from establishing a new mine that will benefit everyone to establishing a new trade route to defeating a newly arrived predator. Your frontier cohorts and leaders become more valuable if you recruit them from a wide range of communities likely to respond to your call for settlers. Moving to the frontier requires a daunting leap of faith, but such a leap can be made less formidable if a potential settler already knows a member of his existing community who has already made the migration.

## playing the frontier game

Faerûn is a vast continent composed largely of small kingdoms and city-states separated by large tracts of wilderness, but it has a tradition of great empires that brought expansive territories to heel in days gone by. In the face of great dangers, Faerûn's civilized inhabitants have dared to repeatedly tame the frontier, seeking to establish new settlements in the shadow of great dragons and powerful goblinoid tribes or in lands wrecked by titanic acts of magic.

Whereas most adventurers seek to destroy fearsome beasts and other threats simply to reduce the risk they pose, frontier leaders see the resulting power vacuum as an opportunity to expand the reach of the civilized world. By playing the frontier game, you seek to construct a new society or extend an existing one in the face of hostile terrain and unrelenting dangers. You see great opportunity to build something new rather than cling to what your ancestors built before you.

### You are a frontier leader— now what?

As a frontier leader, you must figure out where to start your settlement. Are you building a new settlement on the edge of civilization? If so, you must seize or be given title to land that is likely already claimed by the nearest king. Are you developing a rich vale far from civilization? If so, your community must be entirely self-sufficient or you must blaze new trails connecting your holdings with likely trading partners.

Next, you must establish control of the land. Do monsters that might prey on a future populace stalk the land? If so, you must destroy them or drive them from your territory, assuming you cannot subjugate or tame them. Does another group already hold the land? If so, you must dislodge entrenched foes who are defending their homes and way of life.

Finally, you must attract new settlers to the land you wish to hold. Can you guarantee their safety? If not, you need to build a defensive fortification to which they can retreat. Can you give them a stake in your settlement's success? Most settlers seek title to land or ownership of natural resources in exchange for their sacrifices.

### carving out a domain

By definition, frontier regions stand beyond the reach of civilization and the rule of law. Although some frontiers lie far from any established civilization, most lie on the periphery of settled lands. Since most kingdoms claim land far beyond their settled and defended borders in hopes of someday bringing the borderlands beneath their royal writ, one or more established rulers nominally claim many frontier regions. Kingdoms usually encourage enterprising individuals to establish new settlements in the frontier, but they expect such individuals to seek a royal charter granting them permission to do so; furthermore, they

expect the lord of a newly established settlement to answer to the throne. Some frontier lords risk inviting the wrath of their neighbors by settling in such lands without permission, hoping the kingdom will be too weak to enforce its writ once the settlement has established itself. In regions claimed by competing kingdoms, conflict with one or the other is almost inevitable.

For example, the Forest Kingdom of Cormyr can be said to rule all the land encircled by the Stormhorns, the Thunder Peaks, and the Lake of Dragons. In recent years, the throne managed to extend its writ into the eastern Stonelands, encompassing the now-ruined town of Tilverton. However, the crown has always claimed the entirety of the Stonelands, the Goblin Marches, and the Plain of Tun. As such, the kingdom expects anyone seeking to settle these lands to request a royal charter at the palace in Suzail. Usually, the authorities grant such charters without much debate. The crown temporarily recognizes the would-be lord and gives temporary lordship of the intended territory. Within a fixed number of years (usually five), the crown dispatches a royal agent to review the health of the settlement. If the settlement is stable and growing, then the crown usually grants the lord a permanent title (usually baron), dispatches a small number of troops (usually a company of Purple Dragons and a war wizard), and begins taxing both the newly-installed baron and his subjects. If the settlement is failing or has failed, the charter is revoked and the land reverts to the king. However, since the return of the city of Shade, both the scions of Netheril and the Forest Kingdom have claimed the Stonelands. As such, would-be settlers of the Stonelands must risk angering one throne or the other.

For the purpose of effective Leadership score, a frontier leader is considered "able to bequeath resources to those who come and work the land" if he has been granted a charter to settle the land by a neighboring, established kingdom or if he chooses a frontier region far beyond the reach of any established kingdom. In the latter case, such authority lasts only so long as he is able to defend the implementation of his authority against rival claimants.

### Taming the frontier

By definition, a frontier region lacks the benefits of civilization and is home to many monstrous threats. Taming the frontier requires eliminating the monstrous inhabitants in the region and building the necessary infrastructure to hold it.

All areas of Faerûn have a food chain with one or more predators on top. Most food chains are inimical to humanoid settlement, including predators willing and able to prey on settlers. Some leaders attempt to tame the frontier by killing off the top predator(s) and replacing them in a position of dominance. This approach is usually employed when a region is dominated by a powerful, intelligent, solitary creature that has already eliminated all other rivals, such as a dragon or a beholder. Other leaders attempt to undermine the food chain, targeting the favored prey of the top predators. For example, rather than attempt to hunt down roving packs of dire wolves, a frontier leader might instead order the wholesale slaughter of deer in the valley. This approach does not work if the newly arriving settlers are bringing in herds



*A young noble and his men-at-arms have just made short work of a band of goblins*

Illustration by Kev Walker

of livestock, for instance, that might serve as a substitute or if the settlers themselves could serve as prey as well.

Many “uninhabited” regions of Faerûn are actually the territory of nomadic or primitive tribes such as the Tuigan horselords of the Hordelands and the Uthgardt barbarians of the Savage North. In the case of the former, it is often enough to establish a stronghold and defend it vigorously against attacks. Often, nomadic tribes will simply concede the small amount of territory lost to a fledgling settlement rather than expending a large number of resources to dislodge it. Of course, while this strategy makes short-term sense, in the long-term it leads to the gradual erosion of the nomads’ territory and culture.

In the case of settlers confronting established primitive tribes, taming the frontier is simply a battle between two rival groups for territorial control viewed through the prism of cultural superiority. The primitive tribe usually has a well-fortified base, such as a cavern system or ruin, whereas the settlers are usually struggling to erect such a stronghold. The settlers have the advantage of coming from a more advanced culture (in most cases) with the attendant advantage in terms of arms and magical prowess. The settlers might also have a steady stream of replacements, whereas the primitive tribe can only replace its numbers through reproduction.

Once a frontier leader has established temporary control of a region, it is necessary to construct a physical infrastructure to defend it. Usually such efforts begin with the construction of a temporary stronghold. Sometimes settlers can seize a cavern system or existing ruin, but in most cases they must construct

a new stronghold through hard work and/or magic. Frontier leaders often expand and rebuild such strongholds repeatedly in the early days of settlement, changing from tents on a high spot with boulders providing limited cover, to a wooden stockade, to a stone tower. Once the settlement has a central stronghold to which the settlers can retreat, most frontier leaders construct watchtowers and smaller strongholds from which guards can watch for new threats and defend outlying holds. Most early stage settlements revolve around the acquisition of a scarce natural resource and the transport of said resource back to civilization. While watchtowers and the like can guard the former, the latter usually requires defensible means of transport such as guarded wagons and riverboats.

For the purpose of effective Leadership score, a frontier leader is considered to be “the preeminent power within the claimed region” once he has tamed the frontier by eliminating threats to life and limb, created a fortified base from which to defend his claims, and established a means of defending the settlement’s economic activities.

## Medicine in Faerûn

Although divine healers are commonplace across much of Faerûn, they are quite rare in many frontier regions and the poorer districts of most large cities. As such, knowledge of nonmagical, medical alternatives to magical healing is still valued in many communities. Medical knowledge (represented in game terms by the Heal skill) varies widely across Faerûn. It is often highest



among halflings and gnomes because tending humans has been one long-term way of being accepted in human-dominated communities.

The organs of all humanoid races are known, plus the general functioning of the body (including shock, and how to treat it), how blood works, and the importance of cleanliness for wounds. In Faerûn, almost everyone understands (Heal DC 5) that ill or wounded beings need rest, to be covered by a blanket or kept out of full sun, and that moving or rough handling will do greater harm. Most folk will give the ill or injured much to drink (even in cases of internal injuries). Stretchers, splints, and slings are commonly used. When a stretcher can't be found, injured who must be carried are usually lashed to felled tree trunks and borne along between the shoulders of two strong carriers.

Many folk are expert at neatly sewing flesh, creating body piercings (especially among goblinoids), and the importance of using flame or alcohol (separately, of course) to prevent infections related to such piercings are commonplace. (It's not currently fashionable in the Heartlands to make use of facial piercings except in nostrils and earlobes.) Cauterization is well known, so scarring is common. Herbal painkillers (usually liquids that are "brewed" and drunk, but also liquids drizzled into wounds) are widely known and used, especially before someone is "sewn up."

## Attracting subjects

In order to build a settlement on the frontier, there needs to be a steady stream of settlers coming into the region. This unfolds over a series of stages, and each stage requires a different type of settler.

Initially, a frontier leader needs warriors to exert military control of the frontier. Such settlers are often mercenaries (who might or might not be ready to retire) or retired soldiers who eventually form the backbone of the settlement's law enforcement and defense. Carpenters and stonemasons are particularly important as well, for they will erect the initial fortifications and

build housing for those to follow. Hunters are also needed in the early days to feed the populace.

The second wave of settlers should include farmers and field hands to clear fields, plant crops, and raise livestock to feed the settlement once the local game population is reduced.

Most successful settlements see a third wave of settlers made up of miners or loggers. These settlers seek to harvest the land's natural resources, giving the settlement a basis for trade with more established settlements.

The fourth wave of settlers should include craftsmen capable of producing craft goods (e.g. ale, ammunition, and horseshoes) cheaper locally than they can be obtained through trade.

The fifth wave of settlers should provide services, from knowledge (e.g. libraries) to divine ministrations (e.g. temples that provide more advanced healing capabilities) to relaxation (e.g. feshalls and taverns).

Although there is inevitably a great deal of overlap between these settlement waves, most successful frontier settlements follow this pattern or risk having too many settlers on hand before sufficient food, shelter, and infrastructure are present to support their contributions.

Attracting settlers to the frontier might or might not require a lot of work by the local lord. In some cases, rumors of great riches have drawn large numbers of settlers to the frontier. In other regions, the local lord is forced to hire bards and rumormongers in neighboring lands to advertise and recruit new settlers. This task is eased if regular commerce takes place between the frontier and neighboring kingdoms, for word of new economic opportunities inevitably spreads along such trade routes. Likewise, if most of the settlers are being drawn from a disgruntled minority within the neighboring kingdom, familial ties might lure more and more members of that group to join their kin in the new land. Perhaps the most important aspect of attracting new settlers is giving the current settlers a fair reward for their efforts and the risk they have assumed. In a sense, a frontier leader must act as if his real constituency is the

## medical herbalism

In Faerûn, medical practice is dominated by the use of divine magic and herb lore. A typical healer's kit (see page 130 of the *Player's Handbook*) contains a variety of herbs with medical properties appropriate to many situations. Several additional herbs, too expensive to be found in a typical healer's kit, are detailed below:

**Bloodpurge:** Found in the depths of freshwater marshes polluted by magical and nonmagical wastes, this herb can neutralize minor poisons. It grants a +2 alchemical bonus on Heal checks to treat poison. Cost: 15 gp/dose.

**Bloodstaunch:** Found in dry gullies in semi-arid temperate zones, this herb thickens blood very quickly upon direct contact, and so can be applied to open wounds to slow or stop bleeding. It grants a +2 alchemical bonus on Heal checks to administer first aid. Cost: 10 gp/dose.

**Fleshwort:** Made from the stalk of a gray, celerylike vegetable, fleshwort is found only on recent battlefields, where corpses are buried near the surface or left to rot above ground. If sewn into an internal wound, fleshwort is slowly absorbed by any mammalian body as raw material to build new tissue. It grants a +2 alchemical bonus on Heal checks to provide long-term care. Cost: 5 gp/application.

**Silverbark Sap:** The sap of the silverbark tree is clear and slightly sticky. It acts as a minor antitoxin, granting anyone who consumes at least 1 ounce a +2 alchemical bonus on Fortitude saving throws against poison for 1 hour. A typical silverbark tree can be harvested of 2d4 doses of sap per year. Cost: 20 gp/dose.

next wave of settlers who will chose whether to migrate based on reports of how the last group was treated.

### SUBJUGATING THE LOCAL POPULACE

Although immigrants build most frontier settlements, some frontier leaders seek to subjugate the local populace (e.g. barbarian or humanoid tribes), in effect incorporating members of defeated “primitive” tribes into the new society. Subjugating the local populace usually involves military conquest that ends in surrender as opposed to death or displacement. In such cases, the local lord might decide that the cost of enslaving (or enforcing indentured servitude on) the defeated populace is cheaper than attracting new settlers. The usual need to treat the existing settlers fairly in order to attract new immigrants does not always apply due to the cultural divide between the conquered local populace and the new immigrants. Of course, creating a two-tier society creates its own long-term problems and could pose a moral quandary to good-aligned (and even neutral-aligned) leaders. If the subjugated local populace is treated as all other settlers, then some might move away to rebuild their culture elsewhere while others voluntarily adapt and join the newly emerging society.

### frontier justice

The rule of law is weaker on the frontier than it is in civilized kingdoms. In most cases, local lords with the authority to grant title to property and natural resources also have the authority to sit in judgment of those settlers who migrate to their newly established domain. Lords that rule over multiple settlements usually entrust some authority for frontier justice to bards,

paladins, or rangers in their service, for members of all three groups are traditionally accorded respect as if they were justices of the peace.

Frontier justice is quick and harsh, since settlers have little luxury to tolerate troublemakers in their midst and few resources to imprison criminals. Most judgments are made quickly and favor punishment over the rights of the accused.

Most punishments fall into one of three categories: expropriation of property, banishment, and death. Expropriation of property is the usual penalty for disputes over who owes whom. Troublemakers who threaten other individuals are usually banished, with the amount of gear they are allowed to take with them diminishing with the severity of the crime. Death is usually reserved for those who challenge the local lord’s authority or betray the settlement by aiding those who threaten its safety.

## Earning titles

On the frontier, titles are fast and loose and often enforced at the end of a sword. There is a long tradition of minor lords of isolated settlements claiming exaggerated titles, but such titles rarely survive economic or political integration with neighboring kingdoms.

### Lords, mayors, and wardens

Leaders of frontier settlements tend to fall in one of three categories: lords, mayors, and wardens. Lords are generally accorded their title by a neighboring kingdom, are considered to

Illustration by Eric Descamps

*A tax collector accepts payment from a hamlet’s vicar*



own all land within their domain, and are expected to pass their lordship to a blood heir. Although titles vary from region to region, most lords are popularly accorded the rank of baron (in the Heartlands), lord (in the North), or viscount (in the South). As those settlements grow in power and influence, the local lords are often accorded grander titles, such as earl or duke.

Mayors are generally accorded their title by the local inhabitants, with the understanding that it could be revoked by popular consensus at any time. Mayors are seen as arbiters more than leaders, and they are expected to seek consensus among the local elite (e.g. a council of elders or local business owners) rather than issue orders without discussion.

Wardens are generally accorded their territory by a neighboring kingdom, although some claim the title due to a sense of moral obligation or religious duty. Although wardens are interested in settling the frontier, their primary concern is protecting the civilization they have left behind. Most wardens rule territories that lie astride key invasion routes and might not be economically viable in the long term. Wardens often receive logistical and military support from the neighboring kingdom they help to defend.

## vassal state vs. fiefdom

In general, most frontier settlements fail within a limited number of years because of the many dangers that haunt the wilderness regions of Faerûn. Once a settlement is established and proved viable, neighboring kingdoms inevitably want to extend their authority into the new region, but before that time, few kings or merchants want to risk precious coins on another ill-fated attempt to conquer the frontier.

Fiefdoms are independent domains that answer only to the local lord—so long as he is able to maintain and project his authority. Fiefdoms might lie within land claimed by a neighboring kingdom, but until the neighboring kingdom exerts its authority over the region (which it might not be willing or able to do), fiefdoms exist as independent, sovereign entities.

Vassal states, such as Murghôm to the east of Mulhorand or Samarach along the Chultan Peninsula, are autonomous regions subject to the general authority of a neighboring kingdom but given a large degree of independence on local issues. Many frontier settlements claimed by a strong neighboring kingdom are formed as vassal states. Others begin as independent fiefdoms but eventually become vassal states once they grow wealthy and stable enough to attract the attention of the local kingdom. Vassal states are more likely to survive due to their proximity to an allied kingdom and the possibility of being able to draw on the neighboring kingdom's resources in times of great need (such as a drought or local war). Of course, vassal states are at least loosely subject to the same laws, traditions, and customs as the kingdom to which they owe fealty, and this can reduce the incentive for some settlers seeking new land free from the heavy hand of larger, settled regions.

## PLAYING A SUBJECT OF THE CROWN

A frontier leader who is a subject of the crown must swear fealty to the crown and honor the king's commands. Kings look to such lords to provide leadership, vision, and initiative as well as to speak for the king in an area over which his hand rests lightly. Kings are quick to remove local lords of the frontier who seem overly dependent on the resources of the kingdom to solve their problems. After all, they volunteered for the risk of building a new settlement and are poised to reap great wealth if they succeed. As such, most kings do not want to invest much in such settlements (either in the form of gold, soldiers, or free supplies); ultimately, having to do so significantly undercuts the royal treasury on a high-risk investment.

## PLAYING A LORD WITHOUT ALLEGIANCE

A frontier lord who pledges allegiance to no one but himself must rely entirely on his own personal skills and his ability to inspire others to follow his lead. Lords without allegiance must play a dangerous balancing act between growth, defense, and awareness. By definition, they start out as minor lordlings, responsible for small populations, few resources, and small amounts of territory. They must grow their defenses so that the cost of annexing their territory always exceeds the value of what can be seized, yet they must not waste so much of their hard-earned treasure on armies and fortifications that they choke the much-needed growth of the settlement they lead.

## Ruling a fiefdom

The primary role of a frontier leader is establishing a civil society. Creating a functioning domain requires a steady evolution of the fiefdom through a well-understood but challenging series of economic, political, and cultural transformations. In effect, it is the role of a frontier leader to plant a banner in the wilderness, convince others to follow him, give settlers a feeling of investment in the emerging society, and defend the fruits of their hard-earned labors.

## Running a frontier domain

A frontier domain consists of one or more settlements within a modest-sized geographical region ruled by a local lord. In many respects, running a frontier domain is a lot like running a fledgling business. Folks living beyond the relatively safe confines of civilization face numerous threats to life and limb. A frontier leader must balance the various risks and carefully manage the growth of his domain.

One of the primary threats to the continued survival of a frontier settlement is internal power struggles among the settlers. Isolated settlements face numerous problems, and it is not uncommon for members of a community to feel they could be doing a better job leading the group. As such, it is very important for a frontier leader to maintain his authority in the face of internal challenges that might weaken the group as a whole. On the other

hand, everyone must do his part to keep a frontier settlement afloat. A successful frontier leader must be open to new suggestions and be willing to delegate authority as appropriate.

Another threat to the continued success of a frontier settlement revolves around the amount of attention the community attracts. Too much attention leads to the possibility of neighboring kingdoms seizing control or bandits seeking to plunder a poorly defended settlement's newfound wealth. Too little attention could lead to the diminishment of trade opportunities and slow the influx of new arrivals as folks forget about the opportunities available in a particular frontier settlement.

Frontier settlements live on a knife's edge between survival and death. Unlike towns in settled lands, frontier communities often have little to buffer themselves against disruptions in supply. A frontier settlement might receive regular shipments of food from a nearby kingdom but be too poor to build up much of a reserve. As a result, one missed caravan at the wrong time of year might be the difference between life and death.

## holding territory

Whereas established kingdoms do fight battles with one another, warfare to seize territory from another kingdom is rarely worth the cost given the propensity of the region's inhabitants to fight fiercely for their independence. On the frontier, however, territorial claims are much more tenuous, particularly for independent fiefdoms. The right to rule is maintained as much through force of will and the end of a sword as it is by tradition, patriotism, and the rule of law. As such, once a small frontier territory is seized, few dispute the right to rule by the victorious claimant.

Frontier leaders must constantly guard against those who would seize what has been built before their holdings grow sufficient to inspire feelings of nationality and cultural identity. Sometimes the best way to deter such threats is through carefully negotiated alliances, although deals with larger powers sometimes lead to the lesser partner being subsumed as a vassal state. The most successful frontier leaders recognize that the various primitive and nomadic tribes that inhabit the greater region can be allied with and played against each other to form a buffer against would-be invaders. On occasion, bolder action is required, with the local lord making a preemptive strike on a hostile neighbor before they grow strong enough to pose a similar threat in turn.

## expanding the domain

To thrive, most frontier settlements must expand and grow, incorporating new territory and new satellite settlements. Successful frontier leaders concentrate first on defense and the integrity of food stores. The former requires expanding one's domain to encompass natural defensive fortifications. For instance, after erecting a tower at the confluence of two rivers, a frontier leader might build two additional towers upriver, allowing him to defend the triangle of land between the rivers for farming. Eventually he might expand his domain to encompass the entire valley, building fortifications in the surrounding hills overlooking the natural routes leading into and out of the valley.

Second, frontier leaders should focus on defending vital trade arteries connecting their domain with the outside world. In the previous example, the lord's subsequent expansions might include erecting a series of downriver fortifications from which he can defend the flow of trade goods up and down the river. If a waterfall or ford exists in the area, he might establish a secondary settlement there to serve as a way station and secondary trading hub.

Third, frontier leaders should make contingency plans, for little help is likely to be available if an orc horde or a large contingent of brigands suddenly menaces the newly founded hold. In the previous example, the lord might establish a secondary retreat in the old cave system that once served as a lair for the goblin tribe who claimed the valley before the lord's arrival. He might then begin construction of a series of tunnels beneath the river, linking his keep in the heart of the domain to the caves in which his followers can regroup.

## obligations and duties of a frontier leader

Frontier leaders are obligated to support and defend those settlers who flock to their banner. A frontier domain has no underlying infrastructure or economy to fall back on aside from the blood, sweat, and tears of the settlers. Frontier leaders who do not lead or who avoid taking the same risks required of their followers are usually brushed aside. Likewise, frontier leaders can never rest on their laurels, for frontier settlements are rarely stable: They either grow or fade away.

It is the responsibility of a frontier leader to provide unflinching determination and a will to persevere, for settlers look for such in the face of the grave dangers the wilderness holds. A frontier leader must anticipate problems before they arise and prepare contingencies in advance. Likewise, a frontier leader must husband scarce resources (be they people or objects), allocating them based on the probability that their service will be required.

## conflicts

Conflict is inevitable and unending on the frontier. By definition, taming the frontier requires driving something or someone out of its hunting grounds or traditional lands. Likewise, the tenuous hold frontier settlements have on the land encourages conflict as well, for such insecurity rewards the use of violence far more than is the case for civilized kingdoms.

## local law vs. regional law

As discussed previously, frontier justice is usually quick and efficient, if not always just. Likewise, territorial claims on the frontier are often confused and overlapping. Local laws by which a frontier leader administers justice and assigns property rights often come into conflict with regional laws that nominally extend from neighboring kingdoms into the frontier. Oftentimes, the conflict between local law and regional law is used as a pretext for established realms to meddle in the affairs of a weaker neighbor.

For example, if a local lord were to establish a barony in the Stonelands north of Cormyr, the Forest Kingdom might initially ignore him, leaving him to develop a local tradition of justice and property rights. One such tradition might be that all settlers are judged only for their actions in the settlement, wiping the slate clean of past crimes. If a traitorous noble fled Cormyr for the Stonelands, he might be accepted into the community if he worked hard and did not cause trouble. Months later, the Purple Dragons might arrive to arrest the traitor, having finally tracked him down. Such situations require the local lord to deftly balance the conflicts of local customs and regional law, for to favor one or the other might lead to the breakup of his settlement or incite the wrath and attention of Cormyr.

In the same example, the local lord might accept becoming a vassal of Cormyr, pledging fealty to the Forest Kingdom which has a well-documented, long-standing claim to the region, albeit one that has never been enforced. However, such an alliance might raise the ire of the City of Shade, who might then threaten to destroy the fiefdom if it did not pledge allegiance to the reborn empire of Netheril. Again, situations involving competing legal claims to land might undermine the lord's perceived authority to grant property rights and thus undermine the motivation of the settlers.

## Bandits and Brigands

Not unlike caravans or sailing ships, frontier domains are found in lawless regions between established centers of civilization. Outlaws of many stripes prey on caravanners and settlers alike in regions where large military forces rarely tread. Although frontier

domains are less mobile than caravans or ships, they are more apt to have significant defenses against brigandage. Nevertheless, since they cannot move, bandits and brigands have more time to assess the defenses of an isolated frontier settlement, which they see as little more than a bounty of supplies to tide them over until the next raid.

One of the best ways to reduce the threat of brigandage is to induce roving bands of outlaws that it is in their best interests to join the settlers and earn a reward for the type of risks they are taking anyway. Of course, some brigands and bandits are temperamentally unsuited for such settled life, and frontier lords must drill their troops to capture, kill, or drive off such miscreants.

## Monstrous Threats

Although most liege lords begin to establish their frontier domain by driving off the monsters that inhabit the upper reaches of the food chain, monstrous threats never entirely subside. New food sources, such as fields of grain or herds of passive livestock, attract new types of monsters such as ankhegs and dragons, which see such feed stores as easy pickings. Primitive tribes with rapid breeding rates might withdraw upon defeat only to return several years later with a new crop of warriors in tow, as has been the case with far too many orc hordes in the North. Likewise, nomadic creatures might return at any time, unaware that a new settlement has been established within their traditional hunting lands.

Monstrous threats can usually be dissuaded by making food or other items they covet not worth the effort to seize. For example, in the North, many frontier settlements keep herds of rothé in nearby caverns rather than allow sheep and cattle to graze in

Illustration by Ron Lemen



*Fires on the horizon does not bode well for this peaceful kingdom*

plain sight on the surface. In the Inner Sea lands, shepherds prefer to employ large packs of herd dogs to guard small handfuls of livestock for days at a time. The dogs are trained to keep the livestock from clustering into large herds, reducing the threat of large predators gobbling up a large meal in a matter of minutes. Although small groups of livestock are lost on a regular basis, no one monster is likely to destroy a shepherd's entire flock.

Powerful monstrous threats, such as dragons who awake from a long sleep only to find a newly constructed settlement outside the mouth of their lair, might be too strong for the local settlers to confront directly. In such cases, the threat can often be averted by negotiating a suitable monthly bribe. In the case of an overly neighborly red dragon, for instance, a community might pledge a regular supply of livestock and half the takings from the local mines.

## Insidious Threats

As a frontier settlement grows in strength and number, it begins to attract predators that prey on such communities from within. Many doppelgangers naturally gravitate to isolated settlements on the frontier lacking in significant arcane and divine magical support, because such settlements have little means of defending themselves against the infiltration of shapechangers. Once established, predatory doppelgangers prey on new arrivals that are rarely missed if they disappear a few days after joining the community. Most are falsely presumed to have returned to the comforts and safety of civilization.

Likewise, creatures such as beholders, illithids, and vampires—who are able to *charm* or *dominate* key individuals—also find isolated frontier communities easy targets for subjugation. Such predators usually establish a lair near or in the territory claimed by the local lord and then begin bending key individuals to their will. The lack of sophisticated magical defenses coupled with the limited number of individuals make it possible for a secret master to dominate everyone in a position of authority and thereby force an entire community into unwitting service.

The possibility of such insidious attacks essentially necessitates the acquisition of some magical defenses by frontier leaders who hope to succeed in building a new community. Likewise, most frontier communities are forced to develop some aspects traditionally accorded to secret societies—such as spies or secret police—to keep such insidious threats from penetrating their ranks.

## Diseases

Though crowded urban conditions (particularly in ports or river cities) strongly encourage the rapid spread of contagious illnesses, and all caravan routes are more likely to be pathways of infection than sparsely-settled backlands, “strange new afflictions” arise most often in frontier areas, where civilized folk come into frequent contact with wild beasts, insects, and plants.

Widespread plagues are now few in the Realms. This is due to effective herbal treatments; rulers and priesthoods forcibly (or covertly, in food or drink) administering treatments to subjects, soldiers, and worshipers; childhood exposure to many germs and hence strong personal resistance; and centuries of intermingling of species (both crossbreeding and dwelling and trading together). The worst natural outbreaks of disease occur when populations face infections to which they've never been exposed before; most such instances happened long ago in the Realms, leaving behind immunities in survivors.

Most Faerûnian folk know roughly how known diseases are transmitted, but might disagree sharply on treatments (beyond the basics of rest, care, bathing, and feeding victims purgatives or careful amounts of “test” foods). They tend to trust first in memories of what worked for them or their friends, and secondly in local “wise women” or elders.

Behind some of these disagreements are various evil-aligned clergies, notably the church of Talona, some of whom spread misinformation (lower-ranking priests usually do this unwittingly) or keep secrets so as to increase the faith's influence and control—and encourage a continuing flow of coins in payment for healings. Some outlaws have found that spreading rumors of disease (particularly when symptoms are faked by a few individuals) is a very effective way of getting villagers to flee, at least temporarily, and leave much of their property unguarded.

Visibly diseased strangers (and those thought to be mad) are apt to be slain or driven away (often being threatened by archers or with fire); thus, the afflicted tend to “cover up” and approach settlements, inns, and taverns by night or in fogs.

Known contagious afflictions in the realms tend to be named for their visible symptoms, and include:



*Blacktongue claims another poor victim*

**The Five Fevers:** blacklung fever, blacktongue, marsh fever or sallar (typhus), shaking fever, and winterchill fever (pneumonia).

**The Three Plagues:** featherlung, spotted plague, the shaking plague (not the same as the shaking fever, which recently struck Scardale).

**Other Afflictions:** darkrot (gangrene), flesh rot (a communicable form of mummy rot), *green rot* (scaly death, a magical disease tied to Talona), and whitewasting (leprosy).

Disease	Infection	DC	Incubation	Damage
Blacklung fever	Inhaled	16	1 day	1d4 Con
Blacktongue	Ingested	18	1d4 days	1d4 Dex
Darkrot <sup>1</sup>	Injury	12	1 day	1d6 Dex <sup>2</sup>
Featherlung	Inhaled	19	1d3 days	1d6 Con
Flesh rot	Contact	15	1d4 days	1d4 Con
<i>Green rot</i>	Injury	20	1 day	1d6 Int
Marsh fever <sup>3</sup>	Injury	15	3d6 days	1d6 Con
Shaking fever	Contact	13	2 days	1d4 Dex
Spotted plague	Contact	16	1 day	1d4 Cha
Whitewasting	Contact	18	5 years	1d6 Dex
Winterchill fever	Inhaled	12	1d6 days	1d4 Con

1 Darkrot is a risk every time a character is wounded with a piercing or slashing attack and the resultant wound is left untreated and uncleaned for more than 24 hours.

2 A failed save requires the character to make a second save to avoid losing a limb. Roll 1d4: 1 left leg, 2 right leg, 3 left arm, 4 right arm.

3 Marsh fever is normally communicated from vermin to mammals. There is a 2% chance a vermin is contagious with this disease.

## Rewards

On the frontier, coins are less valuable than a secure place to spend the night and a regular source of food and drink. The frontier gives those who work for it the ability to chart their own destiny, free from the bureaucratic, political, and religious strictures of their homeland—at least for a time. In addition to the sense of accomplishment they obtain by building such communities and establishing their independence, frontier leaders receive their rewards in the form of lasting and tangible assets. In particular, those with the vision and dedication to establish new fiefdoms on the frontier end up controlling large swaths of territory, with some of it under their personal control (i.e. their estate) and some falling under their political control. The latter usually provides a steady stream of income in the form of taxes or tithes, some of which must be reinvested in the community and some of which usually goes to build the frontier leader's personal fortune.

## frontier strongholds

Frontier strongholds range from natural caves with boulders piled across their entrances every night, to gigantic fortresses built to withstand assaults by giants and dragons. Most are small, simple fortifications designed to protect families or all the folk of a village—plus their goods and food stores—at a site where natural drinking water (or a well) exists and some outlook of approaches to the stronghold is possible (for example, from a tower built atop a height of land).

Two sample strongholds, one a well-established fortified manor and the other a small, simple castle, are briefly detailed below.

### wolfwatch manor

This old stone manor house is typical of the smallest fortified “grand homes” found in the Sembian uplands and the lower Dessarin and Delimbiyr valleys of the Sword Coast North. More recently-built manors are larger and grander. A building such as this would initially be built as the country residence of a family of minor nobility or wealthy gentry (land-owning merchants seeking ennoblement) and their servants and guests, and it would be retained as a hunting lodge if the family attained a city home. If its owners died or abandoned it, three families of foresters or farmers could well end up sharing Wolfwatch Manor.

Wolfwatch Manor is now one of the “Ghost Holds” west of Battledale, abandoned to beasts, brigands, and the encroaching forest. Shaded and overgrown with trees, it stands on a knoll, enveloped by rings of defenses. Beginning on the inside and going outward, Wolfwatch Manor is surrounded by a steep earthen rampart, descending on the outside to a “dry moat” (a trench as wide as a mule's body), which in turn rises into a ring of old stumps among which brambles and thorn bushes have been encouraged to grow into a nigh-impenetrable hedge, pierced by a secret crawl-path in one direction and a single cart-track (with a swing-log gate) in another.

In recent years, Wolfwatch Manor has become a secret base for Cormanthor drow active in the area; they can keep a close watch on merchant traffic and activities in Battledale from its towers. Although he is only infrequently in residence, the current “lord” of the manor is a drow commander named Ilthivaar Daemonscar (CE male drow rogue 2/cleric 5 [Vhaeraun]/shadowdancer 2). Ilthivaar seeks eventually to claim Battledale as his personal fiefdom, but he is still a long way from dislodging the “primitive” inhabitants (i.e. the Dalesfolk).

### GROUND FLOOR

**1. Great Room:** The wide double doors of the Manor open into this large room, where livestock, wagons of hay, and chopped firewood can be kept in winter, and feasting and general living carried on in all seasons.

**2. Kitchen:** A large hearth and chimney dominate this room, where meals are prepared at all hours, and herbs and medicines are stored and used. The kitchen is equipped with cutting-counters, warming-tray-racks, and deep sinks.



**3. Rearhall:** Typical of upland dwellings, this “crossroads” room contains the (covered) head of the well, plus buckets and water-storage kegs. Ale kegs and brine-kegs of fish and salted meats are also stored here along the walls, and cages for doves and chickens fill the southwestern part of the room. When a lord was in residence, the birds yielded eggs and were roasted for the table, and some message-doves were kept here too. Additional pens are located outside the manor house, but the breeding birds were kept here.

Stairs depart the rearhall for the upper floor and (through a barred door) down to the cellars.

**4. Pantry:** The pantry is the home of the Manor cats, whose ancestors used to kill mice and rats here, and so guard the household’s bread and cheese, stored on stone shelves under metal domes). Herbs were hung to dry in the rafters, and sausages, fruit, field vegetables, and smoked meats and fish were kept in barrels here. The Manor cats are now feral, but they do not bother humanoid intruders.

**5. Back Stair:** This stair leads (through two hatches) to a dovecote housing the Manor’s messenger pigeons surmounted by a lookout turret (not mapped; directly above room 6 and equal to it in dimensions) where a signal beacon of dried firewood is kept under wraps (a covering of old cloaks, sewn together and sealed with tar, and kept in place against wind by stout, peg-held wooden frames). From this turret, crossbowmen could command the approaches to the manor from the north and west. When in residence, the drow usually use this turret for the same purpose.

**6. North Wallchamber:** The north wallchamber is where the lads and unmarried men of the household customarily slept. This

room had crossbows hung ready on the walls, and walls pierced with firing ports (sliding boards on interior-wall frames normally cover them against avian and mice invasions). The drow use it to similar effect.

**7. Longroom:** Walled with workbenches and crammed-full cupboards, this chamber served as a tool room and wardrobe for the men of the Manor.

**8. South Wallchamber:** The south wallchamber served as shared sleeping-quarters for all couples among the Manor servants. This room had crossbows hung ready on the walls, and has walls pierced with firing ports (covered as in room 6). The drow use it to similar effect.

**9. Turret Room:** Normally used as a workshop and drying-chamber, cluttered with sawhorses, shavings, and racks for clothes, tanned hides, and strung and sliced fruits and vegetables, this chamber has walls pierced with many firing ports (covered as in room 6) and two interior stone walls to give defenders cover against arrows and quarrels fired in by attackers. The drow use it to similar effect.

**10. Guest Bedchamber:** This room was once a luxuriously-furnished bedchamber, used as a study and sewing-room when the Manor has no guests.

**11. Master Bedchamber:** The lord’s bedchamber and office was once a sumptuously furnished room, always guarded by personal servants. It is now employed to similar effect by Ilthivaar Daemonscar.

**12. Armory:** This locked room contained the lord’s valuables (in carry-coffers trapped with needle and fall bell), his personal armor, and the Manor’s best weaponry. (Polearms and knives were kept in wall-racks in the Rearhall.)



## UPPER FLOOR

**13. Courtwell:** Open to the Rearhall (room 8) and its ascending stair, this hallway has shuttered windows along its west wall. Plants (herbs and edibles, such as pole-beans) were grown on window-tables beneath them.

**14. Maiden Chamber:** The Maiden Chamber served as a bedchamber shared by all the young and unmarried women of the household. It was crowded with bunks and a single chair and washstand.

**15. Crone Chamber:** The Crone Chamber served as a bedchamber shared by all the older unmarried women of the household, Older married couples stayed here as well when they could not all be accommodated in room 8. This area is furnished as room 14.

**16. Box Room:** The box room served as storage for everything that would have been ruined by damp in the cellars. Typically, its contents were dominated by clothing and carry-coffers full of personal belongings. In addition, this room could be used as an overflow bedchamber.

**17. Upper Turret:** The upper turret served as a sewing-room and retiring room for the women of the household. It was equipped for defense just as room 9 is, containing interior protective walls (covered with storage racks) and a narrow ascending stair that ascends (via a hatch) to a rooftop lookout and firing-platform (not mapped or shown). The drow use it to similar effect.

## CELLARS

**18. Downstair:** The room at the base of the stairs contained a table displaying tinderbox, flint, steel, tapers, and lanterns, and several casks of wine.

**19. Fruit Cellar:** The fruit cellar held casks sunk in sand. The casks were filled with apples and other gathered fruit, preserved for winter eating.

**20. Strong Cellar:** The strong cellar held raised pallets supporting coffins (awaiting deaths), stored foodstuffs (overflow from room 25), and valuables, in locked carry-coffers.

**21. Cells:** The cells were composed of a row of eight locked cages for confining prisoners, the infectious, hunting dogs, beasts (captured live and kept for later slaughter and eating), and the storage of bulky valuables best locked away.

**22. Lime Pit:** The lime pit is a deep pit full of natural lime, where all refuse except chamberpot-waste was thrown. (Lime dissolves bones and all, and reduces all odors of decomposition).

**23. Chapel:** This chamber served as an all-faiths room with a kneeling-pad and simple stone altar, for private prayer and simple religious rituals. The drow have transformed it into a dark shrine of the Masked Lord.

**24. Sick Room:** The sick room was an isolated bedchamber where anyone ailing, wounded, or near childbirth or death could be tended in relative quiet and isolation.

**25. Granary:** The granary held dry goods storage, in bins, casks, and (on raised pallets) sacks, accessible to one corner of the kitchen via a shaft and hatches. (Ladders were kept here, and "reachdown hooks" hung on shaft walls were accessible from kitchen above).

**26. Armory, Workshop, and Storage:** The "everything" room was used for storage of things that needed mending and for working on them and doing other maintenance work (such as dipping, staining, dyeing, and coating things) that involved vats of harmful or odiferous liquids.

## stormhawk keep

This "foursquare" castle is the first step up from a simple lone-turret keep, and is typical of small frontier fortifications throughout the Heartlands and the North. Stormhawk Keep was the abode of a self-styled noble family in the hill country northwest of Proskur, and it still serves as the central meeting-place, temple, and market of the village of Stormhawk. It crowns a hill that was initially cleared of brush to yield grazing-land and deprive attackers of cover; the cottages and yard-gardens of Stormhawk now cover the entire hillside.

Only the ground floor of Stormhawk Keep is shown. In times of trouble, the entire village moves into the castle, hobbling their livestock in the Foreyard as well as piling hay, grains, and firewood there. Under the "square" of rooms joining the four corner towers is a dungeon and granary level, and each tower has four levels of bedchambers above the ground floor, surmounted by a turret-top firing-platform (surrounded by crenellated battlements, and sporting a flagstaff and a ballista).

Stormhawk is currently ruled by a mayor, descended from the castle's last seneschal. The mayor has transformed one of Stormhawk's corner towers into a small personal suite. He runs the bedchambers in the rest of the keep as a guesthouse for visitors to the village. The mayor has long sought to claim the mantle of Stormhawk's lordship for himself, but the people of Stormhawk see little need to move to an inherited lordship.

**1. Foreyard:** The foreyard is a grassy yard (rising from outer gates toward area 2) used for assembling mounted parties, storing and hitching up wagons, deliveries and loadings, exercise, weapons-practice, and as a playground for children.

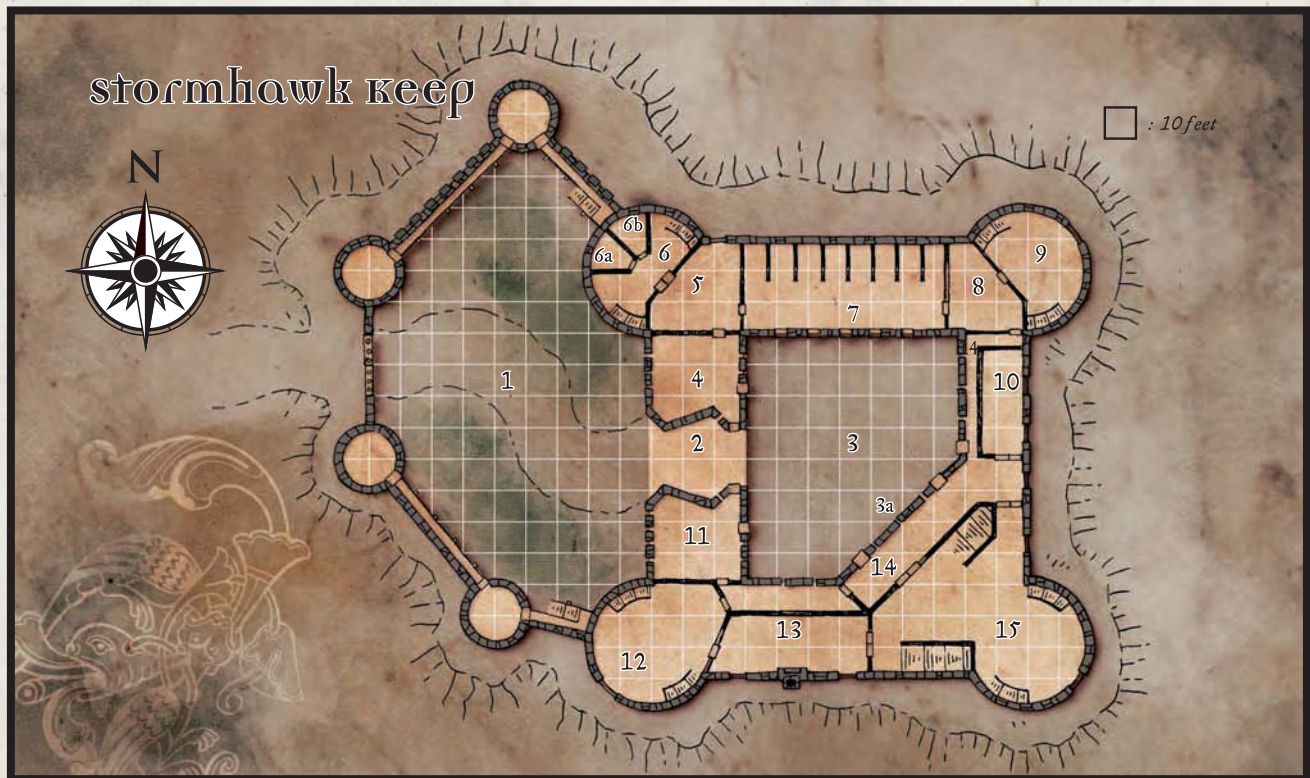
**2. Portcullis Throat:** Dotted lines mark where two portcullis "walls" can be dropped (or raised, via chain-winch) from an overhead "Lintel Chamber" (not shown) that links rooms 4 and 11, and has firing-ports in its floor allowing defenders to attack intruders venturing through area 2.

**3. Inner Yard:** The cobbled (against mud) central courtyard of the castle contains a covered well at 3A (normally drawn on by servants to keep storage barrels and horse-troughs continually full of water).

**4. Armory Guardroom:** The armory is a guardroom where weapons and armor are maintained and stored. Firing-ports (X marks on map) open into area 3, and a shielded ballista is mounted to fire through a horizontal-slit port (marked by an arrow) through area 2, so as to "rake" area 1.

**5. Day Room:** This chamber is a busy "crossroads" lounge and living room for castle inhabitants. It has boot and cloak storage and cleaning for severe weather.

**6. Southwest Lort:** This ground floor room of southwest tower turret has a landing offering access to the mens' garderobe (privy) at 6A and the womens' garderobe (privy) at 6B. Stairs lead down



to the cellars, and a stair to the upper levels (bedchambers) of the southwest tower.

**7. Stables:** The stables include a row of eight box stalls and a birthing stall for the castle milk-cow and mounts (horses).

**8. Ready Larder:** In this room, prepared food is assembled and kept ready (in covered dishes) on tables for transport to room 15 and various bedchambers around the castle.

**9. Wine Lort:** Dominated by two huge casks, this wine storage chamber has stairs rising to the upper levels (bedchambers) of the northwest tower, and stairs descending to many pantries and granary cellars on the dungeon level.

**10. Dry Kitchen:** This always-busy room is given over to baking and “dry” meal preparation (cutting and serving of cheeses, cold meats, pickles, salads).

**11. Slumber Guardroom:** This guardroom is where defenders live and sleep (bunk beds along south wall). It has firing-ports (X marks on map) into area 3, and a shielded ballista mounted to fire through a horizontal-slit port (marked by an arrow) through area 2, so as to “rake” area 1.

**12. Servants’ Lort:** The ground floor room of southwest tower turret is an “easy room” for servants to relax in, offering access to a stairs down to the cellars, and stairs to the upper levels (bedchambers) of the southeast tower.

**13. Carvery Kitchen:** This ever-bustling room is where meats are cooked and carved for direct serving to room 15.

**14. Archers’ Walk Passages:** The main connecting hallways of the castle have firing-ports (“X” marks on map) into area 3. These are normally covered by slate panels slid into frames inside the walls.

**15. Feasting Hall:** This paneled, staghead hunting trophy- and shield-hung chamber is crowded with massive wooden tables and chairs (and “serving” sideboards and side tables). It is used for dining, meetings, and local sessions of justice-courts. It has stairs ascending to the upper levels (bedchambers) of the northeast tower, and descending to the dungeon levels.

## Example: Barony of Starshadow

Although this campaign arc has its roots in the fall of the Kingdom of Man, it deals with events of the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). If the player characters get involved, they might seek to reestablish the Barony of Starshadow, not realizing that Erthaer Javilarhhsson has possessed one of their members, or realize the futility of such an endeavor and attempt to lay the ghost of a fallen baron to rest forever.

## Background

In the Year of the Stricken Sun (691 DR), Lord Erthaer Javilarhhsson, son of King Javilarhh “the Dark” Snowsword, petitioned his nephew, King Davyd Snowsword, for title to Starshadow Vale (so known for its position on the southwestern fringe of the High Forest, poetically placed “in the shadow of the Star Mounts”). King Davyd elevated Lord Erthaer to the rank of Baron of Dauntylgar, and gave him title to Starshadow Vale upon condition that the newly installed baron (or his heirs) could hold the land for at least a dozen winters.

In the Year of Clutching Dusk (702 DR), orc raiders from the High Forest swept through the lower Delimbiyr valley, inflicting heavy losses on the splinter kingdoms of Delimbiyr that were formerly part of the Kingdom of Man, until the Duke of Calandor finally mustered an army strong enough to break the Horned Horde. Among the realms left shattered in the horde's wake was the Barony of Starshadow, just eleven winters after its founding. Unbeknownst to the humans of the region, the orcs of the western High Forest considered Starshadow Vale to be a sacred burial ground, and it was the founding of the barony and subsequent wave of settlement in the region that precipitated the forming of the horde.

The Barony of Starshadow might have faded into history, a minor realm that lasted barely a heartbeat, if not for the return of its founder, Baron Erthaer, as a ghost. The ghost baron refused to rest until Dauntylgar was restored to its earlier status and maintained for at least one full winter. Unfortunately for those who have fallen victim to the ghost baron's possession attempts, events have conspired to defeat such efforts on every occasion.

In the Year of the Curse (882 DR), the Company of the Yellow Star took refuge among the stones of fallen Starshadow Tower while following the remnants of the old dwarven cart path that led north through the forest to the Hall of Four Ghosts. The ghost baron possessed the leader of the company, a warrior named Heldack Ironclaw, who then convinced his fellows that they could make more coin by claiming the vale for their own than they could by plundering old tombs. The Company of the Yellow Star spent the summer months visiting taverns throughout the region, mustering a host of landless men willing to settle Starshadow Vale under the Ironclaw Banner. By early autumn, there were at least three dozen families settled in the valley, and work was well underway to rebuild Starshadow Tower. All this came to naught when a horde of demons erupted from what was then known as the city of Ascalhorn. The demon horde quickly overran elven Eaelann and dwarven Ammarindar, unleashing successive waves of refugees. The fledging Barony of Starshadow fell less than a fortnight later when landless warriors led by Nimoar the Reaver swept through the vale, ravaging the harvest and setting fire to the small settlement.

The Year of the Dracorage (1018 DR) unleashed great devastation across the North, as enraged wyrms attacked cities and

travelers seemingly at random and without restraint. Among those caught up in the chaos was one Tordath Ironfist, blood of Turgo. The dwarven lord and his followers were returning to the Forlorn Hills after visiting kin working a small mine in the depths of the High Forest, but they were forced to take shelter amid the ruins of Starshadow Tower by the passage of an errant green wyrm. The ghost baron possessed Tordath and then led him back to Firehammer Hold, where the charismatic young clan leader convinced many of his kinsman to return with him to the

vale. The Stout Folk rebuilt Starshadow Tower within a matter of months, and then set about establishing a ruby mine along a nearby ridge. Less than two months after their arrival, the dwarves of Starshadow Tower were no more, and the ghost baron's keep was once again a smoking ruin. The great red dragon named Imvaernarhro (detailed in Chapter 7), torn from slumber by the madness of the Rage, set fire to the vale, quickly killing Tordath and his followers and tearing into the ruby-laden ridge with his grasping claws. Since that time, the Stout Folk have avoided Starshadow Vale, but tales still speak of the fortune in rubies they left behind that might now lie in the depths of Imvaernarhro's lair.

Tragedy returned to Starshadow Vale in the Year of the Horn (1222 DR), when a Waterdhavian hunting party led by Lord Ornigar Tchazzam made camp amid the ruins of Starshadow Tower in the early days of Tarsakh. The ghost baron possessed the young Tchazzam scion, who then became obsessed with founding his own hold in the vale. That summer, Lord Ornigar enlisted the financial backing of several noble families; in the fall,

he returned to Starshadow Vale accompanied by a dozen scions of Waterdeep's nobility and ten times that number of retainers. Backed by a large amount of coin and the arrogance of youth, the nobles quickly restored Starshadow Tower with the aid of spellcasters in their employ. However, their efforts quickly came to naught, for some ill-advised plundering of the orc-built barrows that dotted the vale quickly drew the attention of the Horned Lord and Tanglethorn orc tribes of the High Forest. Within a tenday, the Blackhorn Horde had overrun the vale, and Tchazzam and his ill-fated followers lay crushed beneath their boots.

In the decades since its last fall, Starshadow Vale has lain untouched, as rumors of ghostly hauntings and the very real danger of the neighboring orc tribes deter any attempt to resettle



*The ghost of Baron Erthaer Javilarhbsson*

Illustration by Darken

the land. Nevertheless, the ghost baron continues his interminable wait, convinced he can rebuild the dale if only he can find a would-be lordling to possess.

## Baron Erthaer Javilarhsson

In life, Baron Erthaer Javilarhsson stood well over 6 feet in height with fair skin, piercing gray eyes, an aquiline visage, and jet-black hair worn loose beneath his helm. He had a hearty, ready laugh and a thick, gravelly voice that commanded attention. As a ghost, he has the misty transparency of the incorporeal undead, and his visage is tinged with a hint of madness.

The youngest son of King Javilarhh "the Dark" Snowsword was raised amid the trappings of royalty at the palace in Delimbiyran, but he spent much of the youth wandering the farthest reaches of the Dessarin and Delimbiy valleys. In the Year of the Stricken Sun (691 DR), he returned to court convinced he had found a valley he wished to call home. With his kinsman's consent, Lord Erthaer raised a host of men and led the settlement of Starshadow Vale, seizing the land from orcs and other fell creatures.

In the years that followed, Lord Erthaer proved a fair and able ruler, increasing the size and diversity of his fiefdom in a cautious and conservative fashion. However, the death of King Davyd in the Year of the Triton's Horn (697 DR) and the subsequent collapse of the Kingdom of Man precipitated a great wave of homelessness throughout the region, and refugees began streaming into Starshadow Vale.

The next seven years saw the rapid and uncontrolled growth of Starshadow Vale, and Lord Erthaer struggled to maintain his authority. The newly arrived settlers began logging the surrounding woods at a precipitous pace, and overhunting stripped much of the surrounding woodlands of game. In the valley, desperate persons began looting the barrows that lined the valley floor, incurring the wrath of the orc tribes in the surrounding woodlands. Lord Erthaer died a slow, lingering death, laid low by an unlucky arrow shot and buried amid the corpses of the final assault on Starshadow Tower. As the endless tide of the Horned Horde swept through the vale, overwhelming everything he had built, his thoughts turned defiant and he swore to all the gods that he would not be denied.

### ERTHAER JAVILARHSSON

CR 20

Male ghost (augmented elite Illuskan human) ranger 13/dread commando<sup>HB</sup> 5

CG Medium undead (augmented humanoid, incorporeal)

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Spot** +23, **Listen** +23

**Languages** Common, Illuskan

**AC** 15, touch 15, flat-footed 13 or 23, touch 12, flat-footed 21 against ethereal foes; **Dodge**, **Mobility**

**hp** 122 (18 HD); **DR** 5/magic, incorporeal traits, rejuvenation

**Immune** undead traits

**Resist** fire 10, evasion, turn resistance +4

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +14, **Will** +7

**Speed** fly 30 ft. (perfect) (6 squares), stealthy movement, swift tracker, woodland stride

**Melee** corrupting touch +20 melee touch or +22 against ethereal foes (1d6 or 1d6+4 against ethereal foes) or

**Melee** +1 *orc bane longsword* +23/+18/+13/+8 (1d8+5/19-20) or

**Melee** +1 *orc bane longsword* +21/+16/+11/+6 (1d8+5/19-20) and

+2 *distance returning cold iron throwing axe* +22/+17/+12 (1d6+4)

**Ranged** +2 *distance returning cold iron throwing axe* +22 (1d6+6)

**Base Atk** +18; **Grp** +22

**Atk Options** Great Cleave, Power Attack, Spring Attack, favored enemy orcs +8, favored enemy magical beasts +4, favored enemy goblinoids +2, manifestation, sudden strike +3d6

**Special Actions** corrupting touch, malevolence (DC 18), telekinesis (DC 18; CL 18th)

**Combat Gear** *born of blasting*

**Ranger Spells Prepared** (CL 6th):

3rd—*plant growth*

2nd—*cat's grace*, *protection from energy*

1st—*alarm*, *entangle* (DC 12)

**Abilities** Str 18 (— when manifested), Dex 14, Con —, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 16

**SQ** animal companion (none at present), armored ease, camouflage, team initiative bonus, wild empathy +16 (+12 magical beasts)

**Feats** Dodge, Cleave, Endurance, Foe Hunter<sup>PG</sup> (orcs), Great Cleave, Greater Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Leadership, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting

**Skills** Climb +4 (+6 involving climbing ropes), Diplomacy +7, Escape Artist +2 (+4 involving ropes), Hide +31, Intimidate +7, Jump +9, Knowledge (geography) +5, Knowledge (nature) +18, Listen +31, Move Silently +23, Search +8, Spot +31, Survival +18 (+20 to keep from getting lost or avoid hazards and in aboveground natural environments), Swim +9, Use Rope +7

**Possessions** Eaerlanni plate (+3 *fire resistance* *invulnerability woodwalk*<sup>RW</sup> *mithral full plate*), Tuskreaver (+1 *orc bane longsword*), Orcsloss (an orc blade formerly named Feyshot; +2 *distance returning cold iron throwing axe*), Erthaer's Horn (*born of blasting*)

**Stealthy Movement (Ex)** Erthaer takes no penalty on Hide or Move Silently checks while moving at up to his normal speed, and takes only a -10 penalty on Hide and Move Silently checks when running or charging.

**Sudden Strike (Ex)** Whenever a living target is denied its Dexterity bonus to AC against one of Erthaer's lethal physical attacks, Erthaer deals an extra 3d6 points of damage. Ranged attacks only count if the target is within 30 feet.

**Armored Ease (Ex)** Erthaer reduces the armor check penalty of any armor with which he is proficient by 4.

**Team Initiative (Ex)** All allies within 30 feet who can see Erthaer (including Erthaer) gain a +5 competence bonus on initiative checks.

**Hook** "My time has come; it is not yet over. Dauntylgar will rise atop tusker corpses, and through you I will live to see my destiny fulfilled!"

## Leadership and influence

Erthaer is a leader well regarded for his fairness and generosity. In life, his base Leadership score was 21, and he had a reputation for fairness and generosity (+1). The fall of Starshadow is considered a failure (-1), but this only applies after he became a ghost. When alive, he was able to bequeath resources to those who came and worked the land (+2), was self-sufficient in defense (+1), and was self-sufficient in basic necessities (+1). As such, his effective Leadership score was 25.

Erthaer's cohort was the Swordcaptain Mhaelorrin (CG male half Illuskan human-moon elf ranger 6/wildrunner<sup>rw</sup> 9), whom he saved from orcs in the same battle he won *Orcsloss*. (At the DM's option, Mhaelorrin might also survive as a ghost.) Although his followers are also long dead, Erthaer is entitled to 190 1st-level followers, 19 2nd-level followers, 10 3rd-level followers, 5 4th-level followers, 3 5th-level followers, 2 6th-level followers, and 1 7th-level follower. (Note that having a stronghold grants a +2 to his effective leadership when attracting followers.) In the past, most of Erthaer's low-level followers were human warriors, while his higher-ranking followers tended to be human fighters, ranger, and scouts.

Once he regains his cohort and followers (+328), Erthaer has a base Influence modifier of +328, and an actual Influence modifier of +1. This number is likely to rise, however, assuming he manages to draw followers from influential organizations and achieves some early successes.

## Timeline

The following timeline outlines the events of the Starshadow Vale campaign arc in the Year of Lightning Storms (1374 DR). Depending on their relationship to the Shattered Sword Band, the PCs can lead, assist, undermine, or observe this campaign arc, sparking a series of related adventures ensuring its success or preventing its successful conclusion.

**Kythorn 24:** The Band of Falling Waters, composed of adventurers from Loudwater, departs Secomber intent on exploring the legendary Hall of Four Ghosts.

**Kythorn 27:** The Band of Falling Waters takes refuge from a series of devastating lightning storms amid the ruins of Starshadow Tower. During the night, the ghost baron possesses the leader of the band, Dacla Swiftarrow (LN female half-moon elf ranger 9/wizard 1/arcane archer 3).

**Flamerule 12:** Dacla Swiftarrow returns to Loudwater, intent on recruiting settlers to establish a new settlement in the shadow of the High Forest.

**Flamerule 14:** Word spreads through Loudwater that Starshadow Vale is haunted, severely curtailing Dacla's ability to recruit new followers.

**Flamerule 29:** Dacla arrives in Secomber in search of new recruits.

**Midsummer:** On Midsummer's night, Dacla is observed clad in a halo of white fire. Rumors spread that she is blessed of the Morninglord and that her vision of a new kingdom is blessed by the gods.

**Elesias 1:** Dozens of would-be settlers pledge to join Dacla in Starshadow Vale.

**Elesias 14:** The Starshadow March heads north toward the border of the High Forest.

**Elesias 17:** Dacla and her followers arrive at the ruins of Starshadow Tower. Work on rebuilding the structure begins almost immediately.

**Eleint 29:** Work on Starshadow Tower is nearly complete, thanks to hard work and judicious use of magic. Although the tower is still in disrepair, Dacla's followers expect it should provide sufficient shelter and protection to make it through the winter.

**Highharvestide:** Dacla orders a small celebration to mark the arrival and storage of the last shipment of food stores from Secomber. During the celebration, word spreads that three settlers are missing.

**Marpenoth 1:** The shattered bodies of the three missing settlers are found atop one of the vale's many barrows. The barrow itself has been opened up as if ripped by a massive claw. Dacla leads a small band into the barrow where they find a warren of tunnels and a large band of orcish wights.

**Marpenoth 12:** Five more settlers vanish. Their bodies are found after nightfall atop another opened burial mound. Seven settlers are lost battling the host of wights that swarm forth from the barrow. In the days that follow, wight attacks become increasingly common.

**Uktar 9:** Starshadow Tower is attacked by a skeletal wurm during an early winter blizzard, and no tower guards survive to give an account of their foe.

**Uktar 19:** Word spreads through Starshadow Vale that a skeletal dragon has been seen flying above the valley.

**Uktar 21:** Most of the settlers meet and demand that Lady Dacla lead them south to Secomber before winter sets in for good. Lady Dacla refuses to entertain the notion, appealing to their desire to build a new settlement.

**Uktar 24:** Word reaches Starshadow Vale that a few settlers attempted to make their way to Secomber on their own, only to be turned back by roving bands of wights that stalked the low hills south of the vale.

**The Feast of the Moon:** Starshadow Vale is attacked again on a clear, moonlit night by a great dracolich. Lady Dacla and her followers manage to drive it off, but not before the roof of Starshadow Tower is shattered by the wurm's claws.

**Nightal 1:** After a herculean effort to move the settlement's food stores and clearing the tunnels of wights, Lady Dacla leads her remaining followers down into the first barrow to be opened. The settlers quickly collapse those tunnels believed to lead to other barrows. Few believe they can survive the winter.

# KING OF THE ROAD

**A**lmost every city and market town has its lawkeepers (the “Watch,” locally garrisoned soldiers, or both), but what of the countryside—the open road and meandering backcountry lanes, haunts of outlaws and brigands? Patrols upholding law and order can’t be everywhere at all times, and Faerûn never seems to know shortages of cutpurses, thugs, or prowling monsters. How can society prevail against them and make every road safe enough for locals to walk alone to market, to say nothing of outlander peddlers, pilgrims, and lone-wagon merchants?

In many wilderlands, of course, swords and spells are the only law. Even large armed bands are regarded as food by lurking beasts. Yet claimed lands (realms) should be safer than that, and usually are. Not through smiles from the gods or some magic emanating from every border-cairn, but because of hard, diligent work in all weather done by gamekeepers, foresters (many of them rangers expert in the territory over which they range), traveling Harpers and other bards (who gather information and pass it along to the authorities, innkeepers, tavernmasters, and folks who shelter them for a night), and armed patrols of lawkeepers.

Among those lawkeepers are marshals (called “king’s officers” in some places and “lawswords” in others) and heralds. The former are government officers, enforcing the law of the land. The latter are government-sponsored but quasi-independent neutral arbitrators of etiquette, whose actions reduce deception and encourage certain laws and customs to hold sway from realm to realm.

## Long Arms of the Law

Marshals and heralds contribute to local maintenance of law and order in very different ways. Marshals wield the authority of the ruler or government they represent, often commanding others and using the sword and the threat of force. Heralds wield the authority of “the Heralds” across Faerûn, and their weapons are social censure and the power to fine offenders and to insist on proper courtesies. Both might be called on to act as witnesses

or even criminal investigators—and if wise, they work together, maintain cordial relations, and take care to understand the rights, purview, and limitations of the other.

## what marshals do

A marshal might or might not have a badge or a uniform, but does bear something (perhaps just a belt buckle or tattoo of particular design) identifying her as an officer of the ruler or government, charged to uphold and apply the law. Marshals investigate, arrest, and “show the flag” (encourage law-abiding behavior by their visible presence, reminding folk that even a distant throne or ruling council has eyes, ears, and a ready hand right here). In some cases, marshals serve as judge, jury, and executioner. In others, they take prisoners and convey them to magistrates or other officials for trial and sentencing.

Marshals are usually responsible for a place or district, or are sent forth on a particular mission (“Find and bring back Orgroth the Damned, dead or alive” or “Find out who’s taking slaves in the backlands and stop them”). They are usually mounted and well-armed, might be armored and provided with funds, and almost always have the authority to commandeer resources (such as food, funds, horses, armories, and the use of warehouses, homes, or cages) and government personnel (local Watch officers, soldiers, and tax or other officials). Sometimes they have authority over other folk, from militias to local gentry and nobility. These powers—and how they use them—tend to make them respected, feared, or hated.

A marshal observes, learns, hunts down, arrests, kills or fights, threatens, and gives orders, in the name of enforcing a government’s laws and its policies (expressed as decrees and

sometimes also as secret orders). She “wears authority like a cloak,” as one long-ago anonymous Tethyrian clerk put it. Most people understand all too well what a marshal is, and is likely to do.

## heralds: quieter and more mysterious

Heralds tend to keep lower profiles than marshals, and their roles, nature, and duties are far more often misunderstood. Properly understanding what a herald is and does requires some slight familiarity with heraldry.

### HERALDRY

In Faerûn, heraldry is a practical matter, not class snobbery or exclusion. Nobles might have haughty mottoes, elaborate blazons, and intricate rules of social etiquette, but on the battlefield simple badges must be visible—and recognizable—on shields, breastplates, and fluttering pennants, or friends might kill friends (or even kin) unintentionally. As the local herald Artrumpet (of Hawkhill in northeastern Amn) put it, “Blazons keep you from gutting your own father—unless you’re planning to.”

Led by the nearly legendary High Herald, heralds across Faerûn administer strict rules of heraldry independent of the whims of rulers, proud pretensions of noble houses, and deceptions of those pretending to be noble.

Many books of real-world heraldry are available to gamers interested in creating blazons (coats-of-arms) and simplified badges for armigerous folk (such as royalty, nobility, and knights). Such details aren’t delved into here, beyond noting that Cormyr and most other realms of Faerûn follow the “classic” rules of real-world British heraldry as administered by the College of Arms. Notable exceptions include Waterdeep, which breaks the heraldic rule of “no metal on metal” (in heraldry, metallic hues such as gold and silver are metals, whereas blue and red are colors). Also, in real-world heraldry, many women use lozenges and other “nonshield shapes” to display their arms rather than the shields men use, but females in Faerûn use shields.

Most folk “know” the Heralds stop people copying other people’s shields too closely or exactly, and rule on who’s really noble and who isn’t, who outranks whom, and “matters like that.”

The real daily activities of the Heralds (since they decided to stop trying to decide or influence who sat on what throne, and split from the Harpers) are much broader and more influential. As the sage Amaundur wrote in 1269 DR, “The Heralds are the walls of civility between us that keep every realm from raiding and skirmishing with its neighbors. They make possible trade, prosperity, and all that is civilized in Faerûn today.”

## what the heralds do

The most simple and frequent everyday work of any herald is to govern heraldry very strictly (at least, the display of anything more elaborate than a personal badge consisting of a single charge or device). If you proclaim yourself

“The Dread Baron Bluto” and dress your followers in scarlet tunics with a

yellow gauntlet making a fist on

it, you can do so freely—but

if you add a hunting horn

(a “second charge”) or a

motto, or display the horn

and gauntlet on a shield-

shaped field so the result

resembles a formal coat-

of-arms, expect to soon be

visited by a herald.

If you have a plain

orange shield and paint a

boar’s head at its center,

that head is one charge

(and the Heralds will

leave you alone, even if

you then use that same

boar’s head as a badge

on the armored breasts,

backs, and shoulders

of your men-at-arms

for battle recognition).

But if you then think

your shield looks rather

plain and add a hori-

zontal sword beneath

the boar’s head, that’s

a second charge—and

the local herald comes calling. (If you change the boar’s head to have it impaled by a sword, you’ve merely altered your single charge, and the herald will only visit if you have spread around a lot of contracts and other documents, banners, and the like that still display your original boar’s head—because he wants to make sure he doesn’t have two boar’s-head-using persons dwelling near each other. He also wants to warn you that there are rules for heraldry, and you should always talk to him before making changes.)

What the Heralds don’t do is police politics. They’ll impart the existing rules of precedence in a realm or qualifications for a



*A marshal*

Illustration by Lucio Parrillo

title, but won't forbid a ruler to change or defy those rules except in matters of heraldic display.

For example, it's absolutely forbidden to ride into battle in the colors or displaying the arms of someone else as a deception. No mercenary will accept employment with someone the Heralds have deemed to have done so, for fear of themselves being declared "outlaw," and therefore reduced to brigandry.

The Heralds do step in to make public rulings as dispassionate third-party judges in disputes over court rules or noble status or heraldry, when asked to by anyone in a realm, however lowly (not just rulers or courtiers). They are famous for not taking bribes or showing any favoritism. Whether they decide that your breakaway kingdom is legitimate and worthy of having its own blazons and titles as set by you the new ruler, or not, it's their decision, and not something you can—or should try to—influence.

## Nobility and the Heralds

In general, nobility isn't "portable." You can arrive in Waterdeep claiming to be "Lord So-and-so of Athkatla," and be fawned over by innkeepers who want your business, but your influence will extend only as far as your coins do—and the personal opinions of Piergeiron and senior members of the City Guard and Watchful Order hold of you. You don't automatically get special treatment, either in society or under law, though members of the "native" noble houses of Waterdeep do.

Many ambitious adventurers have set themselves up as nobility in the Border Kingdoms, conquering a few pastures and woodlots, declaring it a realm, and giving themselves all sorts of grand and often ridiculous titles, such as "Lord Emperor of the Lower Middens."

The swung sword is the usual way adventurers become noble, aside from wooing and marrying nobility (minstrelry and lore are rich in tales of rough warriors who forcibly wooed fair noble maids, who after marriage fell deeply in love with their new lords, but such sources tend to be more romantic than daily real life; in truth, many force-taken maids have poisoned or daggered their lords). If you just want to be called "Lord," amass a staggering amount of money, take up residence in Sembia, and proclaim yourself a lord, as scores of individuals have done in the last few centuries.

As individuals, the High Heralds can defend themselves very effectively using magic items of tremendous power that come with their office. However, like the far more numerous lower-ranking local heralds, they customarily do nothing by force. What they do is censure—and in this they wield great influence because they establish noble rankings (precedence) outside the walls of a city or the borders of a realm and legitimize status. Very few calm or sober people dare to argue against or defy their judgments.

Those old-money Waterdhavian nobles might "cut you dead" (newly-married-into-junior-noble-family gallant that you are) at a revel in Waterdeep. However, it's the Heralds, not those nobles, who determine your true rank among the nobles if you all show up at a dinner in Scornubel and squabble over who gets the best seat. The same holds true for nobles of Cormyr and anywhere else west of Thay. The authority of the Heralds is especially valued

by folk of Sembia or the Border Kingdoms, where all titles are recent, fanciful, and often invented by their current holders.

If you, newly confirmed as a baron, arrive at a temple in your own barony and demand audience, dinner, a bed for the night, or some assistance, and the Heralds dispute your title, the priests will politely refuse you as "an impostor," even if they know you're the rightful title holder—because the judgment of the Heralds affects even their status (not within their faith, but in the eyes of the wider populace).

## Disputing with the Heralds

Mercenary companies bow to the Heralds too, because the word of the Heralds is their chief defense in all instances of someone else using their battle-standards and committing atrocities whilst impersonating them. Again, the Heralds say nothing about the recruiting or behavior of mercenaries, only about what blazons, "colors," and badges they use.

If someone adds a second charge to a badge they're using, and this is reported to a local herald, the herald will consult the rolls. If the herald has any suspicion this usage is unlawful, they'll immediately report everything to a superior (so if anything subsequently happens to them, the warning stands).

Mistreating, threatening, harming or slaying, or magically influencing any herald is grounds for instant dismissal from whatever rank you have . . . so it's a meaningless punishment only to a brigand ("robber baron") or a royal heir (who will still be of royal blood whatever they do). Everyone else loses their noble or gentle status, and can expect to be pointedly not recognized in negotiations (no one will sign contracts or treaties with them, no one will swear fealty to them, and so on, until the Heralds publicly pardon them—which usually takes a lot of redress and grovelling). Royalty in disfavor can still inherit thrones, but can't rule effectively without that pardon, which means they must either abdicate in favour of offspring or rule through a Regent. All of this means the Heralds rarely have to enact censure; the mere threat is usually sufficient. The Heralds publicly do nothing if you practice regicide, have a civil war, or unlawfully torture or trump up charges against rivals or rightful rulers. They only care about the blazons you use, how you use them, and the lineage you claim.

In the case of a self-assumed blazon, a herald will visit the offender, usually with a Harper or foreign merchant plus a priest of Oghma and some foreigners with titles (knights of a distant realm) as formal witnesses and informal bodyguards, and politely insist on an audience with the offender. At that audience, the herald will explain the transgression and request that the offender cease, immediately and forever, using the offending blazon or displaying any arms beyond a simple single-charge badge—or on the spot petition the Heralds for formal permission to officially use a blazon. Most heralds can tell at a glance if a blazon needs changes and will order them, but a few "borderline" cases will be passed to more senior heralds for judgment. It's up to the herald whether or not the offender has to obscure (or can use) the blazon until it's approved, modified, or denied. In practice, this decision has a lot to do with the attitude of the offender. Penalties for



failure to comply will be politely explained (and confirmed by the witnesses), and matters are then left to the offender.

## paying the heralds

Fees are typically levied on commoners by the Heralds only when a commoner petitioning for a blazon wants the skilled artists heralds can call on (whose identities they keep secret) to render a full (huge plaque, for wall or door) coat of arms (usual bare-minimum cost: 1,000 gp), a grant of arms (on vellum) in triplicate (1,000 gp per trio), a painted shield or shield cover (500 gp), and a banner (500 gp). Once these have been delivered and the fees paid, the petitioner is free to make as many copies as they like and will be instructed on how much they can modify these copies without “offending against the Law of Arms” (the very complicated and constantly revised private code kept by the heralds).

Battle-banners of mercenaries or formal armed forces can be augmented with devices to commemorate battles without express permission of the Heralds, so long as these augmentations are done in the approved manner (which the Heralds will freely explain if asked, and most sages and army veterans know).

So nothing physically stops an adventurer from inventing his own full coat of arms and outfitting his private army, in like fashion, without a word or coin to any herald—so long as he never has to enter into a treaty, contract, or any other formal agreement with anyone, or avail himself of any services of a priesthood.

The Heralds don’t pass moral judgments on the taste expressed in blazons, or on the legitimacy of holders, as long as the holders haven’t been informed by a herald of the Laws of Arms as pertaining to them personally and then ignored those instructions.

The Heralds are kept so busy in the Border Kingdoms and Sembia that in those lands they charge additional up-front fees for blazons (not self-bestowed titles, just the use of arms). These are typically 250 gp per person, once per grant of arms, in the Border Kingdoms, and 5,000 gp for the same thing in Sembia (reduced to 2,000 gp for unmarried children less than twelve winters old, though the moment marriage occurs or the titled parent dies, the “short” 3,000 gp fee must be paid or use of the arms must cease until it’s rendered).

Nobility, gentry, and guilds everywhere are usually charged 1,000 gp to register their blazon with the Heralds, plus the limner’s (artist’s) fee: typically 50 gp for a shield, breastplate,

doorplate, or tabard but up to 500 gp per banner, wall-tapestry, or large coat-of-arms for display on the wall of a feasting-hall or over a gate.

Heralds will levy a 500 gp fine on anyone duplicating or very closely copying (even unwittingly), someone else’s blazon on a shop sign or publicly displayed banner. If use persists despite warnings (or fines go unpaid), fines escalate and heralds will contact local authorities (guilds and lawkeepers) to try to influence the offender into taking down the “false blazon.”

Thanks to heralds’ fees, Sembia and the Borders are full of “Lords” who have no arms or use only a single device (such as a crescent moon, or a diagonally displayed dagger) as a badge. In practice, the Heralds will let an individual add a sheath or scabbard, ribbons, drops of blood, and a severed hand gripping a weapon without considering it a “second charge” and worthy of their attention, but adding a field (specific background) or a second, crossed weapon is definitely an additional charge. The Border Kingdoms even boast dozens of Emperors of various sorts, but only a few have purchased the right to a blazon.

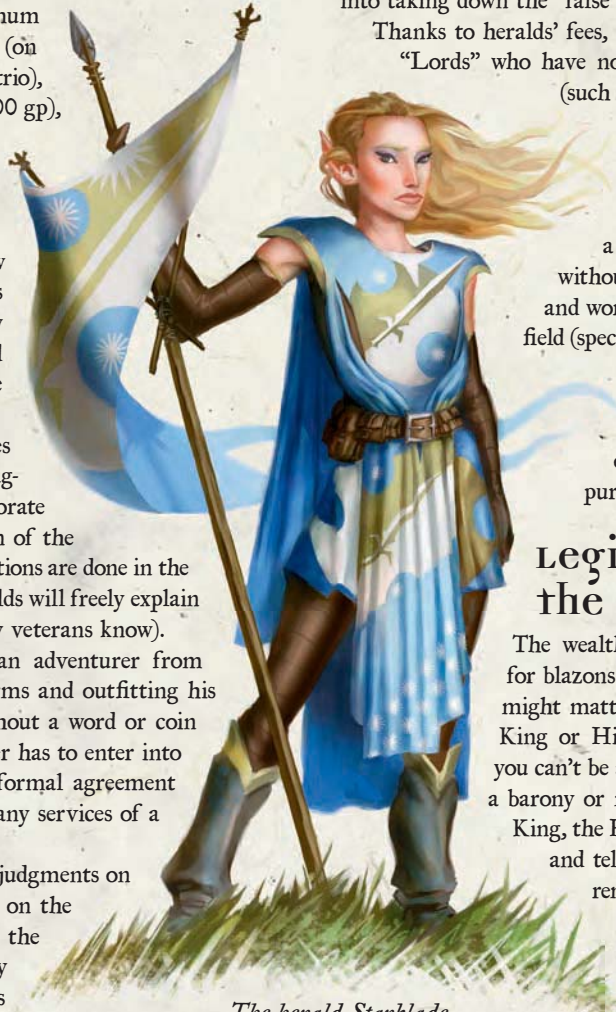
## Legitimacy and the heralds

The wealth and land holdings of petitioners for blazons mean nothing to the Heralds—but might matter very much to a kingdom. If the King or High Chamberlain of Realm X says you can’t be a Baron of X because you don’t own a barony or maintain troops and castles for the King, the Heralds will side with that complaint and tell you to either depart the realm or remove the part of your title alluding to the geographical region of the realm (you can still be “Baron Karth,” but not “Baron Karth of the Stonelands”). The Heralds are very good at noticing attempts

to allude to a locale by an ancient name or claim ties to a fallen or vanished realm, and frown very severely on such distortions.

Yet if you can prove your lineage entitles you to bear a title the King or High Chamberlain is denying you, the Heralds will insist on you being accorded it—which is why lots of titled folk live permanently in exile all over Faerûn, far from the lands they claim. (There’s little real difference between a rich dragon’s-rump with a grand house and a grander knack for inventing florid titles, and a legitimately recognized noble—except for a herald’s blessing).

Heralds don’t “recognize” this or that title. Rather, they say “You can’t have three green crosses on your shield like that, Lord



The herald Starblade

Illustration by Eric Deschamps

Falling-Down-Stairs, because an emperor's already using that design. Might we suggest this? Or that? We've brought along a few drawings. . . ."

In the case of a self-made Border Kingdoms ruler, the Heralds will accept his right to use a coat of arms, motto, colors, badges, and banners. They're not standing in judgment over his legitimacy; they're solely concerned with making sure he doesn't deliberately or unwittingly use heraldry that copies or might be easily mistaken for arms already in use by someone else. They really don't care if he controls land or commands a certain number of troops or subjects.

The Heralds will, however, impose fees and wield the existing Law of Arms to stop a commoner using a noble title and blazon that belongs to someone else (particularly if she pretends to *be* that someone else), or stop the children, friends, or creditors of someone who has a coat of arms and dies destitute all trying to use those arms as if the blazon now legitimately belongs to them (the Heralds will rule on who can and can't use it).

To extend this to the royal family of Cormyr: The approval of local elves initially gave the Obarskys rule, soon formalized into a crown, throne, and title arrangement. Clear, formal rule is always better than endless civil war, so the Heralds stepped in to explain to the Obarskys and their early courtiers: "You have the say over who gets ennobled and what titles are granted, but if you want them—and therefore your rule, too—to be recognized and respected, *we* set the rules you work within. We do this for all Faerûn, and will never otherwise challenge your rule. In such matters, our neutrality is always steadfast."

A trick used by certain early heralds (before the 1116 DR split with the Harpers) was to magically call back the soul of a dead ancestor as a ghostly apparition, to privately tell a recalcitrant ruler that the Heralds were right and should be obeyed—often by awakening and scaring the ruler, in the dead of night. It usually worked like a charm.

## The high heralds

The legendary High Heralds are five offices (Unicorn, Black Vizer, Crescentcoat, Old Night, and Red Dragon) filled by a succession of veteran heralds who have and maintain high levels of creativity, zeal, and energy throughout their careers. No one who openly seeks such an office, or does harm to any other herald in a way that could be seen to be personally advancing toward such an office, will ever be allowed to attain it.

All rulers and high priests can propose candidates for any vacant High Herald office, but the offices are filled by appointment of the surviving High Heralds (after the High Heralds all secretly propose and investigate candidates, then vote in secret).

High Heralds might resign, become mentally unable to continue their duties and be "relieved with dignity," or die in office. If one is killed in office, by tradition his office "dies" with him; as such, there are now four "vanished" High Herald offices (the Huntsman, Manyshields, Blue Blade, and Starscepter). Over most of the years since the Harpers started the Heralds in 992 DR, there have been seven High Heralds at any given time.

Just what each High Herald does varies with every officeholder, but by tradition Unicorn has the final say in decisions (and a veto), Black Vizer is the most warlike and politically active, Crescentcoat (often held by a woman) is the most active investigator and debater, Old Night is the most scholarly and withdrawn (rarely leaving the library at the Herald's Holdfast), and Red Dragon travels the most to observe things firsthand, and is the office held by the youngest and most radical.

High Heralds have in the past served as regents and battlefield leaders (to end civil wars) in several realms, when invited to by legitimate but weak rulers or throne-heirs, but this is an unlikely (though not impossible) role for them to assume today.

You can only become a candidate for a High Herald by impressing fellow heralds with your service. This inevitably involves building great personal expertise in mastering small details of the ever-increasing, evolving rules and interpretations of blazonry. This process takes years and is beyond the scope of most roleplaying, just as (barring calamities that leave High Herald offices vacant) a PC herald will have a vanishingly small chance of becoming a High Herald.

Only a handful of High Heralds exist, but there are thousands of lower-ranking heralds. Their lives (aside from the confrontations and battles bards sing about, wherein this or that High Herald dramatically used her wits and the magic of her office) tend to be more interesting than those of the largely unseen, overworked High Heralds.

## The heralds pursuivant

The Heralds Pursuivant are the traveling envoys or messengers of the High Heralds, and are currently more than twenty beings of various races (some able to assume a variety of guises). They are senior, gifted heralds from whose ranks the five High titles are traditionally filled. They act as the apprentices and personal assistants of the High Heralds, running secret and sensitive errands as they master the staggering load of being able to *think* like the Law of Arms, and so always expand and interpret it correctly. They take on names and devices of their own invention (design of which is part of their training); these are discarded if they rise to High Heraldship.

## The tabards

All heralds have ceremonial tabards (overjerkins of unique design), but the Sun and Moon Tabards are the collective name of two special heraldic offices, filled for short terms (usually four years, from just before a Shieldmeet to just before the next Shieldmeet): Green Shield (who attends to the rituals, diplomacy, and security of the Heralds' Round, a court held at each Shieldmeet to publicly render decisions as to festival datings and disputes over legitimacy, inheritance, genealogy, and blazonry) and Gauntlet (who tries to keep track of the locations, strength, performance, and current allegiances of all militias, mercenary companies, and adventuring bands; this information is normally shared only with other heralds). The Tabards work under the tutelage and direction of Old Night.

## Local heralds

Beneath the special offices are the local heralds—the workhorses who serve Faerûn daily. They serve as criers at tournaments and festivals, designers and regulators of the use of blazons, and genealogical clerks, sometimes aiding local authorities in keeping census and tax records (and sometimes acting as the rivals or opponents of corrupt local court clerks in charge of such matters).

Local heralds have personal arms (displayed on standards and on their tabards), and “purviews” (defined areas in which they hold power, such as a town, dukedom, kingdom, or court) established by the Heralds, not by any ruler. Local heraldic offices tend to have names such as Ironwind, Stormraven, and Wyvernwood.

Below is a partial list of local offices and their purviews.

Bloodbanner (Hlath)	Mhanrued (Esdul: Nimbral)
Blue Velvet (Ithmong)	Moonsilver (Elventree)
Bright Shield (Essembra)	Morningstar (Berdusk)
Bronzespur (Arrabar)	Narhelm (Baldur’s Gate)
Bucklebar (Luskan)	Oakenstaff (Iriaebor)
Curved Sword (Saerloon)	Ohndivur (Tethmor: Nimbral)
Dark Stag (Silvermoon)	Purple Halberd (Elversult)
Diadar (Amphail)	Ramrath (Curstallyon: Nimbral)
Dragonplume (Nimpeth)	Red Sword (Beregost)
Drawn Dagger (Hill’s Edge)	Sable (Crimmor)
Durlance (Nimsur: Nimbral)	Shimmaree (Hillsfar)
Falconfree (Waterdeep)	Shining Helm (Saradush)
Flailchains (Westgate)	Silver Scales (Neverwinter)
Fyrefelen (Ormen: Nimbral)	Skannajh (Rauthaven: Nimbral)
Gold Saddle (Yartar)	Stars (Athkatla)
Green Targe (Spandeliyon)	Statharn (Nimith: Nimbral)
Hawkfeather (Sundabar)	Sundazzle (Teziir)
High Bow (Secomber)	Swanmantle (Eshpurta)
Hoathal (Sombor: Nimbral)	Swordswreath (Zazesspur)
Ironflower (Elturel)	Taerash (Suthhaven: Nimbral)
Jhalvar (Mirabar)	Tallboots (Murann)
Lazalar (Ordulin)	Thorn Tree (Riatavin)
Lone Tree (Ormath)	Thuldroun (Arevar: Nimbral)
Lyaparce (Bromtor: Nimbral)	Utaunt (Vindal: Nimbral)

Cormyr’s local heralds bear as their titles the names of the settlements they’re based in. Wooded and wilderland areas across Faerûn often have “wandering” heralds, such as the four (the offices of Culree, Honthallow, Maunthar, and Vorlmaer) who travel around Nimbral, assisting their “Companions” (as heralds formally address each other) who work in specific settlements.

## Types of heralds

A local herald is one assigned to a court or an area of land. Most regional (area) local heralds are independent of rulers. They watch over and assist the far more numerous court heralds who directly serve rulers—and might be corrupted or coerced by them.

A local herald can be proposed (and if a court herald, will usually be sponsored in office) by a ruler, but is “confirmed in office” (or dismissed) by the Heralds, not by any ruler. Local heralds who greatly anger a ruler are often slain or forced to flee.

Attempts to magically influence, blackmail, or bully local heralds result in Harper actions against whoever does so, even if it’s a king. The Heralds make it bluntly clear and understood that they expect all heralds to be free of threats, mistreatment, and coercion of any sort, and will work against a ruler who doesn’t “keep safe” heralds in her realm.

Local heralds walk a difficult daily tightrope. They have a duty to advise the ruler they serve on all matters of etiquette and heraldry and are sworn to keep all heraldic activity within their territory consistent with the rules of heraldry and fully recorded (both in their personal records and in reports they make to the wider body of the Heralds).

However, their living (shelter and board) almost always comes from the ruler they serve, and it’s desirable that they have a cordial—if strictly professional—working relationship with their ruler. This tends to arise only when they eagerly serve the ruler, anticipating needs and desires and preparing possible blazons and advice so the ruler is made aware of all possibilities and consequences of the details of heraldic rules before the ruler acts or decides on something. Many local heralds review the wordings of the ruler’s letters, decrees, and proclamations after drafting by royal clerks or scribes but before being sent out or made public.

The duty of a local herald is to take great care not to make mischief or undermine or harm the image of the ruler they serve, but to act in all instances in such a way as to uphold civility and peaceful rule, promote politeness (but not at the expense of clarity), and to make absolutely sure that a ruler is shown all ways of proceeding with full and sober judgments of consequences, rather than allowing the ruler to act out of emotion, or when ill-informed or influenced by courtiers who misrepresent or omit truths.

Although courtiers are always aware of the duties (and rights) of a herald, they will often be deliberately excluded from personal meetings between a ruler and “her” local herald. Most rulers come to highly value the candor and opinions of their herald, who can act as someone to discuss matters with—in strict confidence, because a good local herald reports to the Heralds only what a ruler does or enacts, not their thinking or professed intentions.

Some rulers—such as the Obarskyrs of Cormyr—welcome heralds. In Cormyr, each “local lord” (administrator for the Crown based in every important settlement) has a local herald assigned to them. These heralds are expected to examine all land deeds, contracts, and agreements brought to them (to make sure such documents are legally correct and complete, and to report any unusual clauses or details to the ruler, through the local lord). They are also expected to report what they don’t see: who

never presents any documents for inspection, even when their activities suggest they should, and when crucial documents are not shown to them by someone who shows them lesser papers. The Herald's consider such scrutinizing duties right and proper, not an imposition or attempt to control or overload a herald, and will perform them diligently.

The sort of herald most often encountered traveling, "on the road" or not, is the hardest sort of herald to be: the court herald.

**HER MAJESTY'S  
SECRET SERVANT:  
THE COURT  
HERALD**

A court herald obeys the rules of the Herald's, but balances them daily against the needs of maintaining the confidence of the ruler they serve—and being the eyes, ears, mouth, and strong arm of that ruler abroad (and often in the backlands of the ruler's own realm), as an envoy (and spy). Only the threat of reprisals from all of the Herald's (and their allies, the Harpers) keep many court heralds alive, as they venture into hostile courts or visit the castles of lords who would prefer that no herald ever came calling to snoop or deliver unwelcome decrees or defiant messages.

Aside from the far less numerous Herald's Pursuivant and regional heralds, court heralds are the most likely sort of herald to be encountered out on the road, quietly (and sometimes stealthily) observing everything as they proceed with their tasks of delivering messages, collecting replies, demanding and delivering reports, making proclamations, posting decrees, interviewing persons the court desires to learn information from (or deliver threats or advice to), and so on.

There's an old saying: "While local heralds study and draw and fuss, court heralds go and do."

**The daily life of a  
Local herald**

When not directly advising rulers, courtiers, or local officials, local heralds spend a lot of time deciphering coded messages brought to them by other heralds or covertly by Harpers or other agents posing as peddlers or caravan-merchants (these messages are usually decrees from the High Herald's, or summaries of heraldic news, decisions, and "watch out for" warnings), or preparing such messages of their own for the next such messenger to take away.

However, every herald spends most of their time preparing blazons and consulting their books of heraldry to properly do so (or writing *more* coded messages to other heralds, asking for advice on any matters their own library doesn't provide answers to). The rest of the work of blazonry consists of conferring with the person, family, guild, or relevant courtier requesting the blazon; doing the actual artwork of the blazon or arranging for someone else to do it correctly; and properly recording the grant of arms, with several identical copies of records, for the scribes of the local court, their own records, and the Herald's as a whole (regional local heralds maintain libraries of such grants, and recopy each grant for distribution to other heralds as well as the Herald's Holdfast).

Local heralds spend whatever time is left (aside from the human needs of eating and sleeping) updating their records (genealogies and histories of local families), and maintaining, directing, and receiving the reports of their "vigilants."

*Illustration by Lucio Parrillo*



*A herald passes the time sketching heraldry while spying on her adversary*

## vigilants

Every herald needs spies. Not cloak-and-dagger folk who go where they shouldn't, armed, and do dangerous things, but merely honest, reliable, observant watchers who dwell and work in the herald's purview, and keep eyes and ears open for any new or changed uses of blazonry, as well as births, deaths, marriages, breaches of etiquette, and other events that might signal a change in current blazons or a need for the herald to act.

Vigilants are these spies, acting for the herald for paltry pay, a desire to help, and sometimes to feel important (most heralds can afford to pay so little that their vigilants are young children, augmented by a handful of socially active persons such as minstrels who play at revels and servants who work at them). Rulers, courtiers, and lawkeepers are usually aware of the existence of a herald's vigilants and the nature of their work, but the herald won't willingly render any complete roster of vigilants to any authorities. Vigilant work and reporting is done discreetly, and is often "covered up" against the queries of the curious by a half-truth: that every herald is always on the watch for good artists who can render blazons superbly, and asks everyone who knows of such folk to report their identities and whereabouts.

## court herald

The court herald prestige class presented here is a modified version of the loremaster prestige class, which is described on page 191 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

### becoming a court herald

After a character decides to become a court herald, the individual is visited (without warning) by two experienced heralds, who furnish the new herald with basic books of blazonry and lore, tomes about herb-lore and poisons and their antidotes, blank ledgers, and writing materials. The two will try to answer any questions the novice herald puts to them, and will provide a few names, locations, and means of contacting local heralds, sages, and Harpers. They will later return to observe the new herald (so as to be able to report the new herald's deeds and demeanor to senior heralds), but might not always reveal their presence to the new herald when doing so.

#### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

**Feats:** Skill Focus (Knowledge [any single knowledge skill]).  
**Skills:** Bluff 4 ranks, Diplomacy 6 ranks, Gather Information 8 ranks, Knowledge (history) 10 ranks, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) 10 ranks, Sense Motive 4 ranks.  
**Special:** Must speak at least three languages.

### class features

The class features of the court herald, by and large, are all about gaining and retaining knowledge. If information is power, then a highly experienced court herald is a formidable individual indeed.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** A court herald is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, and with light armor.

**Spells:** A court herald casts arcane spells from the court herald spell list. She casts these spells without needing to prepare them beforehand or keep a spellbook. Court heralds receive bonus spells for high Charisma. To cast a spell, a court herald must have a Charisma score of 10 + the level of the spell. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against a court herald's spell is 10 + the spell's level + the court herald's Charisma modifier. A court herald's effective casting level is equal to her court herald class level.

**Secret:** In their studies, court heralds come across many secrets and snippets of relevant practical knowledge. Upon attaining a level at which a secret is gained, you choose a secret from Table 6-3. The same secret can't be chosen twice. A court herald's class level plus Intelligence modifier determines the total number of secrets she can choose.

**Lore:** In their studies, court heralds acquire knowledge and learn to retain and recall it. At 2nd level, you gain the ability to know legends or information pertaining to various topics. This knowledge is categorized as per bardic knowledge (see page 28 of the *Player's Handbook*). A court herald adds her class level and her Intelligence modifier to the lore check.

**Mindsee:** At 2nd level, you gain the ability to remember a single scene perfectly, in exhaustive detail, not forgetting it until she desires to. This is a "frozen moment," chosen by silent act of will, of something you see. It retains the focus, field of view, and lighting conditions of your viewing. For every additional court herald level attained, you gain the ability to memorize an additional scene (without relinquishing the first one). These scenes can be retained for years, vanishing only upon your death, the physical loss of your brain, or as the result of certain spell attacks. Court heralds typically use this power to remember a blazon perfectly for later copying or comparison, but can also use it to keep a perfect likeness of a being in mind, remember who was present at a particular meeting, or the presence and precise descriptions of particular items.

**Bonus Language:** As your studies progress, you acquire new language skills as you decipher older heraldic records from afar. Because many of the most prized heraldic tomes (typically brought to a local herald by a Pursuivant and carried away again after some exhausting days of study) are enspelled to utter spoken tongue fragments as their written counterparts are touched, court heralds can learn entire new languages (written and spoken forms). Upon attaining a level at which a language is gained, you can select any known Faerûnian language (including dead ones).

**Greater Lore (Ex):** At 7th level, you gain the ability to understand unfamiliar magic items, as if employing an *identify* spell.

**Bonus Feat:** At 9th level, you can select a bonus feat from among those for which you meet the prerequisites.

**Skill Mastery:** At 10th level, you select a number of skills equal to 3 + your Int modifier. When making a check using one of these skills, you can take 10 even if stress and distractions would normally prevent you from doing so. You become so certain

in those skills that you can use them reliably even under adverse conditions.

**True Lore (Ex):** At 11th level, you can use your knowledge to gain the effect of a *legend lore* spell or an *analyze dweomer* spell once per day.

**Spell Resistance:** At 12th level, you gain spell resistance equal to your character level.

### COURT HERALD SPELL LIST

**0 Level**—*arcane mark, dancing lights, detect magic, detect poison, light, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, read magic.*

**1st Level**—*alarm, comprehend languages, erase, feather fall, identify, mage armor, silence, silent image, unseen servant.*

**2nd Level**—*arcane lock, blur, darkness, darkvision, detect thoughts, eagle's splendor, invisibility, levitate, locate object, magic mouth, minor image, mirror image, misdirection, obscure object, owl's wisdom, see invisibility, spider climb, whispering wind.*

**3rd Level**—*arcane sight, clairaudience/clairvoyance, daylight, detect scrying, dispel magic, explosive runes, illusory script, major image, nondetection, secret page, shrink item, suggestion, tongues, water breathing.*

**4th Level**—*arcane eye, bestow curse, confusion, detect scrying, dimension door, dimensional anchor, illusory wall, locate creature, minor creation, neutralize poison, rainbow pattern, remove curse, scrying.*

**5th Level**—*break enchantment, dominate person, dream, fabricate, false vision, feeblemind, major creation, nightmare, permanency, persistent image, prying eyes, seeming, symbol of pain, symbol of sleep, sending, telekinesis.*

**6th Level**—*analyze dweomer, antimagic field, contingency, guards and wards, legend lore, mass eagle's splendor, mass suggestion, mislead, permanent image, programmed image, symbol of fear, symbol of persuasion, true seeing.*

## playing a court herald

If you're a herald adventuring in a band, you're very likely a court herald undertaking particularly dangerous missions for your ruler (during which your fellow adventurers serve as bodyguards, vigilants, and "cover" to conceal your real activities), or a court herald in disgrace or whose successes brought unwanted public prominence, now lying low for a time in wilderland areas and keeping busy by undertaking dangerous missions for the crown (such as "explore those old ruins or caves we keep hearing about—all these reports of strange monsters or spells going off"). Playing the Tabard herald Gauntlet, tracking down adventuring bands everywhere, would also make for a fascinating campaign.

Local court heralds sometimes join adventuring bands temporarily or repeatedly, if this is the only way to survive "going in and getting out" of dangerous territory to carry out their duties. If a brigand has given himself a title and unlawful blazon, how else to reach him and correct things alive? (And what better way for a ruler to send along a few secret messages or instructions to be conveyed to others in the area during the journey?)

Information gathering (spying) is almost always the chief duty of any adventuring court herald, who won't be in this situation

TABLE 6—2: COURT HERALD SPELLS KNOWN

Class Spell Level		0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
1st	3	1*	—	—	—	—	—	—
2nd	4	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
3rd	4	2	1*	—	—	—	—	—
4th	4	3	2	—	—	—	—	—
5th	5	3	2	1*	—	—	—	—
6th	5	3	3	2	—	—	—	—
7th	5	4	3	2	1*	—	—	—
8th	5	4	3	3	2	—	—	—
9th	6	4	4	3	2	1*	—	—
10th	6	5	4	3	3	2	—	—
11th	6	5	4	4	3	2	1*	—

\* Provided the herald has sufficient Charisma to have a bonus spell of this level.

TABLE 6—3: COURT HERALD SECRETS

Level + Int	Modifier	Secret	Effect
1		Instant mastery	4 ranks of a skill in which the character has no ranks
2		Secret health	+3 hit points
3		Secrets of inner strength	+2 bonus on Will saves
4		The lore of true stamina	+2 bonus on Fortitude saves
5		Secret knowledge of avoidance	+2 bonus on Reflex saves
6		Deeper understanding	6 ranks in any single Knowledge skill
7		Dodge trick	+1 bonus to AC
8		Applicable knowledge	Any one feat
9		Newfound arcana	1 bonus 1st-level spell*
10		Deeper arcana	1 bonus spell of any level*

\* As if gained through having a high ability score.

in the first place if they don't work for a fairly trusting, tolerant ruler who expects them to "make a little on the side" through adventuring, to support themselves, and doesn't mind if the adventuring band they're part of "stirs things up" wherever they're adventuring. Rulers tend to regard adventuring bands as the best way to promote their influence in areas too remote, dangerous, or sparsely settled to be worth maintaining a garrison in—and having one of "their" heralds as part of the band is the best means available (short of scrying and mind-controlling spells and a wizard they can trust—a rarity in itself—to use them to control the adventurers precisely as the ruler desires) to keep such bands under control. Rulers can make use of the lawless tendencies of adventuring bands, because they can do things uniformed troops shouldn't (break laws or run roughshod over nobles' rights).

Heralds sometimes ask Harpers in the area to track and watch over court heralds who've "gone adventuring," both to keep them safe and to check on their continued loyalty, but see such

activities as both useful information-gathering and a personal “let off steam” need for some court heralds; folk of action can find the life of a herald frustrating, boring, and requiring iron self-control and diplomacy, and chances to “cut loose” as occasionally necessary.

Nor is the lore gathered by adventuring heralds just a convenient excuse. Old tombs, cellars, and dwarf-delves are vital sources for establishing ancient heraldry in an area, and therefore what is right or traditional locally.

## court heralds in the game

Being a court herald or local herald in a frontier or restive area can be a bit like being a marshal or police force, but with far more freedom to interpret matters, undertake ploys and “side business,” and have real adventures. Using various heraldry-related duties as cover, the herald must often rush here and there to deliver messages or pick up information from informants or race to uncover as much as possible about possible uprisings or planned rebel attacks or brigand-gang murders and thefts. Sooner or later folk will realize what you’re doing or just see you as an easy “part of the hated government” target, so capable adventuring companions are a must.

Heralds of all sorts can be even more interesting in an urban campaign, mixing in daily business intrigues or at the revels of nobles and would-be nobles to learn who’s loyal to whom and who’s plotting what. In Waterdeep, over a dozen heralds at once are active full-time in such work; in Athkatla, Calimport, and the Sembian ports, three times as many keep busy gathering information for the Heralds, the Harpers, and

local rulers (carefully editing what they share with each of those three sources).

Of course, being “in the know” gives a herald many opportunities for personal enrichment. Only a fool would stoop to blackmail and expect to live for long, but most urban heralds employ kin or friends in small businesses that can profit from acting on secrets or advance information without spreading it. If a ruler plans new or increased taxes or import duties on outland wine or lamp oil, and your business quietly buys up a lot of it, it can be resold for a swift and tidy profit once the taxes “come in” and the product price rises accordingly. If you know whom a king mistrusts or is planning to punish, you can withhold investments with the disfavored one, and withdraw socially from him, to avoid being harmed when he “goes down.” A good herald knows who might soon be marrying whom, the likes and dislikes of the families (They would love exotic Calishite dancers and musicians at the wedding feast? Well, you just happen to be able to get some, swiftly and with no fuss, so it’ll be the stunning social surprise they’re hoping for), and the attitudes on any matter of trade, society, or legal policy of the ruler and all powerful courtiers or nobles. So long as overt greed is avoided, money can be made steadily, from every twist and turn of court life.

Some heralds seduce their way to intimacy with powerful persons, while others promote reputations for giving good advice. However, a reputation can harm as well as help its owner. Heralds who are forced to flee a realm or city are sacrificing their careers but often remaining personally recognizable to traveling merchants who can spot them (and spread word of it) halfway across Faerûn, so that escaping angry husbands, vengeful noble

Illustration by Francis Tsai



*A herald and her allies confront an ancient enemy of the crown*

families, or agents of would-be traitors the herald exposed can be very difficult.

The access and special status of heralds makes them great targets for blackmailers and others who seek to use them as agents. Even upstanding heralds have to worry about being kidnapped and slain or imprisoned by doppelgangers or other shapeshifters seeking to impersonate them (monsters such as doppelgangers don't care about any legal penalties for being an impostor, or for the consequences of the damage they could do).

## playing the wandering game

In addition to the administration of heraldry (which in many places also means settling matters of social etiquette), court heralds deliver messages from rulers and courtiers, and deliver intelligence (information gathered from spies and loyal subjects and local officials) back to them. They are often responsible for making sure new royal laws and proclamations reach and are understood by folk in remote areas where local officials are few or nonexistent. If a herald has a cohort, the cohort will often be sent on covert intelligence-gathering forays while the uniformed herald makes "official" appearances and visits—although circumstances might lead to trading these two roles.

Wise courtiers employ their heralds as investigators, to gather the "real" facts rather than the claims of interested parties; canny rulers often use court heralds in the same way, as a check against distortions and omissions of information supplied by their courtiers.

Marshals are enforcers, and are typically sent to find and arrest or slay criminals, rebels and other foes of a ruler, or to restore the rule of law and set right corrupt or mistaken legal decisions in areas not within easy reach of much of the government. Marshals seldom operate outside the borders of a realm (except in countryside where those borders might be in dispute), but court heralds often do.

Although heralds need not necessarily be "folk of action" and successful marshals must always be competent with weapons and in combat, the two offices require many of the same talents, notably deep loyalty (to a ruler or to the interests of a realm), an adherence to a code or principles (of heraldry, or the laws to be enforced), resourcefulness, knowledge of laws or heraldic rules, the ability to quickly grasp a situation and to "read" people, and some diplomatic skill.

Fighters and rangers are obviously well suited to the hard travel, tracing persons, and disputes involved in both of these offices, lawful rogues are "made for" the spying, information gathering and weighing, and combat aspects of the jobs, and the mind and skills of a sorcerer or wizard aid in both confrontations and in remembering and using knowledge in an orderly, practical manner.

Heralds most often use cohorts and followers as spies and clerks (copying writings and blazons), and marshals most often use cohorts and followers as bodyguards, spies, posses, prisoner escorts and jailers—and sometimes even as torturers.

Like every other government office, winning a post as a marshal or herald essentially involves impressing the right people (the ruler, senior courtiers, local officials, or the Heralds). Although this sometimes involves corrupt practices such as bribery, an "old boy's network," lineage or prior social status, or even blackmail, few lands can afford the effects of incompetence in such offices for long. Saving a king's life in dramatic fashion while openly "standing up for the law" with sword and word might win you a trial post as a marshal—but if you then begin to accept bribes or try to use your authority to acquire funds, property, favors, and the like, you'll soon be dismissed, framed for a more serious crime or simply exposed and punished under the law, or simply "meet with an unfortunate accident" some dark night. Heralds are similarly policed by the Heralds, often with the assistance of the Harpers (who spy on heralds for signs of someone "going bad," and often eliminate those who are irredeemable).

Although the popular perception of the marshal in particular is that they wander endlessly, meddling in all the trouble they find, neither marshals nor heralds often truly "wander." Rather, they are sent on missions (though such missions might involve pretending to wander as they examine a territory or look for a fugitive). Heralds report to, and receive orders from, courtiers of certain ranks (acting for a ruler), the ruler herself, and the Heralds; marshals more often report just to a select hierarchy of senior courtiers or military officers.

## A sampling of heralds

It's a great mistake to think of heralds as fussy, dusty scholars or disapproving elderly rulesmongers. Some heralds are like that—but other heralds such as Curved Sword, Dark Stag, and Gold Saddle defy the stereotype.

Curved Sword, in Saerloon, is a young woman whose beautiful looks suggest naive vulnerability. Every leering Sembian noble or wealthy merchant tries to take advantage of her as she struggles to keep track of their heraldic inventions, impersonations, and other deceits, and avoid being framed by anyone for some fraud or other. The Heralds consider her vital and repeatedly try to establish other heralds to work with her, but every one of them has "gone bad" or been murdered. Curved Sword has found many hints of manipulation from afar underlying much of what's happening in Sembian society—but just who these manipulators are, she hasn't yet found out. However, someone now seems to be stalking and spying on her. A skilled artist, she supports herself drawing corporate badges and portraits when not busy with her heraldic duties.

Dark Stag, based in Silverymoon, is a tall, keen-witted mature ex-adventurer. She retired after her body was ravaged by a mysterious disease she acquired in the Underdark. She now uses a *hat of disguise* to make herself appear younger and more beautiful (or sometimes as a handsome male), as she acts various roles in Silvaeren night life and revelry, picking up all the information on citizens and visitors she can. Taern pays her well for what she passes on to him, and the Heralds consider her one of their best observers and deducers. Dark Stag has an extensive network of shady contacts from her adventuring days, has been known to "meddle"



in backstreets doings to benefit law and order in Silvermoon, and is known to use a *ring of father falling* and a *hand of the mage*. A friendly mage once smuggled her out of a death-trap arranged for her by transforming her temporarily into a sword.

Gold Saddle, in Yartar, is a gruff, brawling drinker whose roistering ways conceal a keen mind and very flexible morals. He's behind half the swift, everyday shady deals in town that don't involve darker, deeper hands (such as those of the Kraken Society), and earns coins as a horse trainer and signpainter. He also fences stolen goods, smuggling them out of Yartar in one of the wagons he owns—and smuggling in certain drugs, healing potions, and rare foodstuffs. Gold Saddle stays alive by making himself useful to most of the rougher folk operating in Yartar, and by not spilling any secrets (except to the Heralds, of course, and if they pass things on to certain Harpers, he knows nothing about that—and so, for the good of his neck, neither does anyone in Yartar yet).

## Looking for Trouble in All the Right Places

In market towns and larger settlements, marshals and heralds can expect to find “lasting trouble” within the ranks of local officials and in guilds. Crimes of the moment often occur in places where folk gather, such as markets, inns, and taverns.

In smaller settlements and rural areas, crimes of opportunity occur in remote spots (when a miscreant believes there are no witnesses or the body will never be found), or in good ambush locations (where dense cover is close to trails), but most trouble still occurs in inns and taverns—thanks to the combination of people (often including “outlanders” from afar) gathering together for some time, drink (and the confusion, loss of inhibition, and fighting that often results), and overnight darkness.

## Upholding the Law

Some realms, particularly in rural areas or forested regions plagued with lawless brigandry, use the trained warriors of their armies as local police (and sometimes on-the-spot judges, juries, and executioners). In Cormyr, for example, the verges of the Stonelands, the Hullack Forest, and the Thunder Peaks are policed by the Purple Dragons of the realm.

Small settlements governed by a local lord, such as many of the Border Kingdoms and the Dales, usually use their soldiery as sole (or primary) law enforcement. Market towns, ports, and cities of all sizes tend to have local police or “lawkeepers” (usually known as “the Watch”) in addition to any military garrisons.

Large settlements tend to have more polite and disciplined—but sometimes markedly less effective—lawkeepers than rural areas. City Watch officers tend to be more strict in adherence to laws, and to have a code of behavior and dress to follow.

Rural law enforcers, far from city niceties and usually on their own or commanding far fewer resources, are more likely than their urban counterparts to enact on-the-spot or independent punishments, from swift executions (“I had to kill him—he attacked me!”) to leniency.

Examples of such lenient behavior include jailing drunks and hotheads overnight to cool off rather than charging and holding miscreants while officials are sent for to come and try them (or they can be taken to such justice). Rural lawkeepers are apt to scare or fine offenders, beat them up barefisted, and send them on their way with growls of “Don't come here and try such foolishness again!”

Anyone coming into a rural settlement asking too many questions and peering into everybody's business is apt to be seen as a spy for outlaws or thieves come to seek easy targets, and swiftly given the “rough ride out of town” treatment.

Rural law officers might or might not be corrupt, but those who last in office are or tend to become wily, salt-of-the-earth, and streetwise. They know the local terrain and hiding-places, who in town is crooked and apt to fence stolen goods, and who won't easily be caught in ambushes or duped. Haughty, I-never-get-my-hands-dirty officials of the sort called “high-nosed city brightcloaks” are unlikely to be found among them.

Lawkeepers (including marshals) usually have the legal right to arrest, disarm, imprison, fight or even slay to keep order and to protect others, confiscate dangerous items or suspected contraband or stolen goods, order persons to depart a building or area (or remain within one), commandeer mounts and conveyances, seize evidence, demand cooperation (often with strict limits, for example forbidding them from ordering noncombatants to fight or go and face armed foes or monsters).

## Inn and Tavern Security

Almost all inns and taverns guard against fire, theft, and vandalism with hired watchers and muscle, vigilant staff, and handy weapons, signal-horns or gongs, locks and chains for securing doors, and covered firefighting buckets of sand and water.

Most Faerûnian travelers are familiar with having to hand over the care and control of mounts and pack animals to a stablemaster or one of his hostlers (usually the only way to avoid this is to rent an entire paddock, if one is available), but folk who seldom stray from home are usually unaware of “hiddeneyes.”

Most inns located in cities or large towns watch over

anyone entering their premises by using staff or hired street urchins (local children) to openly follow and watch guests and strangers. These are the “eyes” of the inn, and to take offense at their presence or scrutiny marks you as a first-time traveler or someone trying to hide something.

However, any inn that can afford the practice will also have “hiddeneyes.” These are watchers (often an offspring of the proprietor or staff) paired with each eye. While the visible “eye” draws the attention of the person being watched, the “hiddeneye” tries to observe the same person covertly, usually through a spyhole or from behind a tapestry.



*A marshal delivers a warning from the king*

Illustration by Daarken

Heralds seldom have any of these rights (beyond confiscation of false or offending blazonry). When expecting trouble, they often work with marshals, who can act as bodyguards, coerce obedience, and make arrests if need be.

## Ruling the roads

Marshals and heralds posted to rural areas often have the opportunity to become *the* local power. Brute force (extending to blackmail, murder of rivals, and misusing local justice and soldiery to confiscate, falsely imprison, and damage reputations) can accomplish this in the short term.

However, the only road to long-term success lies in gaining the support of the populace (usually by keeping law and order, so folk feel safe—but by doing so in such a way that justice is seen as fair and not oppressive), and at the same time pleasing the distant ruler or her senior courtiers by rendering regular tax revenues, enacting their policies in a loyal and correct manner, and “taking care of trouble” so that the rural domain enjoys a good reputation at court.

### BENEFITS

Court heralds and marshals are paid by the government they serve, and in some cases can legally augment their incomes by providing private services for fees (many heralds do artwork, especially portraits, “on the side,” and many marshals are allowed to provide personal bodyguards or “impress the neighbors” uniformed escorts).

While traveling, heralds and marshals can expect free room, board, clerical and medical assistance, stabling and fresh mounts

from local government officials or at the castles of nobles—and at least room and board from any inhabitant.

Marshals and heralds who win local popularity are often looked up to and consulted for advice. They gain opportunities to start businesses that benefit from their contacts, inside knowledge, and public trust, and might even marry into money locally as a result of their reputations.

### OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Heralds and marshals are two of the four sorts of officials (the others being tax collectors and patrolling lawkeepers) who meet the populace most often. They are expected by their superiors to adhere to the rules of their offices and the laws they must enforce and apply. They represent their office and the government at all times, and might well be held to higher standards of behavior, dress, and speech. They speak for the crown and must be decisive but neither careless nor self-serving. If they make a wrong decision, they must set it right in a way that doesn’t bring disrepute on the office or the government, and they must be honest in the handling of all monies and powers entrusted to them. “Personal gain” must never be what drives their actions—or at least what the public sees as driving their deeds.

## conflicts

Marshals and heralds face jurisdictional disputes with fellow office-holders, disagreements with officials both above and below them in rank, and disputes and attempts to undermine their authority by persons who would prefer them not to exist, or at

least not to operate where they are present (such as a local noble used to administering her own justice).

The real foes of court heralds and marshals are, however, threats to the established authority of which they are a part. These might be monsters (and even hunting bands or hordes of monsters!), common criminals, or enemies of the state.

Outlaws are often persons sentenced to death for crimes, who have escaped such justice. With nothing to lose and no lawful place in society, they hide (sometimes in city sewers, but more often in caves, ravine terrain, or deep forests in wilderland areas), and from such bases seek to eke out a living by theft and violence. Raids on outlying farms are common, as are ambushes of travelers on remote roads, and the boldest outlaws might impersonate authorities so as to purloin goods and funds or extort “protection” funds by blackmailing persons with vulnerable property.

Successful, long-term outlaws form bands and attract other malcontents. This might lead in the end to internal strife (battles for leadership over the outlaw band, and such bands splintering into rival groups), but in the short term often makes outlaw bands very formidable, as sorcerers and other skilled individuals join their ranks. Alyth Redsword in Tethyr and “Lady Daggers” in Sembia are currently notorious female outlaws, whose exploits are retold in hundreds of taverns, attracting both young men and women to at least the dream of “riding outlaw” with them.

Popular local outlaws might be aided by commoners in hiding from or eluding marshals and other authorities, and any outlaw band with large numbers of unfamiliar faces in its ranks (some with local knowledge or talents, or good acting ability) can accomplish far more damage than a handful of thugs who only know how to use force and threats.

Rebels, who seek to overthrow the current government, tend to be far more dangerous than outlaws for three reasons: They are more dedicated to a cause and less likely to be discouraged from activity by arrests or the presence of lawkeeper reinforcements; they often include secret members who aren’t known to be outlaws, and therefore can live and act quite openly anywhere, not just in hiding; and they can often call on resources (lots of money, for example from disgruntled nobles, guilds, or even local churches) outlaws can’t imagine.

Cormyr is plagued by rebels from the conquered cities of Arabel and Marsember, and no large realm in Faerûn is truly free of revolutionaries. From Tethyr and Calimshan to Dambrath or Thay, there are always citizens sufficiently angered by their governments to seek to overthrow or at least replace them.

In their persistence, resources and reach, and “out in the open” secrecy, rebels are akin to the last great foe of marshals and court heralds: conspiracies. These insidious threats might be as small as a cabal of a few merchants seeking to get a tax law changed and in the meantime circumvent it, or as large as every noble in the kingdom working together to carry out regicide and install a new form of rule, sweeping away most existing laws and the courtiers who administer them. Their activities tend to be covert, long-term, and often very subtle, and their members constantly evaluate unfolding events and situations. They can be the hardest foes for a marshal or court herald to identify. They are the enemies of the state most capable of duping or “using” marshals and court heralds,

framing such individuals for their own crimes or manipulating them into striking at the wrong people, and doing damage that discredits the government they serve.

No realm in Faerûn is free of conspirators seeking to bring about changes or cause happenings for their own personal benefit. Many nobles and wealthy merchants even engage in such activities “for fun” (for the thrill of the illicit and the pleasure of seeing their power to do things made manifest). Cabals and conspiracies are everywhere, though some stride through life not seeing them or choosing not to recognize them.

## Rewards

Successful marshals and heralds gain the satisfaction of a hard job well done: accomplishments that visibly benefit all with a sense of security that fosters prosperity along with growth in population, farm yields, and local industry. They might become very wealthy (either honestly or by shady means) through the power of their offices and gain social status from their work.

Some rulers and senior courtiers directly reward loyal, successful court heralds and marshals by giving them land and titles (making them nobility) or increasing their ranks and salaries (eventually landing them in the situations dealt with in Chapter 1 of this book), or both. Care must be taken not to seem to be a threat to a ruler, very powerful local church, or prominent courtier, lest the successful marshal or court herald be murdered, given a suicide mission as a reward, or executed, exiled, or imprisoned on trumped-up charges.

## Rangers of the North

In the Sword Coast North, veteran rangers traveling in the wilderlands act either officially or unofficially as marshals—and sometimes as court heralds, too. They do so officially if they are officers of a court, serving a ruler, and unofficially when they uphold laws and customs because of their personal religious beliefs, support for institutions of common benefit (such as the safety of roads and inns), or membership in the Harpers or other nongovernment organizations.

Rangers in the Northlands are often called upon to be judge, jury, and executioner by local crofters, woodcutters, homesteaders, miners, and by traveling merchants and prospectors. Priests and court officials might request (or try to command) their assistance.

Generations of such practices have led to a general public expectation (and acceptance) of rangers fulfilling such roles. Some rangers refuse individual situations because they are engaged on a mission of “higher” importance or see a conflict that will leave them unable to act or to act justly, but most who live their lives as rangers, close to the land and traveling constantly in wild areas, accept this role.

Centuries ago, a grim lone man of great height and strength, called variously “Steeleye” or “Steelsword” (depending on which fireside tales you prefer), became so famous across the North for his tireless work as a wandering judge and lawkeeper that two sayings arose that are still heard today: “You’ll be sorry when the Steelsword gets here!” and “Trust in the Steelsword—and even more the hand that wields it.”

# HIGH-LEVEL CHALLENGES

**F**oes for formidable PC parties can be “big guns” who hurl spells or reach out titanic jaws and claws in wild battles, or they can be opponents who out-think and out-prepare PCs, misdirecting them into sideline fights and avoiding direct confrontation on any but the most favorable terms.

The “brute force” sort of powerful adversary is short-term: One way or another, big battles are over in a comparatively short time. Introducing them into a campaign needn’t require much preparation. The ground shakes, the skies darken, castle towers topple—and there they are.

The second type of foe, however, can challenge PCs (and fascinate players) for years of campaign time. PC adventurers might have to poke and pry and solve many mysteries just to learn who the villains really are and where to find them. Elaborate scheming might be necessary merely to hamper their activities, let alone expose or harm them directly. Every wrong person the PCs hunt down in that pursuit makes them new enemies or harms their reputation with local lawkeepers. Skillful villains often manipulate PCs into harming, hampering, or eliminating foes or rivals of the villains while the villains themselves avoid battle for as long as possible.

This chapter explores how long-term villains can be used in campaign play, and how they might react to PC activities.

## Deities

In Faerûn, deities are very real entities. Mortals have “faith” in what they might do, what they like and dislike, and in what aid they might provide (in other words, believing in a certain view of what a divine being really is), but need not have faith just to believe in the existence of a deity. Everyone has either seen gods as avatars, godly power in the form of manifestations, answered prayers, or spells cast by priests that “work before their eyes,” or they know folk who’ve seen such things.

Some human-worshipped deities seem to be “super-humans.” They are easily understandable beings who follow clear or obvious codes, and display emotions (such as love, hatred, and

greed) just as humans do—only stronger. Other deities seem far more mystical or mysterious, with priests and lay worshipers sometimes debating for centuries as to what they really want and who they truly are.

The wisest sages of all Faerûnian races believe that deities, like mortals, age with the passing years, gaining experience and changing in powers, abilities, and interests. They see that those deities whose behavior is known enough to be understood by mortals value mortal worshipers—the number of their worshipers determines their power, and mortal expectations shape their most comfortable avatars—but see mortals as flawed creatures, lesser than themselves. Moreover, it’s generally agreed that deities contest endlessly among themselves for power, each seeking to force their aims and desires on the world, defying the differing goals of other deities.

Most priesthoods and sages also believe that the majority of gods—unless enraged or caught in unusual circumstances—believe that directly opposing or smiting any mortal (other than punishing faithful servants who have been disloyal) is beneath them. It diminishes themselves in their own eyes, and in the regard of other deities, who frown upon the practice of directly smiting mortals. Although manipulating mortal creatures is one of the chief activities of divine beings, they prefer to work through mortal agents whenever possible, rather than taking a direct hand.

Clergy, both organized and self-styled cultists, are the everyday agents of deities, but gods can influence any creature by sending dream-visions, visible signs (unusual natural phenomena, such as birds or animals behaving oddly, that a mortal interprets as a divine message) or manifestations (altars glowing, music appearing out of nowhere, objects animating, words formed of fire materializing in midair, and so forth). Casually destroying

a mortal such as a PC adventurer is distasteful to most gods because they would prefer to use that mortal or transform him into a devout worshiper. Moreover, mortals (adventurers in particular) afford the gods their chief entertainment, and no deity wants to see a favorite being forever removed from play.

Most Faerûnians worship many gods, and thus they are in some measure useful to all divinities. Just as the gods use you, you can use them to get what you want in life, if you make yourself useful enough for them to aid you in staying alive in this fight, or winning that dispute, or rising to rule a kingdom.

## for the DM: using deities in your campaign

Deities can make direct contact with PCs, as avatars<sup>FP</sup> or by speaking through creatures they temporarily “possess” (their presence is often betrayed by a glow emanating from a possessed being’s body, blazing eyes, or even a temporary increase in size, stature, or abilities). However, in almost all instances they will send dream-visions, inspire unwitting persons to speak or act in small, temporary ways that manipulate others, or even (via priests) directly order mortal creatures to contact PCs.

Gods devote the most attention to mortals who do them great good (such as prominent priests of their faith) or great harm (champions of other faiths and blasphemers who profane their altars or act against their mortal servants). Adventurers, as persons of action who can potentially force rapid and decisive change, are tools worth a god’s attention. A deity will accordingly direct some of its mortal servants to manipulate PC adventurers into furthering the aims of the god, or to attack and oppose the PCs.

DMs can greatly enrich their own campaigns by secretly deciding what short-term aims prominent deities will be pursuing in the locales in which the PCs are adventuring. These aims will obviously conflict with the aims of other deities, generating some sort of strife. The DM should determine how much and how clearly deities communicate their aims to their local clerical and lay worshipers.

## sample plots

Deities seeking new worshipers can try to create them (urging devout worshipers to have abundant offspring, then charging their priesthoods to train and continually influence the resulting children to primarily and devoutly worship them “before all other gods”), try to foster them (increasing their own reputation through staging “miracles” and guiding their priesthoods to accomplish beneficial or dramatic achievements as well as spread word widely about such successes), and try to steal them from other deities (usually by harming the reputations of other deities through rumor-spreading, “false signs” or false interpretations of disasters, and by seeking to publicize clear victories of their own agents over those of rival deities, implying they’re stronger and should be worshiped or trusted in first). These struggles to gain more influence and worshipers go on continually all over Faerûn, and sometimes involve such brute force

methods, as trying to spread plagues or start wars in lands where rival deities have many worshipers, as well as sending much-heralded champions to defeat monsters, win battles over other mortals, or find relics.

Mystra, for example, is not only the goddess of magic: She is the Weave. Many deities, from Bane to Shar, seek to diminish Mystra’s power in order to gain more influence over

magic. They might seek to subvert mortal spellcasters or exploit alternatives to the Weave (such as Shar’s Shadow Weave). However, deities

who seek to “beat Mystra at her own game” in direct magical contests are doomed to fail because the more anyone uses magic, the more powerful Mystra becomes. Some (such as Cyric) refuse to believe Mystra is the Weave and think they can beat her directly. Others (such as Bane) believe there must be ways to gain holds over Mystra, coercing her into their service, and they devote their energies to finding those influences. Most gods believe Mystra would already be controlled if any deity knew how to do it, so they turn to mortal creativity to try to find “the elusive way.” After all, mortals, whose abilities are so puny, must solve the challenges of life with far more innovation than any deity.

While those gods use their priests, servitors, and personal magic to try to discover which mortals can best serve them as tools against Mystra, the goddess of magic pursues her own goals of spreading the use and knowledge of magic as widely among mortals as possible (even directing her Chosen to plant faked



*The gods are ever watchful*

Illustration by Darken

old spellbooks and forgotten scrolls in tombs, cellars, libraries, inn rental bedchambers, and other places anyone might find them).

Other gods (those of gnomes and halflings, in particular) watch this struggle for magic and direct their mortal followers to whisper to humans that they offer “purer” alternatives, ways to personal power and divine care, guidance, and understanding offered by deities not “tainted” by an endless struggle for godly dominance over magic or anything else. Holy symbols and belt-pouch-sized idols of these gods are placed for nonbelievers to find (with dream-visions sent to anyone handling them), and existing mortal worshipers instructed to mention the gods when talking to strangers, identifying them and their portfolios (and attractive features) in little stories of their deeds and the aid they’ve offered mortals.

In mortal eyes, such struggles between gods tend to be widespread, subtle, and very slow. When events become violent, dramatic, or sudden, either some players in the conflict have become sloppy or desperate, or long-unfolding plots have reached their climaxes.

## deity adventure seeds

The following adventure seeds provide examples of deity-driven challenges appropriate for high-level characters. The DM can drop these into an existing campaign as written or use them as examples on which to model new deity adventure seeds.

### HELM MADE BRIGHT

After the events of the Time of Troubles were made known across Faerûn, Helm’s once-staunch image was sullied. His church gained a great deal of enmity and lost much influence. Senior surviving Helmite priests were forced to hire mercenaries to defend many temples and clergy against angry mobs, and many have met in several secret conclaves to plan the rehabilitation of the church.

The clergy decided to craft and spread stories and sermons insisting that falsehoods had been put about to deliberately darken the name of Helm—and that this foulness was the work of the churches of Bane, Cyric, and Shar, who seek always to weaken the guardians of peace and order. Is there not more dark evil wreaking bloody havoc across Faerûn? Is the Balance not shattered? Is not Helm needed, now, more than ever before?

Helmite clergy are to be rewarded by increases in rank for every priest of Bane, Cyric, or Shar of their rank or greater whom they destroy. Be stalwart guardians to others, but to clergy of these three strike with new aggression, for the Balance must be restored.

“Champions of Vigilance” are to be found among the wider population: adventurers of vigor, accomplishments-at-arms, and discipline (but really any adventurers, including the PCs). These champions must be aided by the church of Helm—with information, food and coins, free or very inexpensive healing magic, shelter and hiding if necessary, and even fighting aid—to strike against lawless and marauding evil everywhere, particularly the forces of Bane, Cyric, and Shar. If such champions do evil work or turn away from the causes of Helm, they can be exposed later, after they have weakened or defeated the Foes.

Priests of Mystra and Torm are to be aided and befriended by Helmite clergy whenever possible. Any plots against them and their faiths exposed by priests of Helm will help to restore the reputation of Helm in the eyes of those faiths, warning the wider populace of the creeping evils against which only the Vigilant One and his faithful tirelessly guard.

### WAUKEEN WHISPERS

Recent widespread strife has hampered trade across Faerûn—and at the same time made it even more necessary—as harvests are lost and devastated regions lack goods in demand. The faith of the Merchant’s Friend is in the ascendant as hitherto “closed” lands, such as Thay, reach out to trade across Faerûn, and the displacements of war stimulate markets by bringing new foods and goods to various places. However, it’s easy for those not sharing in prosperity to shun Waukeen as “a god of greedy merchants” rather than embracing the Merchant’s Friend. False, dark rumors of her consorting with fiends are still circulating, abetted by clergy of other faiths.

Senior Waukeenan are determined to usher in a rightful “Golden Age” for their deity and church. Waukeen has told them in dreams that this is best accomplished not by fighting or competing openly with other clergies, but in a small daily way—and a large covert way.

The small way is to persuade increasing numbers of merchants to murmur a prayer to Waukeen at every transfer of coins, “that both sides of a bargain might benefit” and ill fortune be warded off through Waukeen’s smile. As commoners the merchants deal with hear such prayers, daily regard for, and acceptance of, Waukeen should increase.

The large, covert way requires much work over many years as Waukeenan use coins to increase their local influence and standing everywhere. Clerics of Waukeen are to covertly “buy” (win friendship or establish obligations and other holds over, by monetary means) local officials and lawkeepers, not for evil purposes, but to work together toward local prosperity. The goal is to make such persons trust increasingly in the church of Waukeen and give Waukeenan an increasing say in local governance. Let other faiths pray and chant in temples: Waukeen must become “the peoples’ god,” present in every secular purchase and daily business dealing, behind every legal and social change.

Those who oppose or seek to hamper rising Waukeenan during this process must be thwarted or even eliminated—by adventurers hired through subverted agents of the church rather than directly by Waukeenan themselves. Many such tools will be needed, because there’s much work to be done!

### MOANDER RISES FROM THE ROT

The Darkwatch is a blighted area of deep woods north of Highmoon, where deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup>, shambling mounds, and red sundews lurk amid gnarled trees. It was once the site of Tsornyl, but that fair elf city has vanished, hurled down when the ground beneath it collapsed into a rift that reaches down into the Underdark, a rift overgrown by sick, dead, or alive-but-rotting trees.

Long ago, Moander—god of rot, corruption, and decay—attacked bright Tsornyl, infesting it with a great amount of his force so as to bring about its doom. The Creeping God succeeded,

but victory was neither swift nor easy. A powerful High Magic worked by the elves of Tsornyl severed that part of Moander's force within their walls, so weakening the god that the mortal Finder Wyvernspur was later able to wrest Moander's divine spark from the Creeping God, attaining demigodhood for himself and destroying Moander in the process.

Or so sages thought. The High Magic that bound Moander's essence in Tsornyl is decaying, allowing the flickering sentience of the "dead" god to awaken. The same whisper is heard in many priests' nightmares: "Moander dreams."

Some still exist in Faerûn (notably wood-dwellers who hate and fear farmers' and ranchers' land-clearings) who believe in Moander's power, whispering prayers as they glare with hatred at vigorous intruding foes. Worshiped, Moander cannot wholly die.

Yet Moander cannot rise again without more power. It can sense power: the feeble, dying spells of Tsornyl, some strong magics (enchanted items, faezress, and earth nodes) nearby in the Upperdark<sup>Und</sup> immediately below the rift, and the divine power within avatars, the Chosen of Mystra, divine servants such as archons, and mortals often possessed by gods (such as the highest-ranking mortal priests: Fzoul Chembryl of the Zhentarim, for example). Moander knows how to wrest such power from those who come into contact with its blight: Unless such entities can survive in *wraithform* or similar disembodied states, they are doomed if Moander's rot touches them.

Moander's rot need not consume flesh if he doesn't desire it to. It can merely send spores (through skin, inhaled air, or consumed food or water) to dwell within the host, awaiting future activation to rot or to influence: communicating Moander's will as dream-visions and as *suggestions* (Moander can insinuate one *suggestion* into the mind of any host creature per hour of slumber; each successful *suggestion* causes a -1 penalty on the host creature's Will saves against later *suggestions*).

Moander will so serve any creatures who venture into the Darkwatch, influencing the monsters to battle only intruders who threaten the rift itself with spells or cleansing fires, but merely chasing away spore-infected creatures. If such infected creatures come into contact with adventurers (such as PCs), Moander has the tools it desires. The adventurers will be tirelessly influenced to lure, lead, or if necessary capture and convey avatars, archons, the Chosen of Mystra, high priests personally favored by deities, artifacts, and powerful magic items into the Darkwatch for Moander to feed upon.

The Creeping God will influence priests to believe something of great importance to their faith lies within the Darkwatch, causing them to summon other high-ranking priests to the rift. Moander is cunning enough to recall the echoing power of Ao and counterfeit it if multiple gods take a personal interest in what's unfolding in the Darkwatch—and Moander will infect as many powerful mortals as it can before striking to destroy mortal bodies and seize their life-force. One avatar or just two Chosen are sufficient for Moander to rise as a demigod once more; unless such a harvest falls into its grasp, the Creeping God will infect as many pawns as it can reach, patiently extending the ranks of those it has infected until it faces concerted divine attack or it judges sufficient power lies within its reach.

## Great Dragons

Dragons once ruled much of Faerûn. Although they are far less numerous and dominant today, dragons are so individually powerful that just one is a formidable opponent for even strong and experienced adventuring bands. Moreover, many dragons are smarter—and most are far more wise in the ways of the world—than the adventurers they encounter.

As with any large group of intelligent beings, generalizations about dragons could prove wildly inaccurate when applied to specific draconic individuals. However, most human sages agree that younger dragons tend to be as reckless as many human youths, with one exception: They are governed by a strong fear of older, more powerful dragons. Otherwise, they tend to think they're invulnerable and that the world is an endless dining-table that will never run short. "Treasure-thirst" (the hunger to acquire a treasure hoard of their own) is very strong in young dragons, coloring their lives and activities.

Food is often the greatest trigger for middle-aged dragons, though for some the urge to mate is stronger. Dragons vary widely in attitudes toward other dragons: Some are loners, some want followers or families, some want a mate, and some want to court or seduce dragon after dragon, remaining with none. All middle-aged dragons, however, have faced times of hunger, and they have known the lassitude or weakness that unsatisfied hunger brings to dragons; thus, they realize that finding reliable food supplies should be paramount in their lives. Some choose to dismiss such thoughts, but they *do* ponder them.

Power and dominance are the greatest desires of most older dragons, though some might turn to changing the world to their tastes, leaving a legacy that will outlive them, or rearing and grooming offspring to be worthy successors. More than a few aging dragons sleep for long periods (decades or even centuries); when they awaken, their presence might come as an unwelcome surprise to humans who were unaware of them.

"Great dragons" might be of any age, although they are rarely young (when they're not fully grown, they haven't had time to become world-wise and cunning or to amass many great achievements) or very old (when they're failing and know it, facing their own mortality begins to affect their behavior, as described in the *Draconomicon* supplement). "Great dragons" can be defined as dragons engaged with civilized Faerûn (even if only as predators) whose personal abilities and schemes makes them more to adventurers than overlarge reptilian brutish monsters, winning them more influence over areas of the Faerûnian landscape than other large and dangerous beasts.

Some great dragons can outfight, outthink, and outpace almost all the adventurers they'll ever meet. To best them, your characters must prepare accordingly—or prepare to die.

### for the DM: using Great Dragons in your campaign

Dragons don't survive to become "great dragons" through sheer luck or hiding from the world to achieve longevity. They are

the adventurers of their kind, mindful of the damage the world around can do to them if they give it the chance. Any great dragon knows how to make its lairs hard to reach for others but easy for itself to escape, how to prepare and use traps that will protect the dragon as much as possible and expose its foes at a disadvantage (for example, a red dragon preparing a timber-lined tunnel that foes must approach it along, which it can breathe down upon and so set the timbers alight, perhaps collapsing the tunnel on foes and increasing the effects of its flames), and how to minimize their own weaknesses.

Most great dragons, like human villains or rulers, shield themselves from surprise attacks and give themselves time to prepare for, flee from, or size up opponents by “hiding behind” hired, coerced, or loyal (through upbringing and training) servant creatures who will fight for them. Most great dragons can command automatons and other magical guardians as readily as human spellcasters, and many use their spells to summon monsters. Even if the creatures their magic brings aren’t obedient, such creatures can be brought into an area or situation that forces intruders to fight their way through the creatures. Servitor creatures can suffer the effects of poisons, traps, or spells intended for the dragon, or can be sent out on forays to attack weary adventurers in their camps, or learn all about them so the great dragon can strike at them most effectively (perhaps plundering their fortresses while they’re off dragonhunting or slaying their employers, allies, and/or loved ones).

Too many sages believe dragons are so arrogant that they can easily be goaded into acts of reckless stupidity. Such sages obviously haven’t personally fought any great dragons, because those who have learn one lesson hard and fast: Great dragons fight on their own terms, and withdraw (“flee,” if boastful adventurers prefer) if conflict turns against their liking. Long draconic lifespans offer ample opportunities for rematches—or revenge.

## sample plots

Pride is a prevalent character trait among great dragons, but foolishness is not (bardic ballads and adventurers’ tavern tales notwithstanding). For centuries, as humans and orcs in particular have multiplied with astonishing speed and “civilized” areas have spread across much of Faerûn, dragons have sought to control or eliminate threats to themselves (such as adventuring bands) and to control sources of food (such as herds of wild grazing animals or livestock). Many a dragon reigns over isolated alpine valleys stocked with animals it brought there that it dines upon at will. Dragons can eat almost anything if they must, but prefer certain meals—and, over the years, they have come to expect they’ll usually get what they want.

Relatively few dragons have managed to work cordially with humans and other humanoid races, because this requires not just the draconic ability to take the shape of these “lesser beings,” master their languages, and understand something of their ways, but it also requires the inclination to do so. Many dragons hate, detest, or fear the “swarming puny ones” too much to want to have that much to do with them.

The majority of dragonkind sees humans (for example) both as tasty food and as pests or foes, to be fought or harmed at every

encounter and otherwise avoided, so as not to attract attention that would eventually lead to strong and deliberate human attacks.

Yet as human territories expand, contacts increasingly occur. When dragons are seen, dragonslayers soon come. Many adventurers make their living fighting dragons and plundering their hoards, gleaning dragon scales, blood and other alchemically useful relics, dragon eggs, and treasure from dragon hoards. However, few even realize that dragons in return do the same to them, attacking particular places and persons (eliminating powerful wizards and adventurers) with the intent of halting the expansion of realms or steering growth of settlement in specific directions—perhaps into direct conflict with the expanding territories of rivals (such as orcs). Weakened, preoccupied foes (for example, orcs and dwarves driven into fighting each other in a mountain range) have less time and resources to spare for dragonhunting.

A few dragons are fascinated by the sheer energy and inventiveness of civilized Faerûnian society. If they can readily take human form or otherwise hide from attention, they dwell in human cities and engage in the cut-and-thrust of daily urban intrigues. Waterdeep, Scornubel, Marsember, and many other cities are known to have their resident dragons, and it’s not uncommon for evil dragons to take over or found slaving organizations to gain sources of food (the slaves). Often this involves bargaining with adventurers along these lines: Help me in this, and receive treasure from my hoard; betray me, and I’ll devour you (and your kin and loved ones at home).

Most dragons succeed as crime bosses because they’re shrewd judges of character, cunning (both good at intrigues and good at anticipating the treacheries of others) and bold, deriving entertainment from violence and confrontation where nondragons might know fear, distaste, or simply a desire to run away from it all.

This same love of entertainment leads dragons in the wild to toy with intruders, often prearranging elaborate traps (such as deadfalls and triggered avalanches) just to see what the would-be dragonslayers will do. While this might keep some adventurers alive longer than they would otherwise survive, it also usually means they penetrate the dragon’s lair (often being ruthlessly herded into it if they try to turn back) exhausted, wounded, and without most of their food, gear, magic, or weapons.

## great dragon adventure seeds

The following adventure seeds provide examples of dragon-centered challenges appropriate for high-level characters. The DM can drop these into an existing campaign as written or use them as examples on which to model new adventure seeds based around great dragons (or similar beings of great power).

### RHOARINGOARH’S EGG HUNT

Somewhere in crumbling ruins deep in the upper Thornwash marshes (north of the Lake of Steam) dwells an ancient colossal black dragon, Rhoarigoarh “the Mighty,” who discovered too late (after devouring all of his cowering neighbors, village after human village) that what he loved most was to dominate and give orders. He pondered just what he was lacking for years until he thought of rearing lesser dragons of his kind to serve him as guards, food-fetchers, errand-flyers, and a strike force. However, Rhoarigoarh



trusts no dragon enough to mate, and young dragons quite sensibly flee at his approach, so how is he to acquire servitors?

He hit upon the idea of bargaining with adventurers who came to explore his ruins or slay him, rather than devouring them. In return for their lives and a treasure reward when they returned with what he desired, they would steal black dragon eggs for him and transport these prizes to him (submerged in acidic swamp water renewed whenever they pass a fetid bog or marsh), so he can rear the hatchlings “properly.”

Some NPC adventurers accepted his bargain, brought “Old Roar-and-Gore” a few eggs, and are bringing back more when they come into contact with PCs. The dragon-serving adventurers will try to slay the PCs (they have orders—no one must see the eggs and be allowed to live). If the battle goes against them, they’ll flee toward Rhoarigoarh’s lair with the eggs, seeking to lure the PCs to where the black dragon can destroy them.

If PCs destroy Rhoarigoarh’s adventurers, other bands of his adventurer agents will try to lure the PCs into journeying to the lair where the eggs are being assembled. Unbeknownst to everyone but Rhoarigoarh, the dragon intends to devour or slay all the adventurers who helped gather the eggs, and judges the PCs should serve admirably as their replacements.

If the PCs accept, they’ll be sent on increasingly dangerous missions to bring back specific magic items and artifacts the great dragon knows how to find—usually in the hands of various powerful NPC rulers and wizards the dragon has been spying on by means of spells and *crystal balls*.

### SCALESLED

A disease begins to afflict dragons across the Heartlands and the North, causing them to molt their scales. Panicked dragons want human and other agents to slay affected dragons before the malady can spread, and offer large rewards (half before, half upon “return and report”) as well as coercion and blackmail (devouring of captives or threatened destruction of a castle or palace whose inhabitants have no possible defense against a dragon). However, the dragons will then send secondary bands of agents to kill and then burn any successful dragonslayers, so there’s no chance of infected humans coming back and bringing the wyrm-molt with them.

These secondary agents are under orders never to return to their draconic patrons, but to journey to specific locations that intermediaries will reveal to them after they’ve disposed of the dragonslayers. At these locations, rich treasure (their promised pay) will be waiting. Some of the dragons try to betray their secondary agents as well, of course, but most are yielding up one of their guarded, established treasure caches.

Unfortunately, some evil adventurers learn of the scheme from captured intermediaries, and they decide to enrich themselves by waiting for adventurers to battle the defenses of the caches—and then pounce on the weakened surviving adventures as they emerge, laden with treasure.

Wild rumors of the scaleshed plague spread rapidly across Faerûn. Some rulers desiring to eliminate troublesome dragons hire adventurers to take remains from slain scaleshed dragons and try to infect healthy dragons in their lairs. This enrages the Cult of the Dragon and other dragon-worshippers, who resolve to slay all such rulers (and their hired adventurers, too).

### INFERNO OF THE STAR MOUNTS

Tales of a red dragon of awesome age, power, fire-magic mastery, and hoard size have long been told and retold across the Heartlands and Sword Coast North. The dragon Inferno is said to lair in the heart of the High Forest, in a cave high on the north face of Angaroth, highest peak of the Star Mounts. Inferno is also said to devour even the mightiest adventurers who come against him.

Despite their wild claims, few Inferno legends are baseless. There really is a reclusive, magic-studying great dragon named Inferno (at least to humans, who have simplified his real name, “Imvaernarhro”) in the Star Mounts, and his fire spells are impressive even to archmages of long years and many achievements.

Imvaernarhro is seldom seen by those in surrounding lands because he controls a portal—possibly of Netherese origin—that linked its cavern (in a small and nameless side-peak of the Star Mounts) with a wilderland continent on the far face of Faerûn where vast wild herds of beasts graze plains where no humanoid hunts, and where Inferno can sport and feed at will.



*The red dragon Inferno checks out a magic tome*

Illustration by Lucio Parrillo

Imvaernarhro has never laired in the infamous cave on Angaroth. Before he found it, another dragon (whom he slew) had transformed it into a great death-trap, crammed with harmful spells, covered spiked pits, deadfalls, and collected deadly automatons and constructs. Imvaernarhro maintains it, deriving great entertainment from the sufferings of adventurers who seek him therein.

Imvaernarhro maintains dozens of caverns around the Star Mounts, some as treasure caches and a few sleeping chambers floored in “beds” of (as many as 100,000, each) gold coins. Imvaernarhro’s combined wealth in gold coins alone has been estimated at “at least a dozen million” by the mage Elminster.

Imvaernarhro has traditionally kept to himself, troubling other dragons and the wider world little (except those who seek to violate his privacy). Aside from the diversions of dealing with intruding adventurers, his time was spent chiefly in sleeping—for decades at a time—and in experimenting with fire magics. Curiously, recent “rages” among dragonkind seem to have left him unaffected; he might be magically protected against them.

However, Imvaernarhro’s isolationist ways are changing. He now seems to be taking an interest in the expanding Silver Marches, Thay’s expanding network of enclaves, and the politics and society of “civilized” Faerûn. He spends much time scrying as well as using spells to send messages or give orders to humans, especially outlaws and adventuring bands. Thus far, most of these communications have either been “Don’t do that or I’ll do thus to you!” missives, or “You should know X” (where “X” is information that will send the listener rushing to attack a rival, get to a revealed-by-Imvaernarhro treasure first, or meddle in something to further their own long-standing interests).

It’s too soon to discern the dragon’s motives for such meddling. Does he seek merely to stir things up for his personal entertainment? Set lands to war with each other, to weaken them all so none can threaten him (and he can raid for food at will)? Or, like priesthoods and the Chosen of Mystra and so many others, does he seek to steer and shape realms and their affairs to his own liking?

## IMVAERNARHO

CR 40

Male red great wyrm, advanced<sup>EL</sup>

CE Colossal+ dragon (fire)

**Init** +0; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, Listen +75, Spot +75

**Aura** frightful presence 570-ft. radius, HD 60 or less (Will DC 41 negates)

**Languages** Aragrakh, Auran, Chondathan, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Ignan, Illuskan, Infernal, Netherese, Orc, Thorass, Tuilvilanue

**AC** 67 (–8 size, +60 natural, +5 bracers), touch 2, flat-footed 67

**hp** 1,433 (HD 61); **DR** 15/epic

**Immune** sleep, fire, paralysis; **SR** 46

**Fort** +49, **Ref** +32, **Will** +43

**Weakness** cold vulnerability

**Speed** 40 ft., fly 250 ft. (clumsy); Flyby Attack, Hover

**Melee** bite +77 (8d6+24) and  
2 claws +75 (4d8+12) and

2 wings +75 (4d6+12) and

tail slap +75 (4d8+36)

**Space** 30 ft.; **Reach** 30 ft. (40 ft. with bite)

**Base Atk** +61; **Grp** +101

**Atk Options** Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack

**Special Actions** breath weapon, crush 8d6+36 (DC 57), tail sweep 4d6+36 (DC 57)

**Combat Gear** *necklace of absorption* (functions as *rod of absorption*), *hornring of shielding* (functions as *brooch of shielding*, takes up space as headgear), *ring of spell turning*, *ring of theurgy* containing *dimensional lock*, *greater arcane sight*, *teleport object*

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 40th):

13th (1/day)—any quickened 9th-level spell

12th (1/day)—any quickened 8th-level spell

11th (2/day)—any quickened 7th-level spell

10th (2/day)—any quickened 6th-level spell

9th (7/day)—*absorption*<sup>CAr</sup>, *meteor swarm* (DC 30), *wish*  
8th (7/day)—*etherealness*, *mass charm monster* (DC 29),  
*time stop*

7th (8/day)—*delayed blast fireball* (DC 28), *ghostform*,  
*spell turning*

6th (8/day)—*disintegrate* (DC 27), *greater dispel magic*,  
*transfix*<sup>CAr</sup> (DC 27), *true seeing*

5th (8/day)—*Daltim’s fiery tentacles*<sup>SS</sup>, *firebrand*<sup>CAr</sup>  
(DC 26), *greater fireburst*<sup>CAr</sup> (DC 26), *teleport*

4th (8/day)—*blistering radiance*<sup>CAr</sup> (DC 25), *charm monster* (DC 25), *dimensional anchor*, *polymorph*

3rd (9/day)—*dispel magic*, *fireball* (DC 24), *baste*,  
*nondetection*, *vampiric touch* (+77 melee touch)

2nd (9/day)—*detect thoughts* (DC 23), *fireburst*<sup>CAr</sup>  
(DC 23), *flaming sphere* (DC 23), *invisibility*,  
*scorching ray* (+53 ranged touch)

1st (9/day)—*burning hands* (DC 22), *mage armor*,  
*ray of enfeeblement* (+53 ranged touch), *shield*,  
*shield of faith*

0 (6/day)—*detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*,  
*mending*, *message*, *open/clone*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*, *resistance*

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 40th):

19/day—*locate object*

3/day—*suggestion* (DC 24)

1/day—*find the path*, *discern location*

**Abilities** Str 59, Dex 10, Con 45, Int 32, Wis 33, Cha 32

**Feats** Alertness, Automatic Quicken Spell (0–3rd)<sup>EL</sup>, Automatic Quicken Spell (4th–6th)<sup>EL</sup>, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Hover, Improved Spell Capacity (10th)<sup>EL,B</sup>, Improved Spell Capacity (11th)<sup>EL,B</sup>, Improved Spell Capacity (12th)<sup>EL,B</sup>, Improved Spell Capacity (13th)<sup>EL,B</sup>, Mobility, Multiattack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell, Quicken Spell-Like Ability, Snatch, Spell Knowledge<sup>EL</sup>, Spell Opportunity<sup>EL</sup>, Spellcasting Harrier<sup>EL</sup>, Wingover

**Skills** Bluff +75, Concentration +79 (+83 when casting defensively), Diplomacy +77, Disguise +11 (+13 acting), Intimidate +77, Knowledge (arcana) +37, Knowledge

(history) +37, Knowledge (local) +37, Knowledge (nature) +37, Listen +75, Search +75, Sense Motive +75, Spellcraft +45, Spot +75, Survival +11 (+13 in outdoor terrain or following tracks)

**Possessions** combat gear plus *bracers of armor +5*, *crystal balls* (one of each type in *Dungeon Master's Guide*), other magic items as DM desires.

**Breath Weapon (Su)** 80-ft. cone, once every 1d4 rounds, 38d10 fire, Reflex DC 57 half.

**Behavior and Tactics:** Inferno seems smugly amused by unfolding events around him; he seems to view the world as an endless pageant presented for his personal entertainment. His manner is more “lordly whimsical” than proud, sneering, or condescending—and it’s high-impossible to know what thoughts lurk behind it.

Inferno likes to know his foes: Before revealing himself in any direct confrontation, he’ll want to observe intruders, making sure he’s aware of all of them and of their caches, any hiding-places, and any magical concealments or misdirections. He might cast spells to find out as much as he can about who is approaching, and then enjoy trying to correctly anticipate what they’re up to and what tactics they’ll adopt.

He takes great delight in successfully manipulating humans and other humanoid races into doing things he wants—and even greater delight in “aiming a weapon” by somehow getting a human to go and do a task or attack a target of Inferno’s choosing. After centuries of delighting in magic and largely ignoring other intelligent beings and their societies, Inferno is enjoying honing his manipulative skills. (Turning defiance to fear is enjoyable too.)

Inferno will try to make adventurers who reach him turn aside from trying to attack or rob him, and instead strike against Zhentarim active in Anauroch and across the North, certain wizards and sorcerers in Silverymoon, and members of the Cult of the Dragon (whose identities and whereabouts he seems well-versed in) all across the Heartlands and the North.

Imvaernarhro also seems to view Shade as a threat. He wants it explored, and its citizens (if they can be caught alone, in situations where they can’t call on aid or communicate what’s happening to them to their fellow inhabitants of Shade) covertly destroyed, ideally by adventurers he can nudge (not command directly) into such acts.

## Rival Adventurers

Many sages have said that an adventurer’s worst foe is another adventurer. PCs can accomplish much through boldness, cunning, prowess at arms, strategy, and the smile of Tymora (that is, sheer luck). Of course, so can NPC adventurers—and if they happen to be more successful than the PCs (of higher levels, greater wealth and reputation, and longer careers studied with more achievements), might they not be *better* than the PCs at such things? Formidable foes—or even friendly rivals—indeed!

## for the DM: using Rival Adventurers in Your Campaign

Many PC adventuring groups tend to be reactive and opportunistic: They “drift” from one adventure or dungeon, seizing on adventure opportunities as they become apparent—or as they are attacked or opposed. Many NPC adventuring bands behave in the same way, often pursuing feuds or opposing authority enthusiastically for years because it gives them a sense of purpose, progress, and accomplishment.

Other NPC bands, however, scheme and decide upon plans or long-term goals, and work toward them, reevaluating their activities from time to time in light of changing challenges and their public reputations.

These two sorts of groups—the drifters (reactive) and the planners (proactive)—might respond to PC encounters very differently. The drifters might oppose PCs with cunning, but the planners are likely to be far more subtle, long-term, and effective foes or allies. Either way, rival adventurers give PCs worthy competition in whose defeat they can take well-earned satisfaction.

## sample plots

NPC adventurers who are planners are quite likely to try to “steer” PC adventurers into being scapegoats for any atrocities or thefts the NPC adventurers might commit. They will also probably seek to manipulate PCs into setting off the traps and weakening the guardians” by luring them into a dungeon, wizard’s tower, or other locale the NPCs want to penetrate. This will make the PCs a diversion (while the NPCs attack by another route, such as in through the wizard’s escape *portal*) and/or force them to do all the fighting. Wounded and exhausted PCs who do manage to seize treasure can be attacked and relieved of it while they’re returning home or seeking to get out of the dungeon alive.

NPC adventurers firmly established in a territory (or city) the PCs enter might seek to send a spy to befriend, romance, or even join the ranks of the PCs. This agent can report on PC knowledge, plans, and movements, and “feed” the PCs rumors and lore that will influence the heroes into acting as the NPC adventurers want them to.

Skillful long-term manipulation of the PCs can even help locally vilified NPCs revitalize their reputations, recasting themselves as local defenders of the area against the PCs, those “evil, dangerous, intruding outlanders.”

## Rivals Adventure seeds

The following adventure seeds provide examples of plots centered on rival adventurers, generally comparable in level to the player characters. The DM can drop these into an existing campaign as written or use them as examples on which to model new rivals for their PCs.

### BITE OF THE BLADES

In a small wayside town—anywhere lightly ruled in the Heartlands—Thurdan’s Blades are a small band of outlaws and hard-luck

mercenaries from far lands, gathered under the banner of a local bully. Orst Thurdan is a large-bellied, blustering, hairy CN male Damaran human Ftr7, retired from mercenary life because of a near-fatal (for him) inability to take repeated orders. The Blades are making a precarious living as short-hire bodyguards and wagon escorts for local merchants (who engage them only when in possession of much wealth or valuable cargoes). Their repeated attempts to become salaried town defenders have been rebuffed by the local “lord merchants” and temple priests, who prefer their own bodyguards and mistrust the Blades’ competence and loyalties. Even Thurdan is unaware that four of his twelve “stalwart swords” are a family of greater doppelgangers<sup>Mag</sup>.

When the PCs arrive in town, Thurdan sees a chance to demonstrate his usefulness, and denounces the PCs as “dangerous outlaws from afar who bear a curse, and must be slain before they bring their foes and the disfavor of the gods down upon our heads!” He’ll bluster that the PCs are thieves and murderers, with no evidence at all to back his claims up, but avoid confrontation with the PCs (by not being wherever they look for him) until word of his claims has spread widely, whereupon he’ll gather to attack.

However, the doppelgangers will see their opportunity to commit various bold crimes and have the PCs take the blame (“proving” Thurdan’s claims in the bargain) by taking the shapes of PCs the first night the PCs are in town, and undertaking thefts, murders, and other mischief.

### GEM RUSH

An extra-dimensional “elfhold” (a small chamber reached through an invisible *portal*, where supplies were cached by elf mages, long

ago) is accidentally revealed near the PCs’ location, by an unwitting wizard casting a spell for another purpose. No local inhabitants had any inkling of the elfhold’s existence, and it’s heaped full of loose gems; some flood forth before its *portal* closes again.

As excited rumor spreads like wildfire, the precise location of the *portal* is known to all—but it doesn’t seem to want to open again, no matter what magic is cast. If the PCs take an interest and journey thence, they’ll see a band of adventurers already there, trying their luck and keeping a curious crowd of folk at bay with drawn weapons—and a *second* band of adventurers hurrying to reach the spot, and about the same distance away as the PCs themselves.

A third band of adventurers, of less than good alignment, have seen the converging adventurers and drawn back into hiding, to await an eventual winner—whom they’ll promptly attack!

### THE COMPANY OF THE CLOAK

Founded in 1357 DR by the charismatic Mhair Gulzrabban (CE male Calishite human wizard 15), a coldly commanding, always alert, short and squat man with beady black eyes and iron self-control, the Company of the Cloak began in Scornubel when Gulzrabban assembled fourteen dissatisfied adventurers who had fallen out with employers, split from other adventuring bands, or were on the run as troublemakers or law-breakers. (They should not be confused with the Company of the Purple Cloak, a Cult of the Dragon-associated group now based in Sembia, although they have at times deliberately fostered that confusion to take advantage of the reputation built by the Purple Cloaks.)

Mhair inspired the fourteen with claims of having discovered lore that precisely located magic items, riches, and spellbooks in the

Illustration by Kev Walker



*A force of elves and dwarves slips uninvited into an enemy’s stronghold*

ruins of Myth Drannor and the sand-swallowed lands of Anauria and Asram. In truth, he had found only a few scant notes and descriptions. Their disastrous foray into Myth Drannor cost them several members and much of their confidence.

For a time they became “dark blades for hire” in the Heartlands and Inner Sea lands, doing illicit work (kidnappings, assassinations, “butcher-raids” on mansions of their patrons’ rivals, and so on) for various unscrupulous wealthy persons, notably entrepreneurs of Sembia anxious to extend their influence rapidly across Faerûn. The Cloakers enjoyed some success, but this of course made them increasingly unwelcome as fewer and fewer folk dared to hire them.

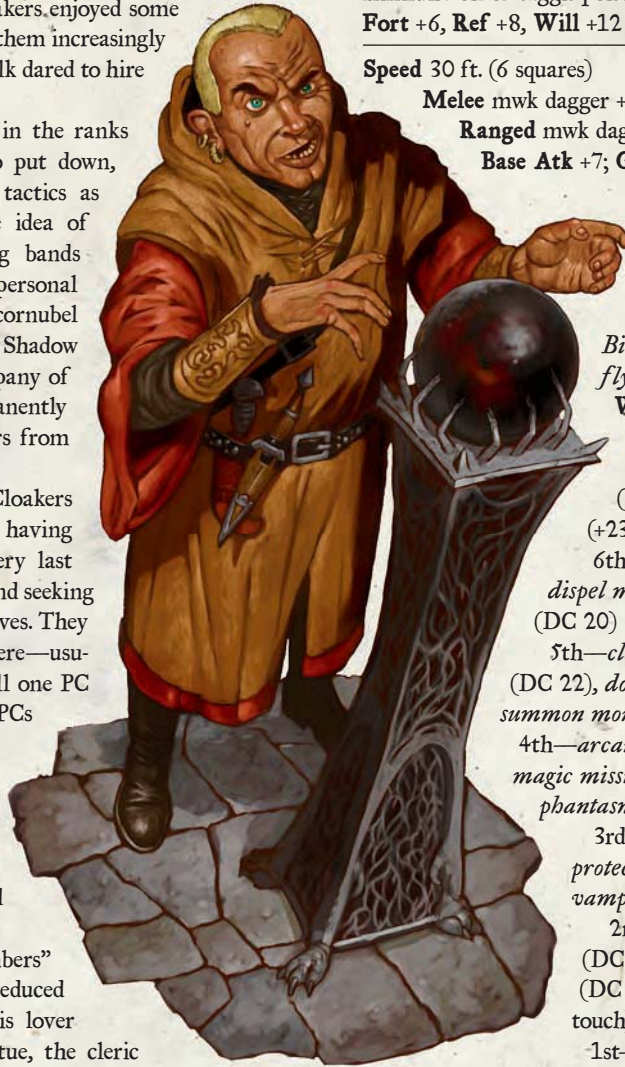
Eventually, facing a revolt in the ranks that cost another two lives to put down, Gulzrabban saw a change in tactics as unavoidable. He hit upon the idea of stalking successful adventuring bands and “taking them down” for personal profit, spreading the word in Scornubel and to his Zhent, Thayan, and Shadow Thieves contacts that the Company of the Cloak specialized in permanently removing unwanted adventurers from the scene.

To do so effectively, the Cloakers disappeared from public view, having no wish to be attacked by every last “glittering new” adventuring band seeking to make reputations for themselves. They can now be encountered anywhere—usually after they kill or try to kill one PC in order to lure the rest of the PCs into their latest trap.

The Company’s badge is a dark green swirling cloak, shaped like a breaking wave, sweeping clockwise to end in a point (starting to curl in and down) at the upper right.

These days, the “full members” of the Company have been reduced to five (Mhair Gulzrabban, his lover and apprentice Sharaera Duthtue, the cleric of Mask Horlo Aumrabbar, and the fighters Burtrar Malith and Omskilar Rethwood); they customarily hire up to three times their number of “competent but know-nothing” warriors and thieves to flesh out their ranks for specific tasks.

All of the five have dosed themselves for years to build up immunity to oil of taggit (which causes unconsciousness in most creatures ingesting it). When they want to shed hired “fodder muscle” members, the five lace a meal with the oil, share it with all, consume it with gusto, and then slay their fellow diners who succumb (the few who aren’t affected are lured away for drinks in goblets painted inside with transparent poisons).



The Calishite wizard  
Mhair Gulzrabban

Illustration by Warren Mahoy

## MHAIR GULZRABBAN

Male Calishite human wizard 15

CE Medium humanoid

Init +7; Senses Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Chondathan, Common, Draconic, Elven, Gnome, Halfling, Orc

AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10

hp 54 (15 HD); Diehard, ring of regeneration

Immune oil of taggit poison

Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +12

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mwk dagger +6/+1 (1d4–2/19–20)

Ranged mwk dagger +11 (1d4–2/19–20)

Base Atk +7; Grp +5

Combat Gear masterwork dagger, 2 spare daggers (sheaths down inside right boot, up left sleeve), bead of force (in belt buckle compartment), iron bands of Bilarro, ring of invisibility, scroll of fly, scroll of gaseous form

Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 15th):

8th—quicken *dimension door*

7th—quicken *fireball*

(DC 20), *Mordenkainen’s sword* (+23 melee)

6th—widen *fireball* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic*, maximized *lightning bolt* (DC 20)

5th—*cloudkill* (DC 20), *cone of cold* (DC 22), *dominate person* (DC 20), *prying eyes*, *summon monster V*

4th—*arcane eye*, *locate creature*, maximized *magic missile*, *lesser globe of invulnerability*, *phantasmal killer* (DC 19)

3rd—*dispel magic*, *displacement*, *protection from energy*, *slow* (DC 18), *vampiric touch* (+10 touch)

2nd—*arcane lock*, *detect thoughts* (DC 17), *invisibility*, *pyrotechnics* (DC 17), *scorching ray* (+10 ranged touch)

1st—*charm person* (DC 16), *hypnotism* (DC 16), *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement* (+10 ranged touch), *shocking grasp* (+10 melee touch), *true strike*

0—*arcane mark*, *detect magic*, *message*, *read magic*

Abilities Str 7, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 17

Feats Combat Casting, Diehard, Endurance, Greater Spell Focus (evocation), Improved Initiative, Martial Weapon Proficiency (dagger), Maximize Spell<sup>B</sup>, Quicken Spell<sup>B</sup>, Scribe Scroll<sup>B</sup>, Spell Focus (evocation), Widen Spell<sup>B</sup>

Skills Appraise +5 (+7 alchemical items), Concentration +19, Craft (alchemy) +12, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +7, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (geography) +12,

Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (local) +19, Knowledge (the planes) +10, Listen +5, Spellcraft +25, Spot +5, Survival +3 (+5 to avoid getting lost or on other planes)

**Spellbook** spells prepared plus 0—all; 1st—*expeditious retreat, shield*; 2nd—*fox's cunning*; 3rd—*baste*; 4th—*polymorph*; 5th—*teleport*; 6th—*globe of invulnerability*; 7th—*forcecage, greater arcane sight, mass hold person, power word blind, project image*; 8th—*greater prying eyes, mind blank, polymorph any object, protection from spells, temporal stasis*

**Possessions** combat gear plus 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*, knapsack lined with hidden inside pockets, each one containing a (false) letter of commission identifying Gulzrabban (by various aliases) as an envoy of a ruler (either the Steel Regent of Cormyr, Lord Piergeiron of Waterdeep, Lord Taern of Silverymoon, or “Lord Irthas of the Thorncrown Empire” [an imaginary place that Gulzrabban will claim is “far across the sea to the west”]), 24 gp

**Hook** “Fair our meeting; let Faerûn be made fairer still because of it.”

**Behavior and Tactics:** Always in control of his emotions, facial expressions, voice, and swift-thinking mind, Mhair Gulzrabban is a superb actor and strategist. He’s supremely confident without being arrogant or slow to learn from others. He never forgets a face, name, or precise quotation. Gulzrabban desires power over kings, high priests, wizards of greater and lesser powers than himself, and even liches and dragons—without being foolish enough to ever want to openly challenge any such foes. There must always be a way to profit from events, moments of a target’s weakness or being distracted or elsewhere, and the actions of others (undertaken on their own or as a result of your manipulations)—and Gulzrabban considers it his life’s work to find those ways, use them well, and as much as possible escape detection (or at least being identified).

Like Elminster, Mhair doesn’t want to rule anywhere or anyone—but he does want to be free to do just as he pleases, ignoring or brushing aside the authority of others, no matter how much it might shock, offend, or astonish. He’s keeping careful watch on Sharaera—anticipating a betrayal on her part—and searching for some magical hold he can gain over her to protect himself from anything she might try. In the short term, he must increase his own personal reach and power as much as possible by gaining magic items, spellbooks, and knowledge from adventurers defeated by the Company.

## SHARAERA DUTHTUE

CR 12

Female moon elf wizard 12

CN Medium humanoid

**Init** +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

**Languages** Chondathan, Common, Draconic, Elven, Sylvan

**AC** 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10

**hp** 31 (12 HD)

**Immune** sleep

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +7, **Will** +8; +2 against enchantments

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +1 *keen dagger* +10/+5 (1d4/17–20)

**Ranged** +1 *keen dagger* +10 (1d4/17–20)

**Base Atk** +6; **Grp** +5

**Combat Gear** *wand of magic missile* (5th), *wand of hold person, bead of force* (in belt buckle compartment), scroll of *gaseous form*

**Wizard Spells Prepared** (CL 12th):

6th—*chain lightning, greater dispel magic*

5th—*break enchantment* (DC variable), *cloudkill* (DC 20), *summon monster V*

4th—*arcane eye, locate creature, lesser globe of invulnerability, remove curse* (DC 19)

3rd—*dispel magic, fly, halt undead* (DC 18), *protection from energy, vampiric touch* (+9 melee touch)

2nd—*detect thoughts* (DC 17), *invisibility, protection from arrows, pyrotechnics* (DC 17), *scorching ray* (+9 ranged touch)

1st—*feather fall, identify, shocking grasp* (+9 melee touch), *true strike* (2)

0—*detect magic, light, mending, read magic*

**Abilities** Str 9, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 10, Cha 10

**Feats** Brew Potion<sup>B</sup>, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item<sup>B</sup>, Double Wand Wielder<sup>CAR</sup>, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longbow)<sup>B</sup>, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword)<sup>B</sup>, Martial Weapon Proficiency (rapier)<sup>B</sup>, Martial Weapon Proficiency (shortbow)<sup>B</sup>, Scribe Scroll<sup>B</sup>, Toughness, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Concentration +15, Decipher Script +14, Gather Information +2, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (local) +14, Listen +2, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spellcraft +21, Spot +2

**Spellbook** spells prepared plus 0—all; 1st—*mage armor, magic missile, shield*; 2nd—*levitate, resist energy, summon monster II*; 3rd—*displacement, summon monster III*; 4th—*detect scrying, minor creation, polymorph, scrying, summon monster IV*; 5th—*fabricate, prying eyes, telekinesis*; 6th—*legend lore, repulsion*

**Possessions** combat gear plus +1 *keen dagger*, 3 spare daggers (sheaths inside both forearms and back of neck under hair, affixed to apparently decorative “choker” throat-ribbon), 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*, 24 gp

**Hook** “Is it so? Tell me more!”

**Behavior and Tactics:** Sharaera is a young elf, not yet “settled” and mature, the whimsical streak of exploration (strong in many elves) still ruling her. She’s fascinated by Mhair Gulzrabban and revels in his attentions. She’s not fooled by his acting and knows him for exactly what he is (attempts to find a magical hold over her and all), but has never met a human so skilled in control of his body, mind, and the ability to scheme before. Gulzrabban reminds her very much of a beloved now-dead uncle, Phondelarrus, an elf adventurer, master schemer, and actor who “used” some elves with cold ruthlessness, to pursue his aims. While she’s with Gulzrabban, Sharaera feels more “alive,” powerful, and important than she ever has before. She keeps patient and silent about his obvious

attempts to limit her power (and therefore danger to him) by not teaching her certain spells, and has some spells of her own gained from previous teachers of wizardry. Sharaera has no intention of betraying Gulzrabban, but will abandon him in an instant (and forewarn his foes) if he does something really harmful to her or to the strength and future prospects of any elf realm. Until that happens, she's along for the ride, gaining all the experience, magic, wealth, and knowledge of useful secrets she can.

### HORLO AUMRABBAR

CR 13

Male Tashalan human cleric 13 of Mask  
CE Medium humanoid

**Init** +1; **Senses** Listen +6, Spot +7

**Languages** Common, Gnome, Halfling, Orc, Tashalan

**AC** 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16

**hp** 75 (13 HD)

**Immune** oil of taggit poison

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +14

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +1 *keen longsword* +10/+5 (1d8/17–20)

**Base Atk** +9; **Grp** +8

**Combat Gear** scroll of *create undead*<sup>D</sup>, scroll of *dispel good*<sup>D</sup> (DC 22), scroll of *summon monster III*, scroll of *shield of faith*, scroll of *divine favor*, *potion of cure moderate wounds*

**Cleric Spells Prepared** (CL 13th, CL 14th for evil spells):

7th—*mass cure serious wounds* (DC 23), *blasphemy*<sup>D</sup> (DC 23)

6th—*blade barrier* (DC 22), *heal* (DC 22) (2), *mislead*<sup>D</sup> (DC 22)

5th—*break enchantment* (DC 21), *dispel good*<sup>D</sup> (DC 21), *flame strike* (DC 21), *scrying* (DC 21), *slay living* (DC 21)

4th—*confusion*<sup>D</sup> (DC 20), *cure critical wounds* (DC 20), *imbue with spell ability* (DC 20), *inflict critical wounds* (DC 20), *neutralize poison* (DC 20), *tongues* (DC 20)

3rd—*cure serious wounds* (DC 19), *dispel magic*, *inflict serious wounds* (DC 19), *locate object*, *nondetection*<sup>D</sup> (DC 19), *summon monster III*

2nd—*cure moderate wounds* (DC 18), *find traps*, *hold person* (DC 18), *inflict moderate wounds* (DC 18), *invisibility*<sup>D</sup>, *resist energy* (DC 18), *spiritual weapon*, *summon monster II*

1st—*cause fear* (DC 17), *command* (DC 17), *cure light wounds* (DC 17), *disguise self*<sup>D</sup>, *hide from undead* (DC 17), *inflict light wounds* (DC 17), *sanctuary* (DC 17), *summon monster I*

0—*cure minor wounds* (DC 16), *detect magic* (2), *detect poison* (DC 20 Wis check to identify type), *guidance* (DC 16), *mending* (DC 16)

D: Domain spell. Domains: Evil, Trickery

**Special Actions** turn undead (5/day, +5, 2d6+15<sup>F</sup>)

**Abilities** Str 8, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 22, Cha 14

**Feats** Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, Jack of All Trades<sup>FP</sup>,

Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Scribe Scroll, Weapon Focus (longsword)

**Skills** Bluff +7, Concentration +17, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Heal +4, Hide +5, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (religion) +17, Sleight of Hand +3, Spot +7, Spellcraft +17

**Possessions** combat gear plus +1 *keen longsword*, dagger, +2 *mithral shirt*, *candle of truth*, *chime of opening*, *gloves of Dexterity* +2, *periapt of Wisdom* +4, 56 gp

**Hook** “Deceive, and Mask smiles.”

**Behavior and Tactics:** Horlo is an urbane, soft-spoken, pleasant-seeming schemer and deceiver. Able to make a good living by making and selling potions and scrolls, he has no intention of getting killed (if he can possibly avoid it) in Company activities; after all, that's what underlings and manipulated dupes are for. Horlo has successfully influenced Gulzrabban to become more patient, subtle, lower-profile, and less domineering over the years, demonstrating the effectiveness of the “gentle, deft, shadowy way” of deception and deceit. Horlo prefers to remain mysterious and “a step removed” from bold public view, and he has convinced Gulzrabban to adopt this approach, too. If Gulzrabban or Sharaera ever grow too bold for Horlo's liking, he's thought of several ways of luring them within reach of Red Wizard zulkirs while he slips away, ending the Company so he can retire under another name. He's prepared caches of wealth and several homes and identities across the Heartlands in preparation for having to “disappear” in the future.

### BURTRAR MALITH

CR 16

Male Chondathan human fighter 16

NE Medium humanoid

**Init** +6; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2

**Languages** Chondathan, Common, Elven, Orc

**AC** 29, touch 12, flat-footed 26

**hp** 140 (16 HD)

**Immune** oil of taggit poison

**Fort** +13, **Ref** +7, **Will** +7

**Speed** 20 ft. (4 squares)

**Melee** +4 *returning throwing axe* +25/+20/+15/+10 (1d6+11/19–20)

**Ranged** +4 *returning throwing axe* +22 (1d6+11/19–20)

**Base Atk** +16; **Grp** +19

**Atk Options** Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack

**Combat Gear** *potion of invisibility*, 2 *potions of cure light wounds*, *potion of cure serious wounds*

**Abilities** Str 17, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 14

**Feats** Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus (throwing axe), Great Weapon Specialization (throwing axe), Improved Critical (throwing axe), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (throwing axe), Weapon Specialization (throwing axe)

**Skills** Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +4, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +12, Listen +2, Ride +22, Sense Motive +5, Spot +2, Survival +4

**Possessions** combat gear plus +4 *returning throwing axe*, +2 *dagger*, +4 *mithril half-plate*, +4 *heavy steel shield*, masterwork dagger (built into right boot; heel is hilt), 60 gp

**Hook** “Surrender—and die anyway.”

**Behavior and Tactics:** Burtrar is smart enough to know that he lacks the foresight and judgment of others necessary to succeed alone, so he was swift to join the Company and has devoted himself ever since to being utterly loyal to Mhair and as useful as possible—so he’ll never be judged expendable. A veteran caravan escort and bodyguard, he speaks little (and tends to be grim and menacing, when he does), and is seeking two things in life: magic so powerful he can defy and then slay Mhair (and Sharaera) and retire from the Company (a life he sees can only end in his eventual death, one way or another), and sufficient funds to retire on. He wants to feel he “belongs” in a stable community and to be looked up to for his skills as a diligent defender, not hated as a reaver. He’ll want to rule that community, of course, and viciously dispose of all rivals and critics.

## OMSKILAR RETHWOOD

CR 14

Male Tethyrian human fighter 14

CE Medium humanoid

**Init** +0; **Senses** Listen +3, Spot +6

**Languages** Common, Orc, Tethyrian

**AC** 26, touch 10, flat-footed 26

**hp** 123 (14 HD)

**Immune** oil of taggit poison

**Fort** +14, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7

**Speed** 20 ft. (4 squares)

**Melee** +2 *bastard sword* +21/+16/+11 (1d10+11/17–20)

**Ranged** +1 *light crossbow* +16/+11/+6 (1d8+3/19–20)

**Base Atk** +14; **Grp** +16

**Combat Gear** 2 *potions of cure light wounds*, *potion of cure serious wounds*

**Abilities** Str 20, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 13

**Feats** Alertness, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Greater Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Great Weapon Specialization (bastard sword), Improved Critical (bastard sword), Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Reload (light crossbow), Quick Draw, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (crossbow), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (crossbow)

**Skills** Climb +6, Intimidate +7, Jump +6, Move Silently +4, Spot +6

**Possessions** combat gear plus +2 *bastard sword*, +1 *light crossbow* (22 bolts in 2 thigh quivers), +3 *full plate*, +3 *heavy steel shield*, *gauntlets of ogre power*, *amulet of health* +2, *cloak of resistance* +2, *boots of elvenkind*, 35 gp

**Hook** “Slaughter, lovely slaughter!”

**Behavior and Tactics:** Omskilar’s love of killing had made him a hunted outlaw at the time of the Company’s founding; for years, he used his crossbow and climbing skills to slay patrons’ specific foes upon order as well as to intimidate such persons by delivering messages affixed to crossbow bolts delivered through windows as “near misses.” Omskilar loves fighting, both its challenges and inflicting wounds or death, and he lives for the moment. He measures his “progress” in life only in “settling scores” with opponents who’ve bested or escaped him, and PC adventurers he tangles with will certainly be seen as such: From then on, until he or they are dead, they are targets for him to take down, one way or another.

The Company of the Cloak will target the PCs for takedown but try not to reveal their presence or herald their intentions; after all, the time for public crowing about them shattering another adventuring band will be when the PCs are reduced to only one or two members. The Cloakers will try to catch individual PCs alone and at a disadvantage, but have lost (through their own previous casualties) any means of questioning dead PCs or transforming dead PCs into undead to use as lures against the surviving PCs. Mhair’s leadership style when fighting PCs is to be patient, slow, and careful rather than dead, so their pursuit of the PCs could take a season or more.

## Invading Armies and Hordes

True heroes take charge of their own destinies, taking initiatives and imposing their will on the world. However, great heroism can lie in defending a land, city, or people they love against an invader—and if the invader is a huge army rather than a rival band of adventurers, the struggle can be long, meaningful, and full of all sorts of adventures.

### for the DM: using invading armies and hordes in your campaign

Anticipated invasions for which defenders have time to prepare can change the face of a country, with food-stores being requisitioned by the authorities, alert patrols hurrying everywhere— watching the movements of all outlanders and arresting or driving forth suspicious or unwanted individuals—adventurers being rounded up and more or less forced into military service, and so on.

PC adventurers can find themselves sent on scouting missions or undercover into cities known to be enemy bases to spy on preparations and military strength. Most often, they tend to be sent on daring commando-style raids to destroy armories and bridges, or to kidnap or slay key military commanders or the rulers of enemy cities (whose support for the invader’s war effort could fall away if their leaders are eliminated). They might be called upon to find and recruit reclusive spellcasters, dragons, or powerful undead to the defense of the realm, or even find long-buried golems or other constructs useful in battle.



If the foe does invade, PCs are inevitably dragged into the military defense of the realm. Frequent missions include attacking bridges, enemy camps, and supply caches (sinking barges, burning warehouses full of food or armor or boots—human warriors don't tend to march far when barefoot—and poisoning wells, or more often escorting spellcasters in and out of enemy territory where their spells can wreak havoc by poisoning many). As the enemy horde advances, PCs will mount guerilla raids against enemy commanders and other specific strategic targets.

The defense of a realm, even if doomed to failure, can be a memorable roleplaying achievement, ending in dramatic throne room battles in which victory is snatched from the jaws of defeat—or the PCs must make a dramatic escape, hustling the surviving royal heir away from certain death, to give the conquered land hope for the future (a one-day restoration of the True King, perhaps spearheaded by the PCs themselves).

## sample plots

Raids from nomads, trolls, or orcs graduate from nuisance to threat in an area, and a council is arranged whereat the rulers of several lands agree to muster troops to scour out the raiders. The armies march forth, leaving the PCs' homeland lightly defended.

In some distant battle, the army from that land is treacherously slaughtered—attacked from the rear by their “allies” while fighting the threat. The victorious double-crossers then turn and march into the undefended region, obviously bent on conquering. The PCs find themselves facing an advancing army. Do they defend their homeland or flee, leaving everything dear to them to the clutches of a plundering, pillaging foe?

Alternatively, perhaps the PCs dwell in a land that is mustering a huge army to invade a hated rival country. As adventurers, they might not want to be impressed into dangerous military service under harsh commanders who consider them expendable fodder. Perhaps they are asked to perform the dangerous and delicate task

## horde types

**Orc or Goblinoid Horde:** These largely undisciplined mobs usually arise when swift breeding brings overpopulation in mountain caverns, forcing imminent starvation. Fighting over food becomes widespread, elders know their authority is threatened, and forming a great army to go foraging is “the way out” (largely because elders are old enough to remember previous hordes); thus, a war leader either rises to prominence or is pushed forward by the elders.

Word is spread that the leader is planning a “great strike for blood and glory” (as well as food and riches), and those interested gather. When restless fighting reaches alarming proportions in this muster, the horde boils forth and heads for the nearest civilized lands to go raiding. It will only choose differing targets or exhibit any sophistication on the battlefield if led or influenced by more capable creatures than most orcs; of course, Obould is an exception. Charismatic orc shamans and hobgoblin battle-leaders can “steer” a horde but rarely truly control it; attempts to order retreats or to delay attacks will be ignored.

Most orc hordes don't scout ahead, charge any visible foe (and so are easily lead into ambushes and traps), and disperse when losses become too heavy—but in their early days, they often crush opponents and overwhelm cities through sheer weight of numbers. There's no bargaining nor hiding from an orc horde: It's fight or flight time.

**Underdark Horde:** Large armies on the move in the Underdark are rare things, in part because the terrain is so hostile and food so scarce (at least when so many mouths are gathered in one place). Most military campaigns “Below” consist of expeditions from one city to conquer the next, with success leading to settling and rebuilding the conquered city and preparing therein for a season or more before mounting an attack on the next city.

Most exceptions to this pattern occur when natural cataclysms or battle defeats force an entire racial population to

abandon their territory and migrate through the Underdark, fighting past and through any opponents, to reach the nearest friendly territory (or suitable-for-living region they can conquer).

Most intelligent beings of the Underdark who live in settlements of more than a single family or clan mount regular patrols and have scouts or “watchposts.” Small groups might surprise or sneak past them, but hordes will be noticed and alarms sounded. Success often means having such huge numbers that, even in the face of heavy casualties, foes can be overwhelmed.

Defeats in the Underdark are usually fatal. All sorts of prowling monsters stalk large groups of creatures, waiting to devour the wounded or isolated stragglers; thus, attempts to retreat usually mean fighting a gauntlet of waiting predators.

**Extraplanar Horde:** Far harder (and more expensive) to muster and control for Faerûnian commanders than other sorts of armed hosts, extraplanar hordes must be *summoned* or brought through a *portal* from another plane, and might prove as dangerous to those who bring them as to their intended targets. There's a long history of outsiders summoned to do battle turning on their summoners if they get the chance.

Extraplanar hordes offer their leaders three features other hordes lack: Its creatures tend to have deadly personal powers, they can usually summon more of their kind as reinforcements, and (if their summoning location or the *portal* locale is right) they can appear in the heart of a target castle, city, or realm, rather than having to march overland for long distances, thus giving a foe little warning.

A commander who can discover a *portal* inside his foe's defenses—or send an intrepid band of adventurers to such a spot to work the necessary magic to “bring through” a horde—can deliver a devastating blow to an enemy that might snatch victory before a real battle even begins.

of tracking down and eliminating undercover saboteurs and agents from the rival land who are at work in the realm, or infiltrating the ranks of the gathering army. Perhaps the rulers of the land, or priests at temples the PCs frequent, know there are traitors in the muster, double agents who will betray the army in battle if they're not eliminated; who better for this work than the PCs?

Perhaps the invading army is halfway across Faerûn, unlikely to ever menace the land the PCs are located in—but envoys or important merchants or royalty from the land that sent forth that army are in the PCs' land, and public anger is so great that they are endangered. Who better for local authorities to call on to protect and escort these hated persons than a band of adventurers? The PCs could find themselves hated, too, and perhaps detesting the task because the individuals they're protecting regard them as spies and oppressors, perhaps trying to injure them, slip away, or dupe them into attacking the wrong people or chasing after innocent folk or otherwise getting into trouble. Interesting times to try to survive, indeed.

## Invaders Adventure seeds

The following adventure seeds provide examples of invasion- or horde-themed challenges appropriate for high-level characters. The DM can drop these into an existing campaign as written or use them as examples on which to model other invasion-themed plots.

Illustration by Lucio Parrillo

## EMPIRE OF THE ISLES

A merchant of Westgate, one Roryth Thaezur (CE male Illuskan human fighter 3/rogue 2), finds his slaving sideline is making things too hot for him at home; his prices are making two rivals think he would be best eliminated. They've nearly succeeded in killing him (three separate times), and have stolen his "meat cargo" (slaves) once. Thaezur, who owns a small shipping fleet, hits upon the idea of conquering various pirate-held isles in the Sea of Fallen Stars and using them as his slave-pens and refuges from foes. He hires a mage he's had dealings with before, one Raskur Thond of Selgaunt (CE male Durpari human cleric 7 [Talos]/wizard 3/thaumaturgist 5), to "magic up" an army of fighting monsters for him, to slaughter all the pirates they'll encounter.

Unaware of Thond's true interests, Thaezur is bewildered to discover, once they're sailing, that Thond intends to use a few island-conquerings as practice, assembling an extraplanar horde on Thaezur's fleet and sailing it into an Inner Sea port to conquer. Thond wants to wreak widespread destruction, not seize power, and if Thaezur objects, Thond will kill him in an instant.

Thond hasn't decided which land will be his first target (it can be anywhere the PCs are, or on the closest Inner Sea coast to the PCs, so the horde can head overland in their direction). He wants to rise in the esteem of Talos, achieve fame, and shatter thrones and authority everywhere—and if he succeeds in his first invasion, he won't halt his horde until they're destroyed.



*A horde of orcs and tanarukk marches triumphant across the battlefield*

## THE RISING OF THE SHAAAR

Drought and spring freezes denude the grassy plains of the Shaar; there's little grazing for beasts and even less food for people. The nomads do what they always do when such conditions strike: gather, arm, and sweep out of the Shaar in endless waves, heading into more hospitable lands to raid.

They ride in small, swift bands, striking swiftly, lingering nowhere, and avoiding rugged or thickly forested terrain where they can't fight mounted. Most of the nomads are the humans known as Shaarans, but the horde also contains warbands of wemics and centaurs. In their wake travel the slow-moving loxo—and opportunistic bands of thri-kreen will raid both wounded nomads and horde-weakened or isolated settlements in the wake of the horde's advance.

This horde is truly a "flood of destruction," with no overall commanders and no discipline except within individual warbands. In the early days of their forays, they'll cooperate closely, but this will wane as the days pass—not only will cooperation between species fail, but also among the Shaaran humans. In the end, it's "every mouth for itself," and the horde will scatter, survivors protecting captured food supplies and seeking temporary defensible homes until the next spring, when they'll hasten back to the Shaar.

All lands in their path (initially every realm adjoining the Shaar, but the various warbands can move in any direction, and will seek easy travel terrain rather than advancing in anything resembling a straight line) are imperiled. There will be much hiring of adventurers and mercenaries not only to defend territory (bridges in particular, in an attempt to deflect the hungry horde), but also to escort and protect royalty and other important personages away from danger, to various refuges halfway across Faerûn. On such journeys, of course, foes of these VIPs will see their glowing chances to capture or slay the valuable persons, PC bodyguards notwithstanding.

Opportunistic thieves and political power-players will swing into operation. Faithful of Malar, hunt-loving nobles, and others who see the loxo, wemics, centaurs, and thri-kreen as sport or a source of alchemical substances will also join in the fighting. PCs might well be sent into the heart of the fray to find and rescue missing persons and royal regalia, spellbooks, treaties, charters, and other valuable items left behind in the initial hasty retreat.

## BLACK BLADES CAST SHADOWS

Thieves break open a crypt in Athkatla that disgorges many greater shadows. They flit through the city by night, spreading not just terror but disease; when folk begin to fall in the streets by the score, panicked citizens flee the city. Using magic, temples spread word of what has befallen ahead of the terrified Athkatlans, and they arrive in nearby settlements to find locked, barred, and shuttered doors and windows—and arrows, darts, and hurled spears and arrows.

Their numbers are such, however, that they overwhelm some buildings, gain weapons, and try to seize food, drink, mounts, and wagons so as to hurry on. General fighting breaks out in many places in Amn, but the sheer numbers of fleeing Athkatlans (who've abandoned their city to the shadows; in their absence the Black Blades pirates from the Nelanther make landfall there, and start plundering) wins the day, and the flood of terrified humanity sweeps on east through Amn (avoiding the Sothillisian-held region because

unseen deadly disease is one thing, but fanged and hulking monsters are quite another), and then south into easternmost Tethyr.

The northeastern duchies of Tethyr hastily arm to repel this invasion, with orders to "slay or turn back everyone, that the plague not spread!" Most of the Athkatlans, it seems, are doomed. However, the disease only induces a comalike state for a few days, followed by lassitude and weakness, and many are immune; those who return to Athkatla will be fine.

That is, if the pirates can be driven out. House-to-house fighting will be necessary, and that's fitting work for hired adventurers (such as the PCs), who should prove less troublesome to pay off than large mercenary companies. The PCs could also be hired to venture into Athkatla just after the pirates' arrival, to find and rescue missing persons—before the pirates slay them or send them away on slave-ships—and valuables left behind when important Athkatlans fled.

This event can be relocated to many other places in Faerûn, using Cormyr and Sembia in place of Amn and Tethyr, or Westgate and Sembia, or neighboring cities in the Vast, the Silver Marches, the Vilhon Reach, or Impiltur.

## THE NETHER HORDE

This battle-hardened, disciplined army of tanarukk-led orcs is commanded by the last surviving commander of Hellgate Keep's Scourged Legions, the cambion Kaanyr Vhok (CE male half-fiend Illuskan human fighter 16/sorcerer 6; *ring of protection +3*; *long sword +2*, *spellblade* [immune to *cone of cold*], *ghost gauntlet*, *magic siphon rod*, judged by the drow Nimor as "a loud bully but ever a quiet coward"). A handful of fey'ri sorcerers and other powerful evil beings now serve Vhok as officers, and a 10 HD tanarukk of formidable size, Rorgak, is his personal bodyguard and envoy.

After the events of the War of the Spider-Queen, the Nether Horde retreats from the failed siege of Menzoberranzan, slaughtering their onetime duergar allies, and heads for "home" (the tunnels deep beneath Hellgate Keep). Vhok's troops are restless, and he decides to quell fighting and dissent (which could lead to his own loss of authority) by striking out against the target he has long lusted after: the city of Sundabar. If the city falls, the Silver Marches lie undefended beyond!

Vhok's Nether Horde boils up out of caverns in the mountains to attack Sundabar by night, just after his fey'ri sorcerers concentrate their spells in an attempt to make the Everfire flare up, its rift to shake, and otherwise distract the dwarves who dwell around it. Their intent is to make the human defenders of the formidable fortress that is Sundabar face the attacking Horde alone.

The Horde's first move is to surround the city in a great ring, sealing it off from reinforcements and surface trade, and to widen that ring until the Horde members forming it are all occupying outposts and rocky terrain offering them cover against any attack from the Marches around. Then the bulk of the Horde is hurled against the defenses. If the city holds out against the Horde for more than a month, Vhok will unleash his Horde on the rest of the Marches, ranging through the countryside raiding and burning, "going Below" (back into the Underdark) if strong armies are mustered against them, and shattering smaller forces. If Sundabar falls not today, let it be isolated from a ravaged Silver Marches, and it might well fall next season.

# THE BORDER KINGDOMS

**T**he Border Kingdoms are little more than names on a map to most in Faerûn. Only a few sages and well-traveled merchants know anything useful about them, thanks to their everchanging nature and incessant wars.

According to the sage Meriadas of Westgate, "The Border Kingdoms are the most favored destination for adventurers who want to proudly and boldly conquer a realm or establish their own new kingdom. Lords, counts, dukes, kings, and emperors rise, proclaim themselves, and are swept away with the speed and regularity of waves crashing upon a shore. What comes to our ears . . . are a stream of amusing or colorful little tales of their most daring, disastrous, or funny deeds.

"Few folk go there except those who want to carve out a place for themselves with a sword . . . Borders and even the names of the realms they define change with each passing month and even tenday; there is no such thing as an accurate history or even map of the Border Kingdoms (which are named thus) because they stand in the way of Calishite expansion, their turmoil and stubborn strength defining the eastern border of that proud realm . . . south of the Lake of Steam . . . the Border Kingdoms spread east and south to take in all the lands drained by the River Scelptar as far as the Shieldmaidens (the hills at the western end of the Firesteap Mountains, just east of The Duskwood) and the rising land that defines the northern edge of the vast rolling grasslands known as The Shaar." If you travel there, Meriadas adds, "Take strong spells, trusty friends, and sharp swords, and you might live long enough to take a brief look around."

*My favorite Borderer is the one on the end of my sword.*

Northarn Dwaever,  
Battlemaster of The Limping  
Unicorn mercenary company  
Year of the Wandering Maiden

*I toured the Border Kingdoms once. Dreary backwaters, my dear, all mud and rough unkempt types who wanted my money. I had to kill forty-two of them, and broke my best dagger in the eye socket of the most inconsiderately belligerent. Uncivilized louts—completely uncivilized!*

Lady Adreinelle Neshor of Waterdeep  
Dowager Matron of House Neshor  
Year of the Harp

The infamous mage Elminster warns that the Border Kingdoms are "riddled with wild magic, as a tattered cloak covers much but not all of the beggar beneath it."

The Border Kingdoms are a strip of warm, lush coastal lowlands between the Lake of Steam and the grassy uplands of the Shaar. Four major forests divide up the countryside of rolling, fertile, overgrown hills. Though smokeholes and volcanoes are common around the Lake of Steam, the only known volcanic activity in the Borders is centered on a wood-cloaked ridge known as the Mount, where sulfurous fume-holes vent steaming vapor that occasionally causes trees to catch fire and burn to the ground (hence the old term "the Flaming Wood").

The Border Kingdoms aren't all "kingdoms," but rather many small territories governed in a wide variety of ways: a confusing, ever-changing hodgepodge of tiny, unstable realms with names whose grandeur often oversteps reality. This verdant, chaotically governed region is prime adventuring territory. Many adventuring bands come to the Borders to conquer their own realm. Those who succeed often spend the rest of their days defending it from other adventuring bands with similar ambitions. The Borders are the birthplace of many a mercenary and merchant who hails from "a place you've never heard of."

Borderer boundaries, rulers, and realm names change from tenday to tenday, and daily disputes seem to occupy the lives of many. Maps are sadly out of date at best and full of willful distortions at the worst (many cartographers seek to suggest the realm they represent—or want their local ruler to trade with—is larger and more important than it really is). Misinformation is the rule when Borderers travel Faerûn in search of adventurers to hire. Thus, boundaries are at best approximate, and since the making of any Border Kingdoms map, realms will have appeared, disappeared, or moved.

Migration and skirmishing are constants in Borderer lives. The warm climate and fertile ground make it possible for inhabitants to do battle whenever they desire while still having food enough to see them through the winter ahead and to live in caves or shelters in the deep woods so they won't freeze in the "cold months" (actually foggy, slushy months far warmer than the howling, deadly winters of northerly regions).

The adventurer Steeleye once called the Border Kingdoms "a deadly but enchanting place where every winding lane takes you to another dotty little realm, complete with pompous rulers and customs, grinning and well-paid mercenaries—dubbed the 'Grand Guards' or the 'Imperial High Host'—who tolerate these ruling dolts until the coins run out, and crumbling castles here, there and everywhere...monsters roam, crops fall off their vines in such plenty that the feast-tables groan, and magic goes wild, opening gates to perilous realms or inverting keeps as often as it does whatever was intended. It's hard to ride half a day in the Border Kingdoms without befriending or offending a Lord High Protector, a Grand Savant, or a High Puissant Duke—or all three."

The Border Kingdoms are often raided by nomads from the Shaar (seeking food, weapons, and anything else they can carry off). Their raids gave the Realm of the Ready Sword its name and forced the creation of alert and capable military forces in Borderer realms south of the River Scelptar. Borderers spend much of the rest of their time fighting each other or privately sponsored Calishite armies.

This makes many Borderers reluctant to stray far from home, so most merchants traveling the Border Kingdoms hail from the Vilhon Reach. They trade coins and trade-goods (fine clothing, bolts of cloth, and all manner of smithywork) for the ever-abundant food. Borderers often build stout and well-guarded granaries, gather in food, and wait for outlander merchants to buy it and carry it away. Many folk in the overpopulated Vilhon Reach would starve if Borderer crops ever failed.

## The border kingdoms today

It would take a library of tomes—outdated even as they're written—to cover the myriad realms of the Border Kingdoms. A few are especially influential, ruled by powerful folk, or have resources (or perils) of interest to wider Faerûn, and they appear hereafter.

## Adaerglast, the Land of mages

This pastoral-looking realm of coastal farms is one of the most prosperous—and dangerous—in the Borders. Adaernen farmers work hard tending their lands and digging the soil for ever more efficient irrigation. At one time, they led more sedate lives, knowing their crops always brought good prices in the nearby city of Yallasch from merchant captains docking there to buy food for many hungry mouths in Calimshan.

That all changed when two young, close-mouthed, and very observant mages from Murghôm arrived. Deeming the Adaernen farmlands ideal, they built a castle in Myrinjar. Safe behind its stout walls, defended by many animated or conjured guardians, they began to work magic on the land around. Their keep became known as "The Castle of Dark Dreams" because spells they devised sent dream-visions to all Adaernen, revealing the two mages as the rightful, gods-chosen rulers of Adaerglast. Soon, brutally officious mercenaries appeared in the land, commanded by constructs (animated empty suits of armor) controlled by the wizards from afar. Helmed horror-mon bodyguards accompanied the two mages at all times, protecting Lord Iraun and Lord Srivven against possible treachery from their own hirelings.

The mages gave commands as if they were gods. All who stood against them were blasted down or torn apart by magic, and the goods and property of such "traitors" were seized, their relatives and servants sold into slavery.

Soon the wizards were absolute rulers of Adaerglast, holding court in Myrinjar and seeking to control Yallasch. It took an open alliance of all Yallaschan wizards and temples against the two, backed by threats of aid from Halruaa and Waterdeep, to—thus far—dissuade the Lord High Mages from conquering the city.

The sinister pair turned to crafting new, more powerful spells and to driving their subjects to farm ever more efficiently. Unfortunately for would-be rebels and wizards who foolishly visit the realm, magic works all too well in Adaerglast. The two wizard-kings scry their land often, and suspicious or hostile beings (everyone who can be identified as a wizard, sorcerer, or wielder of a magic item) are attacked by long-range spells that cause their heads or extremities to explode. Anyone magically shielded is repeatedly attacked by mounted mercenaries, the Mailed Hands of the Lords ("the Hands" to Adaernen), augmented by summoned monsters. Once intruders are disabled, a *projected image* of one of the Lord High Mages appears to interrogate them. Defeated intruders who know the whereabouts of magical treasure might be transformed into beast-shape until their knowledge can be best exploited.

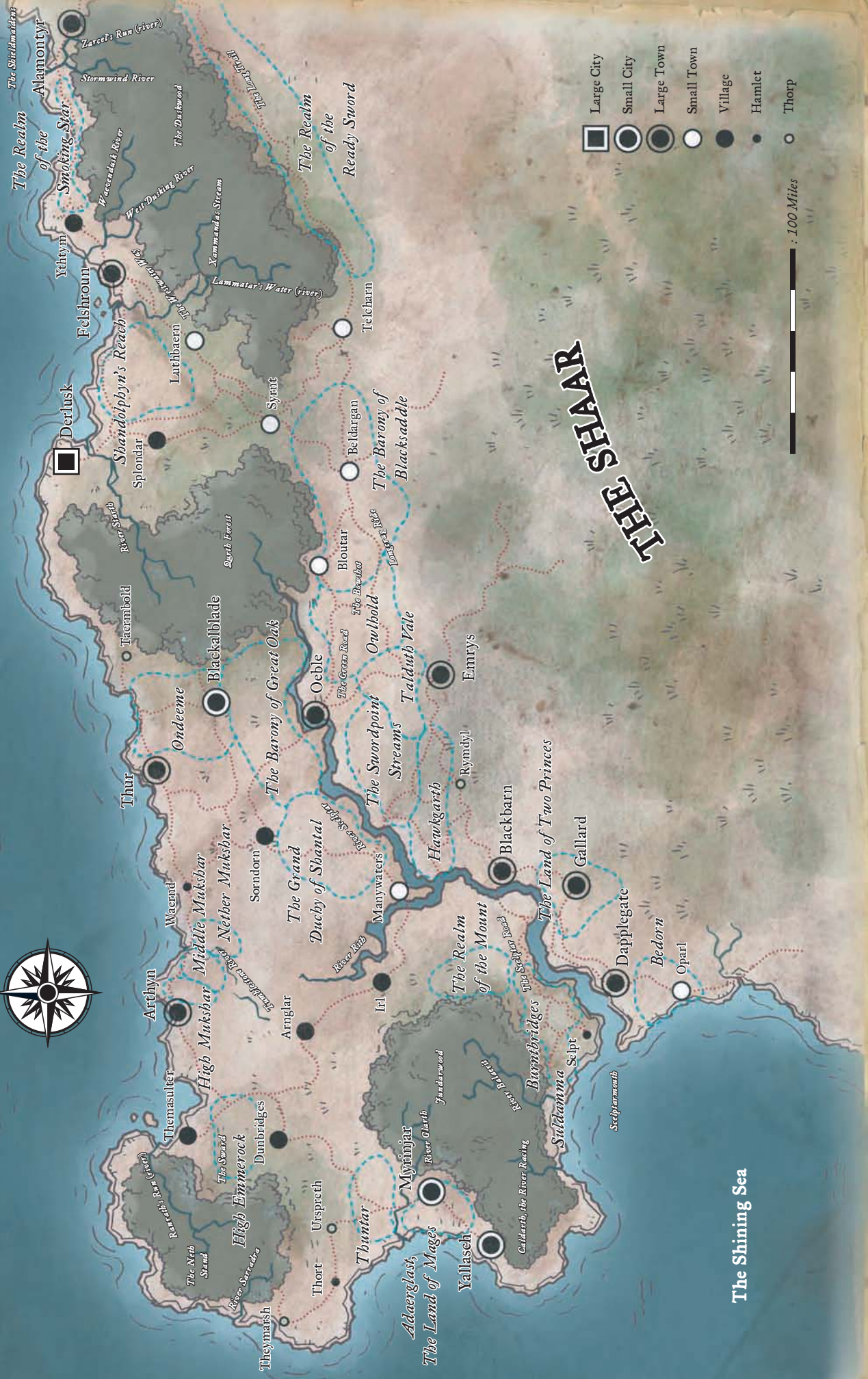
Adventuring bands hired to destroy the Lord High Mages by fearful neighboring Borderers and Calishite merchant interests have met with bloody failure. The wizard-kings have destroyed Zhentarim and Red Wizards, and they rebuffed an emissary from Halruaa. Adventurers (especially wizards) are advised not to enter Adaerglast and to beware when in Yallasch: The wizard-kings are thought to scry that city often and command increasing numbers of hired agents in its backstreets.

The Adaernen rulers (Iraun, NE male Mulan human expert 2/wizard 17; and Srivven, NE male Mulan human wizard 18/

# The border kingdoms



Lake of Steam



- Large City
- Small City
- Large Town
- Small Town
- Village
- Hamlet
- Thorp

100 Miles

THE SHEAR

The Shining Sea

archmage 2, both with many magic items) slay and burn all wizards who fall into their hands after seizing all magic such unfortunates possess.

“The Garden Coast” remains a glittering prize for anyone who can defeat the wizard-kings, and greedy satraps—who stay safely in Calimshan and send hired warbands, assassins, and adventurers—keep trying. The bustling farms of Adaerglast are among the most productive and efficient in all Faerûn.

The badge of this realm is a wickerwork basket full of rounded red fruit (probably tomatoes) on a white circular field whose border is a purple ring of lightning arcing out in all directions, on a green background.

### MYRINJAR

A small, clean, well-ordered city, the Seat of Might stands at the heart of Adaerglast. It is a collection of narrow, four-story timbered houses set shoulder to shoulder along cobbled streets always a-groan with moving food-wagons.

The roughly oval city looks fortified, but its outer “wall” is merely the joined back walls of hundreds of granaries, pierced by four gates. Order is maintained in Myrinjar by mounted patrols of the Hands, who are everywhere in Myrinjar, spying and firmly keeping the peace in a city already fervently law-abiding. Neither citizens nor visitors are allowed to possess scrolls, magic items, or to cast spells. Inks, parchment, and even literate native Myrin are hard to find.

Myrinjar never sleeps, producing sausages, pickled vegetables and relishes, bottled fruit (berries and cherries in wine), and jars and bottles. The city grew around glassblowers digging fine sand; the diggings created a labyrinth of storage cellars that now underlie Myrinjar, much beset by shiftings and collapses despite many “forcebinding” spells applied by the Lord High Mages.

Buyers from all over the Shining South flock to Myrinjar’s three markets: Manymelons (small stalls selling fruits and vegetables) in northeastern Myrinjar; Sharngult’s in the southeast (livestock, tallow candles, and hoof glue); and Eldynklarn in the southwest (fresh produce, grain and milled flours, bottles and bottled goods, eggs, poultry, harness, and farming tools and wagons). Greedy Calishite satraps eye the worth of Myrin farms

and businesses, and they constantly scheme to seize control of the realm—but dare nothing, for fear of the two ruling mages.

Most visitors stay in one of the inns just inside each city gate or in rooming houses in the central city district known as Keepshadow (as it stands “in the shadow of” the Castle), the “approved” area for outlanders. It is possible that every Keepshadow servant or resident spies for the Lord High Mages.

Their frowning castle at the center of the city is guarded by scores of helmed horrorsMon and mightier guardians. Even the Hands are seldom admitted into its gloomy halls. It’s widely

believed the tyrants (who are rarely seen in public, except as *projected images*) spend long hours lying in near-trances on couches while they craft dream-vision magics or scry Adaerglast. A standing Myrin joke is to wryly urge others, in their most private moments, to “smile for the audience.”

The Castle is said to be full of seized spellbooks and magic items, many linked by spell-webs that cause harmful spells to erupt against any intruder disturbing other spells in the web. Lord Iraun and Lord Srivven are always surrounded by helmed horrorMon bodyguards, and they suspect treachery from everyone.

### The barony of Blacksaddle

Thanks to its frequent battles against Shaaran nomads and the resulting ballads (even street urchins in Waterdeep know fragments of *The Ballad of Blacksaddle*), the name “Blacksaddle” is known across Faerûn as a place of endless war.

The barony is a land of many small hill farms, with walls of heaped stones separating the fields. Small stone watchtowers stand everywhere, each with a well inside (ready night-shelter for travelers, though Sadlar frown on outlanders entering them).

The towns of Srynt, Telcharn, and recently conquered Bloutar occupy the three corners of the barony. In the center of the triangle they form stands Blacksaddle Keep, home of the Swords, Blacksaddle’s standing army (375 mounted fighters of 2nd–6th level in chainmail, who wield swords, horse-bows, and lances) under the command of Lord Marshal Aldron Raegrel (LN male Illuskan human fighter 11), assisted by a Lord Wizard,



*Urn, the long-dead original Baron of Blacksaddle*

Illustration by Franz Vohwinkel

Thaerarla Summercloak (CG female Tethyrian human sorcerer 9/incantatrix<sup>PG</sup> 2).

The Baron of Blacksaddle, Thaltor Blacksaddle (LN male Damaran human fighter 16) is a careful, calculating individual whose five sons are being trained to the sword. He is served by a third Lord: the Lord Watchful, Haslan Faerndar (N male Calishite human rogue 5/goldeye<sup>FP</sup> 3), an envoy, magister, and ombudsman who travels Blacksaddle observing problems, adjudicating disputes, and watching for perils. Sadlar are always armed, alert for trouble, and tend to be hard-working entrepreneurs.

In addition to farming, Sadlar earn their coins by stonemasonry. Both "blue gloss" and "red sheen" (blue and red marble) are quarried in the Shaarwall, the hills along the southern border of the barony that cloak the rise of land separating the Border Kingdoms from the Shaar. Stonemasonry often reveals gem-odes, and Sadlar artisans have perfected a means of crafting goblets, small coffers, and hand-sculptures of stone dust and chips mixed with paste (akin to alabaster). To increase sales of these fragile items, some merchant dubbed them "Wizard Ware," and the name has stuck, accompanied by various wild tales about magic being used in the crafting. Very skilled Sadlar carve small but expensive "whitestone" cameo inlays for adorning jewelry and coffers fashioned in Calimshan from rainbow glass, polished amber, and obsidian.

Blacksaddle was founded by Uorn Blacksaddle (Thaltor's father, "the Old Baron") a whirlwind of a warrior who defeated the warring villages of Altrumpet and Shalard, razed them, built Blacksaddle Keep on the Long Meadow between them, forcibly mixed the feuding villagers together and resettled them all over his new barony—and then made war on the Shaarans so furiously that they feared he planned to conquer the Shaar itself. Uorn rode against them in his battered black coat-of-plate armor with such deadly success that the nomads thought him an evil god and prayed to him to spare them on the eve of their every raid into the Border Kingdoms.

Uorn's trademark black armor vanished after his death (probably stolen), but many Sadlar swear they've seen it on misty nights, drifting along above the ground as if some invisible wearer is silently treading the air. Soon after every sighting, a foe of Blacksaddle attacks; now, the Swords regard the Baron's armor as a clear, reliable warning of impending action.

Such bladeswinging comes often. Blacksaddle's location and the ease of entering it swiftly on horseback down one of many broad quarry-cart roads makes it a popular target for Shaarans and brigands raiding into the Borders. The military prowess of Sadlar (among so many lands whose armies are amusingly inept) serves only to attract the arrogant-at-arms to try their mettle against the Swords of the Barony, and the constant warfare attracts many carrion-eating monsters.

Quarrying in the barony recently broke into Underdark caverns, and creatures from Below issued forth with such swift ferocity that quarrying ended forever and a permanent guard was stationed to fight the monsters that repeatedly break through the tons of mine tailings the Lord Wizard regularly *telekineses* into the delve, to block it off.

The arms of Blacksaddle are a lone white castle turret centered on a black shield.

## BLOUTAR

This town of woodcutters and hunters nestles against the southern verges of Qurth Forest. Of old it was the hold of the "Bloodsword Baron," Bloutar Hilathan, a shrewd, iron-fisted ugly monster of a man, famous for personally slaying three dragons, who raided lands around without defeat, and died in his bed after ninety years of brawling. His many sons tore his realm apart fighting over it, leaving only the town named for him and the now-abandoned and overgrown hamlets of Deltyn's Dagger and Empaerla.

This small remnant, the Bloodsword Lands, suffered under a succession of brutal mercenary rulers, until Klelder Blackhawk renamed it the Barony of Blackhawk. The spells of Klelder's foe, the archmage Lyrildan of Calimport, made the land teem with monsters. Klelder died in his castle fighting seven dark nagas long after most of his subjects had perished or fled the Mage's Curse.

The Barony of Blackhawk continued to spawn things taloned, fanged, and tentacled for over three centuries, until Lyrildan was slain by an ambitious apprentice. Today the rolling, forested hills around Bloutar are known as superb (and perilous) hunting country. The area's dangerous reputation has made it a refuge for outlaws, exiles, and hunted folk who dare go nowhere else.

Bloutarran have become known for fierce independence, hardness, fearless defiance of authority, and dislike of outsiders. These traits kept Bloutar ungoverned and independent until a decade ago when a large Sadlar force overwhelmed a handful of Bloutarran defenders.

Bloutar has sullenly remained part of Blacksaddle largely because of the wealth brought by trade along the new road built on the orders of Blacksaddle Keep: Pelts and smoked forest beast meats are snapped up as fast as Bloutarrans can produce them. However, an outlander charismatic leader (priest of a forest god, fighter of commanding prowess, or even a tightly knit adventuring band) could easily bring Bloutar to rebellion.

Bloutar is a maze of rambling log houses that seem to grow out of the sheltering trees, with trails winding off in all directions to outlying farms—and a few woodcutter's clearings from which hunting trails plunge into the vast gloom of Qurth Forest. Hunters, trappers, and other visitors are strongly advised to hire a local guide.

North of Bloutar, the trails lead into deep ravines where owlbears lurk and forest-dwelling spiders spin many trap-webs. A few paths wander into the heart of Qurth Forest—through reaches roamed by korred and intelligent fungi—to ruined, overgrown cities (including Hawklyn, where Klelder made his court) where treasures are said to lie forgotten under tree-roots, and monsters roam in the deep cellars and crumbling halls. Some Borderers suspect a deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup> lairs near Bloutar, producing endless stags—because Bloutarran-led hunts seldom fail to bring back two or more such prizes.



## Bedorn

A verdant coastal land of water-meadows, thickets, and treacherous bogs that protect it against anyone trying to invade from the Shaar, this little-known realm is quietly prosperous. The town of Dapplegate, nominally independent, marks its northern limits; the only other coastal settlement south of Scelptarmouth, Oparl, is the center of Bedorn.

The realm has long been the little-known private playground of rich satraps of Calimshan, where they can host beast-hunts, hold month-long revels or dangerous games involving monsters and champions fighting to the death, or have landscapes rearranged to please themselves. As a result, it boasts all manner of wealthy, powerful, and eccentric citizens, and it is a landscaped realm of great beauty dominated by lawns of “greengrass” (i.e. moss) and trees planted and pruned to create pleasant vistas adorned with the crumbling remnants of many grand (often grandiosely over-ornate) palaces, surrounded by follies and terraces that fade into the surrounding wooded swamps.

Rich nobles, retired merchants, and archmages seeking seclusion for their studies dwell here in grand houses, maintaining bodyguards (often as bored as they are richly uniformed) against intruders.

Bedorn has breeding farms where rare and unusual (sometimes monstrous) pets are bred, reared, and trained for sale in Calimshan, Chessenta, and the Tashalar. Tantar’s Fine Enchantments, just east of Oparl, once produced spell scrolls, healing and love potions, *glowing globes* to illuminate shops and homes; *firewarded* doors and shutters; and magic daggers for the wealthy. It was recently destroyed in an explosion that has left spells spontaneously taking effect at random times in the ruins, fatally discouraging salvagers.

### OPARL

In the heart of Bedorn is Oparl: sixty large, fanciful Calishite mansions, each surrounded by private walled grounds, crowded together on four knolls that provide views over much of Bedorn. All are grandiose, but they differ greatly in appearance.

Officially a town, Oparl lacks a lord, a Watch, shopkeepers—and even signs proclaiming its name. “Like most gardens,” a veteran Borderer commented, “Oparl is need of constant grooming. Work crews hustle in to build a new this and shore up an old that—and another spire built by an idiot falls on them, necessitating the hiring of another work crew to throw up an even more outlandish spire in its place—preferably something larger, and more gaudy, and even more useless. See this continuing, spurred by rivalries in bad taste for some sixty summers, and you can begin to picture Oparl.”

There’s not a single inn, tavern, eatery, or shop in Oparl. Any band of more than three quiet travelers, afoot, won’t be allowed to tarry a night in the open there: A dozen or more plate-armored guards will emerge from a nearby palace gate, often with wizards or trained, loyal monsters, and led by officers wielding wands who will coolly order the travelers to move on. Even injured outlanders will be moved away from Oparl, usually to the first hollow along the lane north out of town, where there’s a stream of drinkable water. The guards might give needy or

distressed travelers water, bandages, and bread, but will show no such kindness to the able-bodied (being suspicious even of lone, crying children, in lands where doppelgangers and shapeshifting mages aren’t unknown). Intruders bold enough to fight will face horn-summoned reinforcements. Many mansions can unleash formidable monsters, and some have private chapels with resident clergy who will work magic to defend the peace of Oparl.

Many of the “Mighty High of Oparl” are powerful wizards, and it’s been said at MageFairs that Oparl probably contains more animated guardians and magic items than any other settlement in all of Faerûn. Some palace owners can send flights of gargoyles to tear apart unwanted intruders, and at least one Oparlan is said to be able to summon a dragon to aid her. Powerful spells inhibit mansion fires, and most of the grand houses have alert, liveried guard forces. Moreover, the outer fringes of most palace grounds are liberally furnished with alarms or traps. A few mansion owners collect dangerous beasts and think it sporting to let them prowl the grounds, devouring intruders. At least one Oparlan mansion has a spell-confined vampire roaming its gardens, who likes to seduce handsome intruders before she slays them, and over time has built herself a small legion of vampire spawn who do her bidding. The grounds of another house contain unmarked, one-way *portals* to various unsavory “elsewheres,” awaiting the unwary who lack protective rings that prevent the *portals* from functioning.

Oparl has an unwritten code of privacy. Guards might work together against intruder invasions but know little about the identities and names of their employers. Not all guards are private mansion forces: There is a common “Guard Below” created to foil palace invasions through the common sewer network (streams are pumped to fountains and bathing-pools in each house, before being used to flush garderobes away). The Guard Below is accustomed to fighting in waist-deep filth, and the Cotahars, its senior officers, carry *wands of hold person* and *fly* potions. They wait patiently in the dark, wet reek, watching float alarms (string-tethered bladders are suspended below the water surface, in patterns intruders can’t help but disturb, causing alarm-gongs to chime). The Guard is augmented by hired adventurers who are sometimes deliberately tempted into use as unwitting “test foes” for the standing Guard, but usually provide muscle to deal with determined assaults on the glittering wealth of Oparl.

Nothing in Oparl is as nature left it; no matter how ruined a feature might appear, everything is built and kept that way for a purpose. Many “wild” shrubberies conceal pumphouses or privies, and almost every tall tree survives because it frames, rather than blocks, a pleasing window-view. Owners who dislike seeing servants carrying refuse dig service tunnels linking their palaces with trash-storage cellars or pits. A gnome team brought in to fix cellar flooding once discovered a cavern stuffed with valuable furnishings made of exotic woods, sculpted metals, and gems, all with minor scratches or breaks. Their owner wanted never again to see anything marred, and her servants could not bear to burn such wealth.

The Mighty High tend to be spoiled, imperious folk who—beyond peering, gossiping, and sneering—largely ignore each other, keeping inside their walls and entertaining their own guests. If revels are held simultaneously and disputes develop

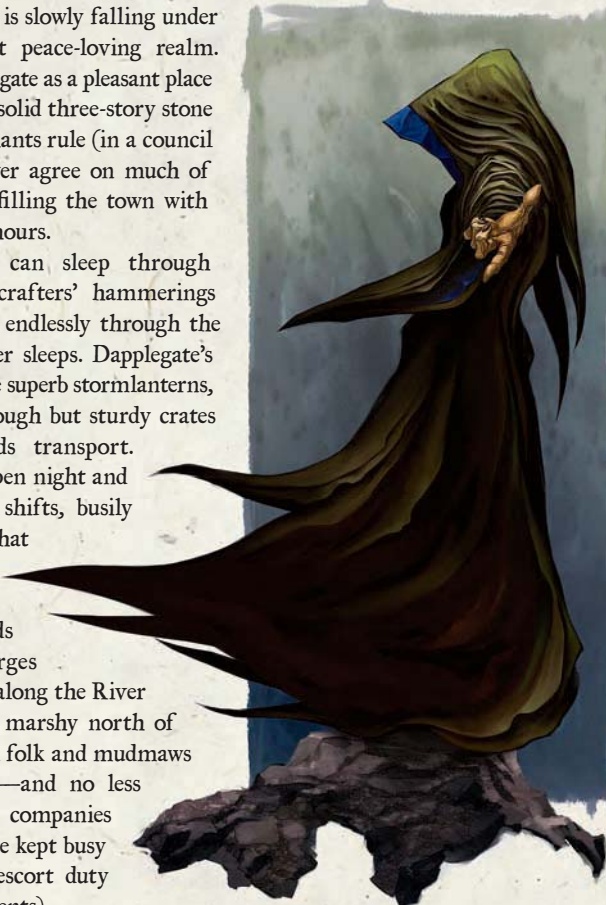
between one gathering of guests and the other, the hosts might begin (with a round of duels between hired champions) a feud lasting for years—without ever even really knowing what each other looks like.

### DAPPLEGATE

This independent town stands on the northern border of Bedorn, and is slowly falling under the influence of that peace-loving realm. Borderers know Dapplegate as a pleasant place of cobbled streets and solid three-story stone buildings where merchants rule (in a council of forty that can never agree on much of anything) and dwell, filling the town with cheerful bustle at all hours.

Native Dapplans can sleep through *anything* thanks to crafters' hammerings and wagons rumbling endlessly through the streets; the town never sleeps. Dapplegate's resident craftfolk make superb stormlanterns, adequate chain, and rough but sturdy crates and chests for goods transport. Most businesses are open night and day, staffed in three shifts, busily selling Borderers all that the rest of Faerûn has to offer, and buying Border goods for export (via barges from nearby wharves along the River Scelptar—which is so marshy north of Dapplegate that lizard folk and mudmaws battle for supremacy—and no less than six mercenary companies based in Dapplegate are kept busy providing protective escort duty for bargebound shipments).

Illustration by Francis Tsai



*Danchilaer the Mad Mage  
has a task for you*

Visitors to Dapplegate are directed to the Place of Arrows (central market, the site of a long-ago battle between rival companies of archers), where stalls of traveling merchants crowd together inside a ring of eight circular, waist-high-walled ponds (for watering draft animals).

Overlooking the market is the round, turreted Council Hall, expanded over the years with haphazard wings (and offering rental storage lockchambers for visitors). Facing the Hall across Lockwyvern Street is *The Chased Unicorn*, one of very few luxury (and expensive) inns in the Border Kingdoms. Beside the Hall rises Danchilaer's Tower, surrounded by its own walled garden of massive oaks.

The hidden tombs of dozens of powerful Halruaan wizards (said to bristle with magic items) underlie Dapplegate, but merchants' bodyguards and warehouse guards take a *very* dim view of outlanders digging anywhere in town.

### Derlusk

This city has grown around one of the best and busiest harbors in the Borders, sheltered by Dragonsmoke Ridge, which curves around Derlusk on the west and north. Many of the stout stone buildings of this fast-growing city climb the Ridge or are dug deep into it, Derlusk fills a natural bowl valley, and by night is a beautiful vista of slate roofs and shimmering lanterns.

Almost all the exported wares of the Barony of Blacksaddle and Shandolphyn's Reach are shipped out through Derlusk, a port known for building swift, sleek "wave runner" coastboats (preferred by smugglers and pirates for their speed, nimble helms, and low silhouettes).

## the mad mage

Danchilaer the Mad Mage (LN male Halruaan human wizard 21/sorcerer 6/archmage 5) is a reclusive renegade from Halruaa who settled in Dapplegate four centuries ago, and is now either undead or long-lived indeed. His simple, slender tower stands dark and empty (except for occasional bands of adventurers seeking treasure in its trapped, labyrinthine chambers and cellars), but Danchilaer remains an unseen, watchful presence in town. Once a year he abducts a lone human resident or visitor and gives them a task somewhere in the Border Kingdoms.

If they succeed, he somehow magically augments their personal abilities permanently and returns them from whence they came, charging them with a long-term goal or mission. Whether they follow his guidance or not, the Mad Mage

haunts their lives, appearing in dreams to give cryptic advice, or answering when they call on him in great need with a spell, spoken message, or advice whispered in their minds.

Danchilaer appears as a tall, deep-voiced man in plain robes, his face always hidden by his pulled-down cowl. He's amoral, but neither insane nor malicious. His true aims are unknown, but the tasks and goals he sets seem dedicated to the survival of Dapplegate, the Border Kingdoms (as a region of free, everchanging realms, subject to no outside rule), and self-sufficient farming folk everywhere. He works against large armies, proud kings, and vast empires. Those who serve him are free to pursue their own lives, and don't necessarily know of others the Mad Mage has "augmented." (Danchilaer is not building an organized group of agents.)

Derlusk is also known for salty “Dlurn Paste” of revolting green hue, made from the small green dlurn fish, found in profusion in the harbor and nearby inlets. It keeps well, smells marvelous, and makes a solid meal spread on biscuits, but its saltiness goads fierce thirst.

Derlusk is a city of music where bards are highly regarded and every inn, tavern, tankard-house, and breakblades club (where patrons fence for exercise and to improve their swordplay) has its own musical entertainment. Derluskans share a love of music—even sung lustily off-key as barrels are heaved on the wharves, or bawled drunkenly when the moon is high.

Derlusk is also a city of scribes, bookbinders, and book collectors, who’ve made The Faring Falcon bookshop and its rival, Fendelmer’s Fine Folios, prosperous successes. Fictional tales, the more fanciful the better, are eagerly collected, lent (for fees and deposits), and discussed by Derluskans. Parties are held to celebrate new releases or a host’s acquisition of a long-sought tome. Authors are treated like royalty, and annual revels are held to commemorate their deaths.

Many scholars, sages, and limners have settled in Derlusk. This is the place to find a particular old book or pay rich collectors to have their scribes make you a copy of a rare work they won’t let out of their private rooms (at least 100 gp/page, often thousands more for especially prized titles; maps sell for 1,000 to 4,000 gp). Streetcorner shops offer new books for as little as 6 sp, or passages copied from books in stock into a blank chapbook for 12 to 25 gp (double that for more than a dozen finished pages).

The dockworkers of Derlusk regard book lovers as harmlessly eccentric fellow citizens. The books and music give Derlusk a whiff of the sophistication of far larger ports, and the city boasts one inn equal to the hostelrys of grand cities: The Turrets at Twilight. This superb establishment is an old seacastle rebuilt

from crumbling ruin by wealthy adventurers into a many-winged, palatial palace offering long-term rental rooms and a central ballroom with promenade galleries and balconies. The Turrets is famous for hosting a MageFair—and surviving. The Seneschal of the Turrets, retired adventurer Amaryth Delbara (CG female Illuskan human sorcerer 14/incantatrix<sup>Mag</sup> 6), got Khelben “Blackstaff” Arunsun to clean up lingering post-Fair undesirable magics, though several magic items are rumored to still be hidden about the city, awaiting activation from afar by those who put them there. Derlusk still talks about the Fair with proud nostalgia, but holds no great hunger to host another soon: good news to Borderer merchants, who would like this safe, bookish, music-loving, bustling port to stay in one piece.

## The duskwood

Deepest and least tamed of the Border Kingdoms forests, the Duskwood fills the eastern end of the Borders, separating the Realm of the Smoking Star (a bucolic forest infused with wild magic) from the largely lawless Realm of the Ready Sword (home to brigands, misfits, and many monsters). Few folk dare to venture far into its thick tangles of moss-girt trees, clinging vines, and many tiny rivulets that tumble down from knife-sharp central ridges to carve deep “breakneck” ravines thickly cloaked in underbrush. The breaknecks render mounted passage through the forest—or ground pursuit of anything that can fly—impossible. The undergrowth provides ample cover for giant spiders, snakes of astonishing size, and owlbears. Beholders are reputed to drift menacingly among the trees, and the forest is known to harbor at least one large thirst (flock) of stirges.

So plentiful are the Duskwood monsters that some sages believe a colony of deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup> must dwell in its depths. Others observe

## The vauntagar

Venerated by a Borderer cult in olden times, this magic remains a dark horror in many fireside tales and warriors’ legends.

Seemingly lost to wizardry today, the Vauntagar is a permanent spellbinding that links monsters of the caster’s choice in a symbiotic cycle. Only one monster prowls Faerûn at a time, but is replaced by the next in the cycle whenever the first is slain, sorely wounded, or desires to escape its current situation. The first beast vanishes, and the second fades into view in the same spot.

Up to a dozen creatures of widely differing abilities, natures, and alignments can be linked without apparent harm or instability (most Vauntagars have six to nine beasts). Combat damage dealt by any monster in the cycle heals an equal number of hit points, evenly distributed, among any of its fellow monsters that are wounded at the time (the unseen “elsewhere” beasts are healed offstage, beyond the reach of magical attacks), but the onstage beast can’t heal itself through the damage it does. This repair extends to regeneration of completely destroyed body parts and elements, so long as actual death hasn’t occurred.

The Vauntagar magic prevents aging and inhibits disease and poisoning; its beasts can only die violently—and can’t voluntarily leave the binding.

The death of a cycle creature doesn’t shatter a Vauntagar binding, but shuffles the order in which the remaining beasts appear. (Some cycles reportedly include the slumped forms of decomposing or skeletal beasts, but the only account of a Vauntagar entirely composed of various undead has been dismissed as a drunkard’s fabrication.) The adventurer Loryngyl of Baldur’s Gate escaped a Vauntagar in which he faced (in order) a gorgon, a displacer beast, a sinister<sup>Mon</sup> (bat), a wemic<sup>Mon</sup>, a chimera, a stinger<sup>Mon</sup>, a leopard, an ogre, and a grell.

At least one Vauntagar guards each Deep Duskwood magical pool. Some sages speculate their beasts bathe in the waters to prolong the bindings. A binding that includes an ogre mage wanders the Duskwood freely, one has been encountered in the depths of Undermountain, and they might also lurk in various ancient Netherese ruins.

that its plants flourish just as frenetically; old tales of a nature god dwelling in the Duskwood, or it being the onetime home of a Netherese sorcerer whose now-untended generative magics run amok, might be nearer the truth.

Among the Duskwood's rich flora are many rare shade-dwelling herbs and fungi—growing larger, richer, and more abundantly than anywhere else in the known world. Alchemists, dyers, herbalists, scent-makers, wizards, and priests pay handsomely for specimens.

At the heart of the forest lie pools whose waters glow with magic, and they can recharge certain magic items dipped into them long enough. This legendary property has brought a host of adventurers into the Deep Duskwood down the centuries. Most reported that the pools are guarded by “the Vauntagar.”

Many legends describe such secrets of the Duskwood as a vein of emerald ore so rich that human-torso-sized gemstone lumps can be hewn free; an invisible wizard's tower; and a sunken dell where a lich wanders the roofless, overgrown rooms of his once-grand mansion, compelling adventurers who reach him to go back out into Faerûn under *geas*, to do tasks at his bidding (such as slaying particular realm rulers). Among these tales is one certain truth about the Duskwood: It has claimed the lives of thousands of adventurers down the years, and is still doing so today.

## The grand duchy of shantal

Shantal is sometimes called “the heart of the Border Kingdoms” due to its central location in the tamer western half of the region, and because of its stereotypical pastoral beauty, eccentric rulership, and lurking danger.

The Grand Duchy is a broad, tranquil-seeming valley of gently rolling farmlands studded with woodlots, flanked on the east and west by lightly wooded hills, and crisscrossed by winding lanes. At its center rise the triple-spired Ducal Towers, surrounded by a neat ring of cottages: the village of Shantal. These in turn are encircled by a road beyond which long, narrow vegetable gardens radiate out like the spokes of a wagon wheel, one per cottage, all ending in orchards.

This curiously neat and ordered settlement is dominated by the alert authority of ever-present, dozen-strong mounted patrols of “Vigilant Bailiffs” (War4–7s armed with crossbows, swords, javelins, and weighted throwing nets). Visiting mages are closely escorted by Bailiffs at all times while in the Duchy.

Visitors will notice a lack of any resident priests or mages (a handful of Tempuran priests dwell in the Ducal Towers to administer Shantan spiritual and healing needs). There's only one well-stocked store—The Roping Post across from the Tower gates, run by Analytha Kroanarl (NG female Calishite human expert 1), a cheerful, talkative, bustling woman who knows everyone in the valley. Beside it stands Shantal's lone combined inn and tavern, the Grand Duke's Griffon, a typical dingy old roadhouse. Shantan farmers keep livestock, grow vegetables, and sell smoky-flavored dark beer (“Old Oakey”), Shantan Slice (a sharp-flavored red cheese), sausage, and hams.

Shantans are almost all well-armed retired warriors glad to dwell in a place free of hostile magic. Most volunteer for occasional duty as Vigilant Bailiffs but otherwise work as self-sufficient farmers and craftworkers, producing such things as helms, shields, and bracers of their own design (“Shantan-make” gear

## The daerndar

The Arcanauh accidentally broke into these caverns while expanding his cellars, and thereafter used them for storage, spellcasting experiments, and to hide his strongest magics. The explosion that destroyed him and his artifacts imbued the caves with strong magical radiation. These radiations block all translocation, scrying, and astral and ethereal spells (and spell-like powers); no being can use magic to journey into or out of the Daerndar. Blue-green, glowing mists now drift endlessly through the caverns, and within them lurk at least three doomspheres Mon (ghost beholders).

Only a few spells (known to Flyndara) can safely be cast in the caverns; all other magical discharges cause outbursts of wild magic. Occasionally violent spell storms arise spontaneously and rage through the Daerndar, involving explosions, raging lightning, and magics that *polymorph* only parts of a creature's body. Spellcasters exposed to a storm must make a Will save every round or be *feble-minded*.

In storm-free times, Daerndar magic spontaneously creates bewildered and usually belligerent monsters inside the caverns—trolls, minotaurs, mimics, ettins, gibbering mouthers, nightaunts, and ropers appear most often. (These monsters aren't actually created per se; instead, they are the result of

semirandom effects similar to *polymorph any object*, transforming rocks, pebbles and debris into creatures for roughly 20 minutes at a time.)

All magic items brought into the Daerndar float freely (drifting gently through the mists, or hurtling violently if a spell storm erupts) if released and not tethered. The mists generate multiple “ghost” images of any magic item, akin to the effects of a *mirror image* spell. Typically six or seven in number, these identical images move independently. Touching a false image will reveal its intangibility, but won't make it vanish.

Moreover, the Daerndar walls seem to move from time to time, changing the shape of the caverns and in at least one case crushing a hapless wizard to pulp between closing walls. The caverns have claimed the lives of over forty adventurers during the past decade.

Some say the Daerndar drove the Official Mage mad. There's said to be a single secret way down into them—a flooded tunnel that a swimmer must know well, or perish of lack of air in dead-end side passages—descending from somewhere in Flyndara's tower (from under her bed, local legend insists, but this might be a tale-teller's embellishment that gained credence through many retellings).

tends to be nonreflective, rust-resistant, and fitted with handy dagger-sheaths and coin pouches).

The duchy is protected by strong *mythal*-like wards that have the powers of a *dimensional anchor* spell, absorb all natural and magical lightning and electrical discharges and all magical fire, and prevent the following magics from functioning: *web*, *bold person*, and all *invisibility* spells. These wards were created to hamper unwanted visitors seeking to reach the Daerndar, or "Heart of Spells," a series of dry natural caverns beneath the Ducal Towers.

The Daerndar hold great attraction for mages because they're full of magical radiations strong enough to recharge most magic items, for those who know the proper spells to focus and infuse. (Those who don't know the right magics beware—most spell use in the Daerndar causes chain-reaction outbursts of wild magic!)

Twice the Grand Duke has granted permission for travelers to try to recharge items in the caverns. Both attempts were made under the watchful eye of the prickly Official Mage. Thieves have discovered secret passages in the Ducal Towers connecting to the route she controls, and visited the Daerndar on the sly; when the few survivors emerged and told their tales, the Official Mage teleported slaying monsters after them.

The Grand Duchy was founded by Pelindar Slendyn, last surviving servant of an archmage known as the Arcanauh, after a duel that destroyed his master, his master's consort-turned-bitter-foe, the Thayan sorceress Ithcatra Llumen, and the tower they shared. The Ducal Towers stand on the site of this destroyed Red Tower.

Pelindar forbade the use of magic in Shantal, as did his son Thaeirin, the second Grand Duke. Almost continuous incursions by Daerndar-seekers made necessary the establishment of an Official Mage early in the reign of the current Grand Duke, Orsarr Slendyn. Orsarr (NG male Tashalan human fighter 10) is an outspoken, burly, fun-loving who very reluctantly retired from wenching his way through Sword Coast taverns upon the death of his father Thaeirin.

Orsarr tried to convince an elderly adventuring companion to become his Official Mage, but she craved her retirement cottage and sent her daughter instead: the stunningly beautiful Flyndara Rildar (CN female Tethyrian human wizard 14/sorcerer 6), who stands almost seven feet tall and sports flame-orange hair, sparkling green eyes, and a temper swifter and fiercer than most thunderstorms.

Flyndara Rildar gave the Grand Duke what he wanted: wards (most sages believe she modified wards powered by a hidden artifact, created by the Arcanauh) and her promise to defend the duchy from severe attacks. She then spell-built herself a tower (the smallest, most northerly of the Ducal Towers), and vanished inside to pursue her studies, giving orders she wasn't to be disturbed unless the safety of the Duchy was at stake.

Flyndara has only rarely been seen since. Typically, she strides unannounced into evening feasts, half-dressed and with tangled and matted hair, and falls on food like a starving prisoner, gorging herself until sated. She welcomes neither visitors nor apprentices, and Shantans believe she stalks the duchy in beast-shape, indulging her cruel bloodlust by hunting the usual prey of the shape she's using.

Whatever Flyndara's sanity, she's known to have destroyed more than a dozen intruding mages (reputedly by using strange spells and multiple artifacts of great power—the very mix of magic widely believed to have caused the explosion that destroyed the Red Tower).

## Irl

This quiet village nestles into the Crumblerock Crags (a sheltering crescent of weathered hills named for their treacherously soft rocks), just west of the River Rith and due north of the Realm of the Mount. A cluster of tile- and slate-roofed cottages amid woodlots and hedgerows, Irl has a superb but pricey inn, *The Bold Ki-rin*, run by a jovial ex-adventurer, Brelmere Baerith (NG male Calishite human fighter 11). The luxuries of the "Rin" exist because Irl is mainly famous for gems.

The jewelers of Irl are reputedly among the richest humans in all Faerûn; secretive, reclusive old men whose behind-the-scenes influence can coerce Waterdhavian nobles, Sembian merchants, and Zulkirs of Thay alike. Visitors (some of whom come to plunder or kidnap) find a shortage of impressively sinister, finely robed local esthetes; the jewelers live simply. As the veteran adventurer Torbras of Westgate said, "If you accost a barefoot laborer digging in the mud of a turnip field, and stained glass golems suddenly lurch out of nearby sheds, the columns of a barn come to life, and gemstones float out of the man's pockets to circle his head and spit lightning at you—well, you've found one of those fabled jewelers of Irl, and likely a swift end to your life, too!"

Many of the larger and wealthier Irlan families command caryatid columns and stone or stained glass golems. Descendants of apprentices of the wizard Calagrath Halirl (from whose name "Irl" is derived) might carry gems that store attacking magics, and animate when activated. Irlans refuse to speak of such things; anyone asking to buy magical gems will be firmly shown the door of any Irlan shop. Those shops sell jewelry set with rubies, emeralds, and moonstones (usually crown-cut, the local fashion), and azurite (the striated blue-green stone is abundant locally) carved into smooth swirl-spiral candleholders, napkin rings, and "thumb-boxes" (tiny rounded containers used to carry spices and other powders; their sliding lids can be opened with a thumb when held in one's palm).

The most powerful Irlan families are the Belingrosts and the Mammantals. The Ephrost, Gultulbar, Shabadather and Tamurleon clans are the "second-rank" houses, with the Irlingars rising and the once-proud Relingasters now little more than a memory. Their investments and influence reaches far, but Irlans seldom issue orders or otherwise inconvenience their debtors—except to stave off wars or imminent crises.

Governing decisions are made by the Eight-Sided Stone (a covert council whose members are elders of these eight families), but a visitor will find no way to contact them. They employ a Master of the Mace, Uldron Alvar (LN male Tashalan human fighter 7), who commands eight Swords of Justice (armed police, fighters of 3rd–5th level). These battle-hardened ex-adventurers wander Irl, observing attentively, and little escapes their attention. They hate strife, and tend to be

bad-tempered if they must fight. The village jail is two cells under a stable.

Border lore says labyrinthine storage tunnels underlie Irl's gardens, cellars, and orchards, so vast and old that no one alive knows where all of them lead—and so crumbling that not a season passes without a cottage garden collapsing suddenly into a gravelike opening. The jewelers reputedly have secret storage caches behind false walls in these passages. The tunnels have hidden entrances in stables and thickets, and lead to the gem-mines in the Crags behind Irl.

Local legend insists the lost tomb of Calagrath Halirl is also beneath Irl (perhaps deep under the Rin's yard), where the Wizard of the Gems floats forever on his back in glowing, enchanted air above a sparkling bed of magical gems that preserve and defend his body. Calagrath, 'tis said, will awaken to hurl his own head at intruders, as it turns into a howling, flame-eyed flying skull. Other tales insist the jewels under the corpse emit rays that wither, disintegrate, or incinerate intruders.

## Jundarwood

Thrusting into the Shining Sea like the head of a gigantic lion is “the Dragonback,” the worn-down root of ancient Mount Goraunt. Few know the shorn mountain exists; it's entirely cloaked in the deep, brooding warm woodland known as Jundarwood. Every sort of tree not restricted to cold, dry terrain grows abundantly in “Old Shadow.” Countless streams and three rivers rise in Jundarwood, which stands like a shield separating the realms of Adaerglast, the Realm of the Mount, and Suldamma. Only the most intrepid hunters venture into its leafy depths—and beasts prowl forth from it to do their own hunting. Jundarwood has no settlements, reliable roads, or trails.

The forest is named for Jundar of Silvanus, an elder-days wizard-turned-priest who set about finding and breeding threatened “monsters” who couldn't comfortably dwell in ever-expanding civilized lands. Jundar is thought to have died somewhere in Jundarwood centuries ago, but the beasts he gathered still flourish.

Most Malarites consider Jundarwood a sacred site and often ambush or stalk nonbelievers found there. This reverence is curious, because something in Jundarwood does not love Malar; followers of the Beast Lord who venture too far in are always torn apart, and their remains scattered along the forest verges as bloody warnings.

For centuries, there have been reports of a stag-headed man standing silent in Jundarwood, watching intruders and vanishing if approached. Malarites debate his identity furiously, but most non-Malarites believe this is Silvanus or a servitor.

Plants and beasts alike grow very swiftly in Old Shadow, running water is everywhere, countless “stream-hollow” caves underlie the trees, and Jundar scattered many permanent *dimension door* and *plant growth* magics (so some trees grow at astonishing rates—and passing between two, or over a certain stump, might bring sudden translocation to elsewhere in the forest).

Druuth now hunt Jundarwood, prowling in beast-shape. (A druuth is a monster adventuring band of four to six doppelgangers, each led by a lone illithid; at least four such bands raid

stealthily across the Border Kingdoms, adopting human guises to escape detection as much as possible. Druuth are named for their leaders; of the Borderer bands, the names “Sshreea” and “Oinuth”—probably illithid nicknames—are known.)

As the Border Kingdoms were explored and settled, Jundarwood's seemingly endless monsters kept it largely untouched. Then, as now, game-trails seem to shift positions from day to day, and “landmark” trees also move about. Treants seem absent from present-day Jundarwood; aside from the Stagman and Jundar, no one “civilized” has managed to dwell in Jundarwood—not even elves.

Some swear Jundarwood is a mythal gone mad, or home to a colony of beholders, or deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup>, or drow come to the surface, or even phaerimm<sup>Mon</sup> (“they're working all this weirdness to keep folk away”), but the truth is unrevealed.

Jundarwood is claimed by no realm and ruled by no known entity, though in younger, more carefree days, Sammereza Sulphontis of Waterdeep sold ambitious merchants the title of “Baron of Jundarwood,” presenting them with impressive maps of the “greatest uncut stand of timber in Faerûn today.” Fourteen such Barons, or their descendants, still walk Faerûn; at least three briefly visited “their” land in vain attempts to claim the bounty Sammereza described so glowingly.

## The Land of Two Princes

Nestling between the River Scelptar and the northern edge of the Shaar, this war-torn realm is centered on the walled town of Gallard, whose folk (far too busy making coins to worry about the romantic foolishness that drives their fellow countrymen) turn their backs on the “crazed” doings of the Two Princes. The realm is pleasant rolling country of orchards, small farms, and ruined keeps (called “strongholds,” though elsewhere they would be “follies”), with good roads and prosperous folk.

If the country is pictured as a very broad shield with the river as its top edge and Gallard at its point, its features of note are the castles of the two princes: Corthgrolt at the shield's western top corner, and Revelrar at the eastern. Both stand on bluffs overlooking the river, are as ornate and beautiful as the “show palaces” of any Waterdhavian noble, and house men who've deservedly been called “romantic dolts”—and far worse. The realm's main road (linking the land with Bedorn to the west and Blackbarn and wooded Hawkgarth to the east) runs diagonally south to Gallard and then back up to the river in a “V,” with all the land's hamlets along it. From Corthgrolt at the western border, heading southeast to Gallard, these are Runcerin, Sholbrut's Gard, Umble, and Dlackbridge. From Revelrar going southwest to Gallard, the road-hamlets are Bucklegrijm, Starshroud (named for a smoke-like magical mist in a nearby dell, that causes dying, near-dead, and recently dead beings taken within it to float in the positions they are left in, in stasis, not decaying or deteriorating further), Appletree, and Ornar's Belt.

The realm was founded by two knights exiled together from Cormyr for rebelling against the ruling Obarskys. Together they slew or drove out the lordlings who ruled the lands they fancied, assisted each other in building castles at either end of their new realm—and promptly quarreled, unable to agree on which of them

should rule or even what the land should be called. A year-long, bloody war “ended” when they slew each other in battle at the crossroads of Appletree.

Their rival families, Amcorth and Meldrist, eventually agreed to contest rulership of the realm under strict conditions (enforced by a mysterious mage, who cast a lasting spell that consumes any covenant-breaker “by wildfire of the blood in the veins”): No family member shall draw weapon or cast spell against a member of the rival family; poison and any sort of bows shall not be used; magic shall not be wielded against either of the two castles or folk within their walls, by any family member; and the strife between the two houses shall be decided solely by contest between hired warriors, not to exceed three persons per living family member. To win the realm, these hired combatants must control every part of the land except the rival castle and Gallard, and have captive at least two members of the rival family, of either or both of its eldest two living generations. The losers have safe conduct to flee the land; the winners become its outright rulers.

Generations have passed as the endless battle of gleaming-armored knights thundering through the trees on horseback has raged, acquiring some unwritten additional rules: Crops and property are to be despoiled as little as possible, and no danger offered to those not in the hunt for the crown. Knights hacking at each other will pause to ride around an old farm-woman with a handcart of apples, and then resume their deadly fray. Local farmers regard this craziness with cynical fondness; they’re used to it, it makes their realm “special,” and it confirms popular opinion that all nobility are unworthy of power and unsound of mind.

The Amcorths and Meldrists maintain investments in Gallard and elsewhere, and nod civilly when they meet—but their warriors slay each other up and down the realm, while grasping Gallardians pay no attention and outlanders gape. Some family members try to devise strategies to win the struggle, but most Amcorths and Meldrists sip wine, play at cards, and leave the fighting to their hirelings, often watching the “evening fun” of bloodshed through enchanted scrying devices.

To travel or act in the Land of Two Princes as a committed hireling of either family without clearly displaying their badge (for Amcorth, a large golden lion’s-head, face-on and in a golden circle enclosing a brown field; for Meldrist, a purple-antlered, white-skinned stag with a silver dagger clenched in its teeth, facing to the right, inside a white circle enclosing a field of blue; the rival forces have become known as the House of the Lion and the House of the Stag) is punishable by execution on the spot.

Young, restless would-be knights and hired warriors desiring battle experience without facing deadly magic come from all over Faerûn to hire on with the Lions or the Stags. Bribery (to join service, change sides, or look the other way at crucial moments) is allowed, and nearby borders make desertion easy. The Hunt has an allure; many who survive a season become deeply loyal to the family they serve, and devote the balance of their lives to the struggle. Those who survive without becoming committed often depart the realm richer. Warriors can win coin; the mounts, armor, and weaponry of the fallen; and titles (both families hand out knighthoods like indulgent children reward favored pets).

Illustration by Franz Vohwinkel



*Two great houses vie for the throne of the Land of Two Princes*

A visitor will often see mounted bands of armored men racing past, and swordplay within the strongholds that crown every height of land in the realm. Most of these follies are littered with warriors' bones, and some are haunted by undead or used by brigands or monsters as lairs. Local children play at fighting in them, and often find coins or even weapons as collapses and erosion bare another skeleton or grave. There are over a hundred strongholds, including Oscalot, the Sunset Wall, Malkin's Turret, Arambar's Hold, Untkeep, Baland's Gard, and Stornpost. Most famous is Ghound Castle, an empty shell north of Gallard where caravans often camp overnight, but minstrels tell ghost tales of Watchfire Keep, a ring of tumbled stones near Appletree, and Blackstone Hall (a turret atop a rise on the east bank of Swordpoint Pond, just north of Dlackbridge) is cloaked in persistent treasure-rumors and is known to sit atop deep, extensive underground storage cellars.

The church of Tempus is happy to see the Hunt continue forever. Priests of the Wargod are sent to the Land of Two Princes for training. They earn high fees healing, raising, and burying combatants (anyone refusing to pay a priest's fee discovers no clergy of Tempus anywhere will aid him until it's paid doubly). Two-thirds of fees are yielded to senior priests; the church uses the coins for upkeep of holy sites and clergy and sponsoring swordsmiths, armorers, and folk intending to wage war—such as the rival Houses of Amcorth and Meldrist!

The coins the two families gain let them live in high style (dining on exotic foods and wines, throwing revels, buying superior steeds, and wearing fine clothes) and recruit combatants from across Faerûn. A steady stream of battle-hungry men comes out of the Vilhon seeking the Hunt, but both families are always seeking skilled adventurers or veteran warriors, to give them an edge in battle. Those who love danger and warfare often travel to the Land of Princes for a taste of it. Certain noble ladies of Waterdeep like to picnic in strongholds while warriors battle all around. One was recently heard to proclaim, "I don't feel it's truly been a good summer unless I've been to that land of the Hunt, and had some warrior's hot blood spattered all over me!"

## GALLARD

This walled town is home to many locksmiths, pewterers, tinsmiths, potters, enamellers, shoemakers and bootmakers, leatherworkers, and smallsmiths (makers of such things as hinges, wirework, fastenings, corner-caps for chests and coffers, and edgings for doors, panels, and slots). It's a hive of skilled craftworkers and close-guarded wealth, one of the busiest and wealthiest Borderer settlements but also one of the most grasping and grubby. Gallardians have earned general dislike for being unfriendly, self-important, and "sharp" in their dealings.

Every Gallardian merchant has a personal bodyguard and an amanuensis (clerk, scribe, and bookkeeper). Most hire at least three "trustyblades" to guard their home and family (when they're at work), and their workplace (when they're at home). This habit arose from a long history of Shaaran raids, but it is now more a matter of custom and status rather than daily survival.

Gallard is a crowded place of winding cobbled streets and mud-and-gravel alleys. Its timbered houses are narrow, steep-roofed, and close-crowded. They rise four or five floors above street level, typically having storage cellars and kitchens below and a rear chimney flanked by a dumbwaiter shaft (to drop laundry and refuse to lower levels).

Visitors will search in vain for grand palaces, manors, or civic buildings. Business is conducted in shops or at Gallardian "firesword houses" (establishments named for the skewers of fowl and various meats constantly sizzling over central cooking fires). Gallardians use firesword houses as meeting-places to transact business as well as day-and-night-long sources of ready meals. In the better houses you can rent private rooms or curtained booths as well as minstrels to make noise or "fenders" (guards who prevent anyone stealing close to listen to your negotiations).

The closest thing in Gallard to a seat of government is the Risen Dragon Finest Fireswords on Ovirstreen Street, owned and operated by Ulgarth Hithtor (LN male Tethyrian human fighter 16), a grizzled, balding old warrior who runs the Gallardian Council of Bodyguards and Trustyblades, the organization that licenses every town resident who bears a weapon outside their home. Folk "come Updragon" (to the Risen Dragon) to pay their sword taxes, hear Council justice, and hire bodyguards or trustyblades (or to register such hirings with the Council; actual negotiations are often conducted elsewhere beforehand, though most visitors come to Hithtor to swiftly and easily find protection-for-hire).

The Council keeps the peace by enforcing the laws it passes and sending out street patrols of at least a dozen "Watchful Helms" (senior Council members, veteran Ftr6s or higher who anticipate traps well, laugh at attempted bribes, and wield blades and crossbow bolts dipped in blue whinnis poison).

Council laws include "no sale of tainted or deceitful goods, no sale or possession of poison, no extortion, no attacking rivals or their goods or premises, no theft, and no murder." Penalties include stiff fines, property confiscations, and "being under the Ban" (exile).

Mercenary companies aren't allowed to operate in Gallard, but several local weapons-trainers (stalwart Council members, all) equip and train warriors in town: Ithtyn Mearin (NE male Calishite human fighter 14; his trainees wear badges of an amber griffon's head on a red oval); Nander Philglar (NG male Tashalan fighter 12; his badge is a black eel on a red oval); Jhalassan Dreir (LN female Tethyrian human fighter 15; a white striking hawk on a green oval); and Bunder Breldayr (NG male Chultan human fighter 11; a yellow eagle's head on a green oval). Ulgarth Hithtor's trainees wear a badge displaying a white turret on a black oval.

Gallard is a place of bustling commerce, not a romantic backwater of pastoral beauty. In the words of one local: "Well, Gallard's necessary—like a privy or rubbish-heap." Detractors sometimes call the town "Dungstink Sty" because of two sites within sight of the walls: Shaarsar (to the southeast, a large market where farmers bring cattle for slaughter and transformation into hides for tanners and spicy "trailmeat" known to





Illustration by Warren Mabry

*Two merchants of Luthbaern reach a tenuous truce*

many wayfarers and caravan-guards); and Ong's Batar (to the southwest, a reeking cluster of tanneries feeding ever-busy Gallardian craftworkers).

South of the road linking Shaarsar and Ong's Batar lies an everchanging chaos of encamped caravans and horse-dealers. Mounts stolen anywhere in the Borders might arrive in this "Zarnmoot" for sale with astonishing speed—and from time to time doppelgangers are discovered here lurking in horse-shape, hoping to be sold to lone travelers they can devour when their new owners fall asleep.

## Luthbaern

This walled, fortified, and wary town of traders and crafters stands on the Westwater Way northeast of the Barony of Blacksaddle. It's a cobbled, crowded place of tall stone-and-slate buildings, where nary a blade of grass is allowed to waste space that can be devoted to making money.

"Welcoming" is a word never applied to what one uncharitable Borderer dubbed "the Sty of Fat Merchants." The phrase stuck, confusing wayfarers who associate fat merchants with Sembia. Borderers often call Luthbaern "the Fat Sty" (as in: "Oh, yer a Fat Styer, eh?").

The tall stone buildings of Luthbaern stand shoulder to shoulder, balconies almost touching. Local tales feature midnight moots of conspirators who stride, high aloft, from one house to another. A thief famously fled through twelve houses in this manner, hotly pursued by sword-waving bodyguards, before escaping. Luthbaern architecture runs to dark, ornate wood

paneling and tapestries, and almost everyone lives above their business or in rooms rented out to others.

Luthbaernar know how to work. They love to play just as hard, consuming barrels of drink and wagons of meat nightly, and so tend to be fat, large-bellied folk. Luthbaernar merchants are usually successful and pompous, and they wear finery trimmed with lace at cuffs and collars. Many wear rings bearing cantrips that make the adornments wink or glow to impress onlookers. Most Luthbaernar are never far from food and drink (wearing belt flagons and pouches of cheese, sausages, and fried bread "ready rolls"), and they often talk at top speed while waving their arms expressively. A visiting trader described arguing town merchants as "roosters strutting up belly to belly and shrieking insults at each other." Luthbaernar tend to be suspicious of strangers—assuming everyone in Faerûn is after their money—and take elaborate precautions against thieves and swindlers.

Luthbaern is justly proud of the goods it produces. Furniture and cabinet-work have recently been joined by earthenware, glass-glazed crockery, and fine-sewn tapestries and rugs. The town saying "swift and fine" refers to producing goods; requests for custom-made wares are seen as welcome challenges. Luthbaernar often hire passing traders to note new trends and goods and impart their observations on their next stopover in Luthbaern. Such information is promptly acted upon, producing new goods.

The ability to see consequences, costs, and how to do things better seems inborn in Luthbaernar; in the words of some, they're "ordained by the gods to be merchants." Even the lowliest crafters

invest coins in various concerns, sponsoring more caravan wagons and new businesses across Faerûn than any other citizenry, even Sembia.

In part, this happens because Luthbaernar needn't worry about defending property or "keeping a little by" for bad times, trusting in their mysterious guardian, the Belted Mage, to prevent brigand raids, large-scale attacks, and thieving magic. Thanks to his wards, fires can ignite in Luthbaern only in specified workshop areas (to allow forges, crucibles, and cooking—as a result, few Luthbaernar cook at home), nothing can fly over the town, lightning and rain veer to fall "outwall" (outside the town walls), and no shapeshifting or illusions (except his) work or persist within Luthbaern.

The Belted Mage is named for his magical belt that stores spells of flight, personal disguise, invisibility, and fire resistance. When he wants to be identified, he casts an illusion of his well-known symbol: a barrel in flames, enclosed in a circle of rope. Most of the time he looks like just one more fat, bustling merchant (gruff, untidily mustached and large-nosed), but *his* finger-rings wink with real magic. His true form is thought to be slim, raven-haired, and dark-eyed. His name, nature, and origin remain mysteries, but persistent local rumors encompass the truth: He is a renegade Red Wizard of Thay, Izazrem Thal (LN male Rashemi human wizard 16/Red Wizard 9), who chose to live in seclusion far from the strife of his homeland, perfecting ward-magic in peace while growing richer. He is known to be able to trace specific items he has touched as long as they're within his wards (the town walls).

Most visiting Thayans and powerful mages stay outwall, just beyond the Belted Mage's reach, in the bustling "Muddy Ring" of paddocks for visiting caravans, market stalls, and stockyards.

Surrounding Luthbaern are verdant farms kept busy feeding the busy townsfolk. "Luthlander" farmers keep goats, cattle, and pigs, and grow food crops (tubers in particular). Luthland cheese, known as "sharpsair," is white, crumbly, and as fiery as hot mustard or radishes. Luthbaernar love it, and eat cubes of it doused in mustard, to work up drink-thirsts.

## Manywaters

The old town of Manywaters stands just southwest of the Grand Duchy of Shantal, whose battered stone borderpost is two hundred and forty paces outside its north gates.

Inside its low, tumbledown stone walls, Manywaters would be little more than a way stop village were it not for the Riven

Healing House (a small but important temple of Ilmater) and the Riven Rock from which flow the famous hot healing springs that gave Manywaters its name.

A sorely wounded adventurer once collapsed in the pool formed by the springs. The next morn she awakened whole, not only undrowned but having regained a missing arm and much flesh! Her magical armor was gone, apparently dissolved by the waters. Later experimentation revealed that the waters heal (even banishing insanity, diseases, curses, and parasitic infestations, and restoring lost, withered, or shattered body parts) by draining the powers of magic items worn or attached to a stricken being.

More than half a day's immersion is needed for most injuries, and Riven Rock Pool can't bring the dead back to life. However, its waters keep alive dying creatures even when their condition (such as inability to float or a slit throat) would ordinarily bring swift doom. The pool won't "draw on" more magic than it needs to work; immersed magic items will be unaffected if no injured creature is in the pool. Some say Ilmater causes this healing, but others believe ancient wizardry gave the pool its powers long before the Broken God was known in Faerûn.

The waters lose all efficacy the instant they're removed from the pool and entirely lack healing properties when rising through the Underdark to the surface; the Rock itself seems to grant the healing effects. Priests forbid chipping at the Rock, but some who've done so discovered its smooth black rock crumbles to dust when fragmented—and no piece or dust of it retains the slightest magical aura or powers.

Riven Rock is a scalloped dome of smooth black rock, like an upturned bowl, about the size of a small cottage. Many fissures in its surface radiate like wagonwheel spokes; from them flow many rivulets of enchanted water that gather into a pool (generally 4–5 feet deep—eight feet in the center—and forty feet across at its widest) that forms an arc, about two hundred paces long, halfway around the Rock.

The waters of Riven Rock Pool resist all natural and magical attempts to part it, boil it, or pump it out. Small amounts can be removed in containers, on objects immersed in it, and in cupped hands. Many mages have prepared magical containers to carry off the waters, but the healing powers are instantly lost upon separation from the pool, no matter what magics are on the container.

The Ilmatari of the high-pillared Riven Healing House heal anyone in return for fees they use for the betterment of the sick and maimed who dwell in interconnected buildings behind the temple (and will fiercely defend the priests without thought for their own lives). Injured pet animals lope or stagger around the holy compound: a tree-girt wall enclosing (from front to rear) the temple, the "Hurt Houses," the Riven Rock with its pool, a small orchard and overgrown garden, and an abandoned mansion the priests sometimes rent by the month or tenday to injured visitors desiring seclusion (the Ilmatari only reluctantly allow such guests, and are very selective about who they allow in; they wield a surprising array of magic items in defense of the compound, and will hold them aimed and ready when allowing evil creatures to enter the pool).

## Riven Rock Healing

The powers of the waters vary from creature to creature and occasion to occasion, but in general, curing of insanity or one disease or infestation, or restoration of one lost limb, costs 1 item ability or 3d4 charges from an item. Physical wounds are healed on a basis of 2d4 hp per item charge (for items lacking charges, 3d6 hp per item function or power; for "one-shot" items, 3d6 hp for the item).

## The neth stand

This vast, dark, and deadly forest is named for a widespread Border belief that folk fleeing shattered Netheril reached its tree-shrouded peaks and there “took a stand.” (Most sages, however, believe the “Stand” refers to a stand of trees and came into use because the wood consists of tall, dark trees growing close together.) The legend says the Netherese raised fortresses on the rocky heights at the heart of the wood. For years sages dismissed this as fancy, but recent sightings (made at great peril, given the scores of perytonMon and wyverns that infest the range of crumbling peaks running north-south through the heart of the Stand) confirm that atop some pinnacles stand shattered stone towers that were once slender, beautiful, and soaring.

The nameless Neth peaks, studded with caves and ledges, are crumbling; entire rock faces often break free and slide. They are home to astonishing numbers of wyverns and perytonMon—so many that dragons occasionally fly long distances to feed on them. Both wild magic and dead magic areas (perhaps moving) cloak certain peaks, and the Red Wizards of Thay have mounted so many recent expeditions into these mountains that someone in Thay *must* believe very valuable magic lies in the Stand—as yet unfound, despite a high toll in Thayvian lives. The Stand has swallowed generations of Calishite hunters; some sages claim the forest alone prevented Calimshan from long ago expanding east to swallow the Border Kingdoms.

The Stand today is an old, dark, thickly-grown forest, its trees so close together that travelers must often hack their ways, and its depths so gloomy that phosphorescent fungi (some ambulatory, and perhaps sentient) are often seen. No reliable trail maps are known, and hunters swear that forest paths move from season

to season. Intruders encounter carnivorous plants, thornbush thickets, and small colonies of monsters who use extensive burrow networks to surround targets, strike from all sides, and vanish again before victims can strike back. In the forest depths lurk spiders in unnatural profusion—and within their ring, a seemingly inexhaustible supply of monsters. Some sages attribute the wide array of prolific monsters of the Stand to a group of deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup>, mad mages, or hermit-priests of Malar busily breeding or magically multiplying beasts, or powerful spellcasters protecting their privacy with summoned monsters. Still others believe the forest holds *portals* through which hungry monsters are streaming from elsewhere.

## oeble

Oeble grew around the Great Ford (where three fairly ruined bridges cross the River Scelptar, repaired every summer only to be swept away in spring) and has been a trading center for centuries. Oeble is a maze of walled courtyards, rambling alleys, balconies, and rental lodgings rising three or four floors above street-level shops that change with bewildering rapidity. From its leaning towers and rambling balconies one can see Talduth Vale, Owlhold, the Barony of Great Oak, and the more distant Grand Duchy of Shantal and the Swordpoint Streams.

“All rogues meet in Oeble,” claims an old saying. Though Oeble today has a ruler, laws, and policing to cut down on open street warfare, it’s still not a place for the faint of heart, innocent, or unwary. Knife-throwing is a local sport, as are skulking, spying, and creeping about on rooftops, leaping from one high place to another. On most mornings, one or more citizens are found dead of violent causes, their remains burned in garbage-middens

Illustration by Franz Vohwinkel



*A druid contends with lizardfolk skulduggery at the Talondance*

# oeble

- 1. River Scelptar
- 2. Alhan's Span
- 3. Arch of Gargoyles
- 4. Vriel's Leap
- 5. Laskalar's Square
- 6. Alhan's Ride
- 7. Way of Gargoyles
- 8. Vriel's Walk
- 9. Dead King's Walk
- 10. The Rolling Shields
- 11. Balamonthar's Street
- 12. Sixturrets
- 13. Sarl Street
- 14. Thaelr Street
- 15. The Street of Six Tombs
- 16. Mraedur Street
- 17. Tarandar Street
- 18. Manywheels Street
- 19. Jarthoun's Ride
- 20. Darkwind Street
- 21. Slarvyn's Sword (dining club)
- 22. Skulls New and Used (shop)
- 23. Griffingate House (inn)
- 24. Mhalree's Door (inn)
- 25. Wyvernposts (inn)
- 26. Sammart Hall (inn)
- 27. The Black Rose (brothel/inn)



- F** Ferry
- C** Cable Ferry
- R** Rainspan (aboveground linking bridge)
- W** Warehouse

Scale bar: 250 feet

southeast of town. Hulm Draeridge, the unwashed, shaggy, “gnarlbones” (misshapen) man who runs the Dead Cart, keeps a finger, toe, or ear of each corpse, mummifying them in a cellar in case wizards or priests want to buy such trophies. If Hulm knows what person a remnant belongs to, he’ll label it, hiding known mages, nobility, and royalty.

Oeble is home to kidnappers and slavers, smugglers, fences, outlaws, and the bounty hunters seeking them as well as a smattering of half-orcs, orcs, drow, goblins, and mongrelmen. Most monsters keep to the Underways, dark or dim passages damp with river-seepage that underlie the town, linking cellars and wells in a signless labyrinth that boasts at least one inn and two taverns the sun never sees.

Access to the ever-growing (and unmapped, by local edict) Underways is gained down narrow, slippery, unmarked stairs at the ends of many alleys (watched by the authorities and various spies). No adventuring band enters unnoticed, and no large armed force can converge there without raising an alarm. Many cellars connect with the Underways, but few surface buildings have publicly known links to the “Lawless Below.” The Underways never sleep but often seem half-deserted and quiet. However, open slave-dealing, fencing of stolen goods, and important upstanding folk in the company of outlaws or out-and-out monsters can be seen at any corner or passage-moot, and a mysterious sorceress dwelling somewhere in its twisting ways spell-alter (for fees) the features of outlaws or captives whose identities must be swiftly concealed.

The lone “Below” inn, deep under the busy intersection of Sixturrets, is Melder’s Door, a dank, gloomy stone pile where room prices increase by the amount of privacy (and heating lanterns) guests desire. Screams aren’t unknown in its halls, but guests expecting such noises are urged to use one of the “Rooms Below” (the cavernous inn cellars). Disposal of bodies is an expensive extra (there’s a lime pit on the premises), and the inn usually has idle muscle (a dozen experienced warriors) for hire to patrons desiring a bodyguard, to make a show of force, heavy objects carried discreetly, or some violence attended to.

Visitors are warned not to molest any bats they might see in the Door; these report to the proprietor, the darkly handsome Melder (NE male Calishite human rogue 14), who regards his “flying eyes” as family. Anyone harming them swiftly entertains one of his poisoned (secret mix, causes intense pain [1d4+1 point Con penalty] plus 1d2 Dex primary and secondary damage) crossbow darts. The smilingly sinister Melder regularly trades with illithids, and carries two pet saranooths (foot-long flying cousins of flying snakes<sup>Rac</sup> that can’t spit acid, but have bites that paralyze: injury DC 20, 2d6 minutes) up his sleeves.

The two taverns in the Underways are The Talondance (“the Dance” to locals) and The Hungry Haunting (a more spartan eatery).

The Dance is a place of eerie “piping and hooting” music, much frequented by yuan-ti, bugbears, lizardfolk, and more exotic creatures. It hosts most of Oeble’s most dangerous dealings (slave-trading, hiring murderers, and mustering coins or swords for Border coup attempts), and the town’s most memorable brawls. Its owner is Naneetha Dalaeve (NG female Tashalan human

wizard 6), a lonely woman disfigured in an accident, who uses spells to conceal her looks. Adventurers are her entertainment; she follows their exploits avidly. She sponsors and kindly tends wounded or on-the-run adventurers, but takes vicious revenge on those who cheat or steal from her.

The Haunting is owned by Imrys Skaltahar (CN male Calishite human fighter 6), a soft-spoken, watchful individual who deals in more stolen goods in a year than many kings ever possess. As he likes to mutter, “Things have no owners . . . only passing users. The trick is never to get caught with something by those whose anger has a serious edge.” Skaltahar prefers deft deals (in his kitchen) and foresight to feuding, drawn swords, and intimidation, but can swiftly call on both financial aid and armed muscle if need be. He prefers swift turnarounds, reselling most goods so swiftly that they’re in his hands no more than half a day. Many clients bring their troubles to him; Skaltahar hears more Oeblaun secrets than anyone else. Order is maintained in the Haunting by a resident watchghost Mon, Krothaer “the Cruel,” who glides above the tables watching for deceit and coming violence. He murmurs warnings to try to prevent pitched battles erupting.

Folk who find the Underways and the streets not to their liking can travel between a few Oeblaun buildings along the Rainspans, a network of seriously crumbling bridges that leap from rooftops to balconies and even right into the upper floors of such structures as Griffingate House, the large, ornate old inn that stands in the center of Oeble. (This expensive lodging boasts luxurious furnishings, many secret passages and spyholes, and a house guard of expert knife and club-hurlers.) It’s now illegal to leap or cause another being to fall from the Rainspans, or to drop or throw any object from them, but that doesn’t stop darts, rocks, and knives from being hurled down from the heights with deadly accuracy.

The most infamous store in Oeble is Skulls New And Used, an emporium selling the gear and relics of adventurers who’ve moved on . . . or passed on. This crammed, dusty labyrinth of odds and ends is run by a shaggy mountain of a minotaur: Thoele Raervrun (CN male Damaran human fighter 12) was enspelled into minotaur-shape by a wizard long ago, but retained his own wits and grumbling speech. He wears a dusty, decaying array of leather aprons, pockets bulging with odd keys, string, knives, saws, hooks, candle-ends, and a *necklace of fireballs* with only a few globes left, that he won’t hesitate to use in a fight. His shop is named for a row of orcs’ skull-drinking cups, displayed in the window. One holds two handfuls of glass marbles that Thoele’s been known to fling in the faces (or under the feet) of would-be thieves.

Oeble is ruled by the Faceless Master (a fat, always-masked man whose hands bristle with rings said to harbor deadly magic), with the assistance of an advisory Council of Nine Merchants (a bickering, money-grubbing bunch the Master always politely listens to and then largely ignores) and a force of thirty-plus Gray Blades, a human and half-elven police force.

Most Gray Blades are outlaws from elsewhere who enjoy the good pay, chances to swagger, and fringe benefits of good food, wine, and ardent companionship laid on by their Master. Like

most city lawkeepers, they are cordially disliked by most Oeblar. The Blades might be indulged by their employer, but are very good at their jobs, including spying at lofty windows, acrobatics, deftly firing and avoiding hostile crossbow bolts, and anticipating trouble before it erupts.

Few Oeblar know the raspy-voiced Master died some years ago, and is being impersonated by his former female chamber-slave, using padding and her natural gift for mimicry. She loves Oeble, and is ever-watchful for plots to raid or conquer it, spending much time manipulating mercenaries and competent adventurers to be nearby and ready to defend Oeble—without actually being paid to do so until they're really needed. The Master accomplishes this by endless rumors, offers of "little deals" that can only be made in Oeble, and so on; she's *very* good at such intrigue.

She profits from Oeble's lawless reputation by (fairly secretly) owning The Paeraddyn, a "safe" inn on the south edge of town with amenities and a heavily policed market all within its own walled compound. Bodyguards can be hired from the management by the half-day, day, or night; an impressive array of deadly looking brutes, most nearly eight or nine feet tall, and all bristling with weapons. Some folk stay at "the Paer" out of fear, some just to say they've been to Oeble, and some for the extra security it provides. Few know that the veteran warriors who patrol it can call on undead and other monsters stored in the cellars.

"Too useful to destroy," one now-dead High Duke of a certain Border realm once described Oeble, and his words remain true today. The town is useful to everyone as a hiring center where one can expect to find outlaws on the run, misfits, and monsters; a neutral ground meeting place; and a market for the rare and unusual.

## ondeeme

Once a coastal land of small homesteads carved laboriously out of a lush forest, Ondeeme was transformed forever when the mage whose name it bears founded his own kingdom there. Ondeeme was a successful but restless wool-merchant (and secret wizard) of Schamedar who in 1360 DR descended without warning on Phaeradar (as the land was then called), and viciously blasted everyone to ashes. Everyone.

When there was no one left alive, he departed to recruit his own servants as well as younglings in Calimshan who desired magic and power of their own, returning to found his new kingdom of Ondeeme.

Under his iron rule (and the ever-present threat of his magic), the forest was cleared with astonishing speed and many sheep farms established. As would-be mages and malcontents from all over Calimshan began to arrive, Ondeeme lost no time in adopting Calishite airs and fashions so his realm would lure the restless, lawless, and unwanted of Calimshan and the Shining Sea coasts.

He succeeded in this all too well, finding his busy hands full of an endless succession of deceitful mages, doppelgangers, cruel slavers, smugglers, and thieves looking to establish new thieving-guild chapters in his "Echo of Calimshan." Vicious street-battles and covert murders occurred daily, chaos reigned—and Ondeeme

went into hiding to modify an ancient spell he had found (that he had planned to work on leisurely for years). It became his *bloodmage charm* spell, enabling the caster to mentally control any creature whose blood could be procured for the casting: a spell that could be combined with multiple castings of itself to form a large web of control over a dozen or more beings, if the caster could withstand the mental strain. Ondeeme successfully used the spell to control eleven human mages. Treated well and ruled lightly, they became his nobility and war-officers, as he moved ruthlessly (late in 1362 DR) to reestablish his rule over the battleground of thugs Ondeeme had become.

Ondeeme's controlled Calishite wizards were called "the Slee" by Ondeemans (derived from a merchant's bitter observation that they were "the darkness in Ondeeme's sleeves"). In descending rank, they included three Samphanars (masters of castles or towns); four Oedellars (roving "spell-captains"), and four Nictars (expendable servitor mages, crawlingly ambitious and endlessly energetic; many of these were killed and replaced in the struggle to control Ondeeme).

Under the Slee-reinforced rule of Ondeeme the Mage-King, open lawlessness came to a swift end. Stability brought trade and increased prosperity. As the influence of the young, haughty realm of Ondeeme spread, distant eyes and ears turned its way, and agents of sinister cabals hungry for power began to appear in the streets of Blackalblade. This interest caught fire in 1368 DR when the Mage-King announced the creation of his own school of wizardry, Tethannar, atop the craggy hill of that name north of Blackalblade.

Someone or something of great magical power attacked in the winter of early 1369 DR, destroying Tethannar in a nightlong spellbattle that set the sky afire. The blazing beams of the shattered school had barely tumbled to earth before rumors swept the realm that the Mage-King was dead, and all his students with him. Some said the Slee had also perished, but others insisted they had rebelled against their master, subverted by Red Wizards or other, unknown powers or acting on their own behalf for the first time after breaking Ondeeme's spell-thrall. The "Night of Doom" has been blamed on something dark and mysterious known as the Night Parade, on various powerful Calishite wizards, and even on various offended gods.

All that's certain is that Tethannar remains in ruins, King Ondeeme has not been seen since that night, and all of the Slee vanished that night and stayed unseen for months. During the "Months Without Magic," emboldened Blackalblade merchants hired mercenaries to keep order, and managed to cow the surviving Swords into obedience. Power struggles began, but the realm remained surprisingly calm (see Blackalblade). Courted by the ruling merchants, other wizards began to settle in Ondeeme. Two of these were Jarorthlan of Sheirtalar and Ondalus of Calimport, both of whom took houses in Blackalblade provided by the merchants' council and were named Lords of the Empty Throne. Much to their discomfort, the Slee reappeared before the year was half over, simply striding into Ondeemans' and the other Swords' holds of the realm one morning as if they had never been away.

The realm remains abuzz: Are these truly the Slee ... or disguised Red Wizards or Zhentarim (or ... ?) who have taken the shapes of the Slee? If so, why?

And what of the Mage-King? Is he dead? Who rules the Slee? Or was Tethtannar a ploy to lure wizards so Ondeeme could easily destroy them, and the Months Without Magic a way to get prominent Ondeemans to step forward so they could be easily identified and slain or magically controlled?

The Slee kill any who dare to ask them about the Mage-King or Tethtannar or their recent absence, the Lords of the Empty Throne don't dare emerge from their palatial homes, and Ondeeme holds its collective breath, watching and waiting for magical doom—and worse.

The Slee seem stronger in their magic, as if changed. Swords are sent racing around the land as if invasions are imminent, the Slee seem driven as if by a dark and onrushing fate only they can see, and at the heart of it all, Blackalblade sits in a tense calm, mirroring the decadent fashions of Calimshan. Adventuring bands have begun to sidle into Blackalblade, and rumors are flying like storm-driven dragons. Recent news of the discovery of an extensive ancient underground tomb a-crawl with magically animated guardians on a southern Ondeeman sheep farm has everyone talking. Did the Mage-King found his realm here because of this great buried power—and possibly more magic that Ondeemans know nothing of? Fear can almost be smelled in Ondeeme as everyone awaits answers.

### BLACKALBLADE

Capital of Ondeeme, this walled city isn't much larger than a grand and sprawling castle, but assumes all the airs (complete with arcane laws, fast-cudgel guardsmen, and ridiculous fashions) of Calimport and other wealthy, decadent cities.

Blackalblade's prosperity began with the wool-trade. Its weavers were enriched by working for, and having their designs enhanced by, the mages and would-be mages (wastrel sons of rich Calishite merchants) that Ondeeme gathered around himself. After Ondeeme's disappearance, the weavers successfully attracted more sedentary wizards to Blackalblade with generous offers of free residence and special status under local laws. After a brief, ruthless power struggle, Blackalan merchants formed a ruling council of eight headed by three well-balanced rivals. They set about increasing Blackalblade's wealth and importance—only to cower into hiding at the return of the Slee (see Ondeeme).

Fine-forgers and jewelers came to Blackalblade because of plentiful gem supplies in the Raundawn Hills northwest of the city. The wily council hired famous gem cutters (including Ildyn Onsyphir of Athkatla and Urthe Crownshimmer of Baldur's Gate) to come to Blackalblade and live like kings in Sparkling Hall, the first formal school of gemcutting and jewelry-making. This establishment has acquired a reputation for haughtiness extreme even in Blackalblade, for the excellence of its stylish products (now adorning many a noble across Faerûn) and for the sadistic cruelty of its Masters to their pupils.

Borderers laugh at Blackalblade as a ridiculously pompous copy of the worst of larger, older cities. Visiting Borderers are careful not to show such feelings within the city's high-towered walls, because Blackalans have high prices, quick tempers, and harsh

laws (featuring floggings, confiscations of all goods, and exiles dragged down the cobbled streets to the nearest gate, bound on a rope pulled by a well-whipped horse).

Blackalans in turn sneer at "back-country hay-heads" who come visiting from less fortunate places for "a look at the good life." Blackalblade is one of the wealthiest cities in the Borders, and the place to buy odd, arcane, expensive, and fashionable things. Blackalan acquisitive hungers keep the nearby port of Thur busy.

The city is named for a notorious pirate, Kururn Blackalblade, who built the first (long-vanished) house on the site, and died in it after living one hundred and twenty-six winters.

### owlhold

Since the loss of Bloutar to the neighboring Barony of Blacksaddle, there's been nothing approaching even a hamlet in the little-known land of Owlhold. Almost as thickly wooded as the Qurth Forest it was once part of, Owlhold is a rolling, many-ridged land of hedges, vines, hanging moss, and ever-present shade. The air is damp, and nameless lanes twist and turn, leading the traveler astray. Tales are told of caravans swallowed and lost forever in the green, tangled heart of Owlhold—and at least two such tales are true: Bogs and brigands are the real perils of Owlhold.

The Owlmen are quiet folk who live with the land rather than endlessly striving to conquer it. They are adept at melting away from needless trouble. Many an aggressive band of outlanders has entered an Owlman home in search of food, shelter, or directions—only to find it deserted, snuffed candles still smoldering and back door standing open. The homesteaders haven't gone far; anyone foolish enough to pillage, vandalize, or set fires will taste swift, plentiful, and deadly arrows from the trees.

Elves, half-elves, and outlaws are plentiful in Owlhold—as are owls, who hunt small scurrying creatures that are locally very plentiful because Owlmen don't kill them to protect farm crops. "Farming" to Owlmen is gathering medicinal mosses and herbs, and berries for the making of throat-scorching wines, and selling the results to the few traders who venture into Owlhold.

Owlhold was once the heart of Oelerhode, a gnome kingdom that grew proud and foolish. Domed stone houses were built and rebuilt, rising ever higher above conical stone waymarkers and walled gardens. The Oeler gnomes pushed back the forest with almost as much vigor as they tunneled the earth after plentiful gems. Then orcs came, roaring south in an endless flood of blood-drenched blades and roaring cruelty. They swept over Oelerhode and left it a shattered, plundered open grave, abandoned to vultures and carrion-beasts. The forest swiftly reclaimed it, burying shattered domes and fallen waycones as it cloaked everything in green and growing things, obliterating proud gnome-work (and hiding cellars of Oeler riches) with seeming eagerness.

Brigand and adventurer intrusions stir Owlmen to call on the mightiest among them: outlawed adventurers, renegade wizards who dwell here in seclusion to study and experiment (often using roofless gnome granary-caverns as spell-hurling chambers), and undead (such as Ongolym Nlerreth, a lich who commands unique and mighty spells, flying golems, and a small airship; and Baeremyl Clathaderra, a watchghost<sup>Mon</sup> who owns nine magic swords

she likes to see used in battle and will lend to adventurers for use in a specific combat, animating all the blades to threaten anyone who fails to return a blade she has lent; magic rings and rods float inside her body, flickering and pulsing, and by some eldritch magic she can cause their powers to flow to her fingertips and mouth, to burst forth at her command).

Maps of the Border Kingdoms show the major roads crossing Owlhold, but these are wildly inaccurate. Owlhold is unknown territory; even most lifelong Owlmen have detailed knowledge of only a small area and the courses of a few streams and rivers (the trails one can't get lost on) as well.

The road between Oeble and Bloutar (known locally as the Green Road) skirts Owlhold proper, and it is readily and openly traveled. The perilous winding way on which travelers can too easily get lost is the Bowshot, linking the midpoint of the Green Road with Longcrag Ride, the route between Talduth Vale and Beldargan. Proper inns stand at both ends of the Bowshot, where it meets the other roads. At its north end is The Four Stags, a bustling place where Owlmen come to trade goods with passing merchants, hire companionship, and see all they desire of the wider world. Owlmen seeking to meet not outlanders but each other seek The Griffon Aflame, at the south end of the Bowshot.

## QURTH FOREST

More than a few adventurers and avid stag-hunters have ventured into the gloomy, unmapped depths of the second largest wood in the Borders, but fewer have emerged again. Qurth's duskwoods, oaks, and shadowtops guard secrets—and dangers—whispered of throughout the Borders.

Outlanders who try to find their own ways through Qurth often become lost; thus, the use of local guides is essential. Bloutarran guides do a brisk trade accompanying wise adventurers, hunters, and gleaners of rare woods into "Old Gloom." A certain Borderer suspicion is spreading that Bloutarrans put traps on the trails and allow certain monsters to flourish, feeding on an endless flood of stags disgorged so plentifully (by hidden deepspawn<sup>Mon</sup>) that every Bloutarran stag-hunt is a success. Bloutarran foresters trade in Qurth pelts, antlers, hide, and smoked forest beast meats year-round.

Qurth is old and thickly grown, its deep stands cloaking hills and deep gullies in an endless damp shade where fungi glow and flicker, unseen things watch and slither, and owlbears, furtive myconids, and aggressive wild boar lurk. Its outer verges are choked with trap-webs spun by many spiders, some led by ettercaps. In its seldom-seen depths, giant slugs roam at least one overgrown, abandoned keep and two lost cities. One of the ruined cities must be the once-proud Hawklyn, and the keep might be Starth Keep, where many gems cut by the fabled Starth family might lie strewn and long-forgotten under tree-roots.

## THE REALM OF THE MOUNT

The wooded ridges and uplands east of Jundarwood are dominated by an actively volcanic wooded ridge known as "the Mount," tightly patrolled highlands that have for years been one of the most secretive Border Kingdoms.

Though the highlands seem almost deserted wilderness—the only signs of habitation are a few muddy trails, small paddocks

of sheep and goats amid the trees, and the occasional log cabin elevated on timber cribs—intruders will be challenged by patrols who savagely attack everyone except Tomb Holders (landowners of the realm); traveling merchants who keep to certain camping-places, markets, and trails; or dwarves seeking to buy forging time. Intruders bearing magic items will be attacked with particular fury; those trying to parley for admittance will be surrounded by a ring of at least three patrols (the Realm can muster more than twenty) while an Overduke is summoned to decide their fate.

A Mount patrol consists of three dragonkin<sup>Mon</sup>: a Hawklar (leader) and two Sturklars. These officers magically command six gargoyles and two "deathwings" (undead winged owlbears animated by the Dread King), and are accompanied by one to four pixies as "eyes" to watch patrol encounters from afar, fleeing to summon other patrols if need be. Hawk-lars often carry flying snakes<sup>Rac</sup> in back-pouches, for unleashing in tough fights. If all dragonkin in a patrol perish, surviving gargoyles and deathwings are freed to attack all creatures nearby.

Thanks to its volcanism, the Realm of the Mount was nameless, monster-roamed wilderland shunned by elves (whose arrows kept away interested dwarves and gnomes). The wizard Xavander Relurvor of Ravens Bluff found it by chance in 1319 DR, when his kin were determined to retain the sizable portion of the Bluff's treasury that Xavander's older brother, Ormalin, had managed to embezzle.

Xavander saw that the Mount's hot rifts could swiftly melt easily traced trade-bars and coins into lumps of silver and gold from which he could mint replica coins of Amn and Calimshari to secure the family fortunes and pay for his own arcane schooling. So the Relurvors "died" in a house fire and from various diseases, slipping away south to their new kingdom. Ormalin and Xavander argued furiously over what this bright new realm should be like—until Ormalin somehow fell into a lava rift, his desires of castles, bustling cities, pomp, and worldwide importance dying with him.

## THE DREAD KING

Helemvo Relurvor (NE male. Damaran human wizard 17/archmage 2) is a small, balding, sour man with glittering black eyes. He often magically spies on, or into the mind of, anyone in his realm; his chief fears are of illithids or powerful wizards overthrowing him, and he'll move swiftly with poisons, "accidents," and massed patrol attacks to eliminate all such threats. The Dread King dislikes face-to-face combat or even confrontation, preferring to work obliquely or through underlings whenever possible. He's adept at vanishing when foes seek him; he magically transforms innocent humans into false duplicates of himself, to die in his place. Helemvo's magic also cloaks his true shape whenever he wants to romance ladies or see what Borderer life is really like. He spends most of his time scheming to acquire ever more magic and riches in ways that won't attract too much attention to the Mount's existence.



Xavander the Great ruthlessly established the realm as it is today: a seeming wilderness lacking towers, good roads, or even much cleared farmland, where secrets reign and everyone is part of a hierarchy. For fees, the Relurvors quietly sold suitable Ravenaar territory in “a hidden land,” to serve as a refuge. As troubled times beset Ravens Bluff, word spread of “The Land of Tombs” where loved ones could be laid to rest in pastoral beauty (the Relurvor cover story), and many Ravenaar settled in the Realm. One was a wizard more powerful than Xavander, who killed “the King of the Mount” when Xavander tried to swindle him.

Xavander’s son became Tholander the Mighty, First Lord-Emperor of the Mount. Tholander was a magnificent blustering giant of a man with great charisma, a mellifluous voice, and just enough wits to know he was hopeless at running anything or matching wits with anyone. He hired some of the nastiest Ravenaar and gave them wealth and titles (such as “Grand Duke Most Awesome Belborst of the Gilded Banners”), in return for ruling the Mount from behind the scenes and preparing Helemvo, his most promising son, for rule. They did—and that keen-witted, cruel lad rewarded them by poisoning them and most of his siblings when Tholander took to his deathbed. Upon his ascension, Helemvo the Peerless coldly and calmly set about improving the security of his kingdom.

First, “the Dread King” murdered several wealthy Tomb Holders. With their wealth he bought minor items of magic, and with these lured dragonkin to his service, using powerful spells to bind and empower them to command gargoyles and undead owlbears of his making. He set patrols of these minions to guarding the Mount, and made a handful of weak but shrewd underlings into “Overdukes of the Mount.” There are usually seven Overdukes; Helemvo elevates replacements whenever treachery or incompe-

tence force him to slaughter one. Recently he’s taken to ennobling increasingly beautiful and brainless human and half-elven women, so long as they agree to become his lovers. The Overdukes are served by Harcounts, who do any real work (fetching, delivering messages, signing documents, retrieving and keeping records) in addition to keeping watch on each Overduke for the Dread King. Most Overdukes and Harcounts cordially hate each other, and the Dread King often shuffles them into different pairings to prevent friendships from developing. The King usually has nine or so Harcounts and one or two Bannerlords (his personal messengers, who outrank Harcounts and Hawklers, but not Overdukes).

Helemvo’s kingdom is a storage cache for Ravenaar wealth (especially things its Tomb Holders don’t want publicly seen, such as stolen goods, kidnapped rivals, or family members hiding from justice or foes). Tomb Holders pay four to six thousand gold pieces annually, per “tomb” (storage cairn) they possess, toward the common guardianship of the realm. Mount cairns are usually covered with overgrowth to escape notice from afar. Their concealed tunnel entrances lead to a few rough living or storage rooms, and sometimes an emergency crawl-tunnel “back way” entrance. Every Holder is free to furnish and use their cairn however they see fit, establishing their own traps, staff, and guardians (golems, crawling claws, dread warriors, and monster skeletons are popular).

Local volcanism hasn’t included any recent eruptions, though “grumble-thunder” earth tremors are common. Visitors will notice that homes are elevated (caves and cellars are almost unknown), the air often stinks of sulfur, and in many hollows hot springs bubble or steaming vapors rise from fissures. (Locations of rifts suitable for melting or forging are kept secret.)

The Dread King maintains firm personal control over “the Way of Screaming Swords,” the one-user-at-a-time *portal* link between the Realm of the Mount and Ravens Bluff.

The Mount end is at Hool, in the Founder’s (Xavander’s) ruined mansion, and functions automatically, transporting any creature stepping on a particular stone. The ruin is crowded with stone golems and other constructs that obey the Dread King; unless activated, they look like broken stone pillars or heaps of stone. Five large, floating disembodied eyes (human-seeming, but as large as wagons) fly about the ruins, gazing and moving wherever Helemvo directs and transmitting what they see to him. They can emit spells he casts into them from afar.

In Ravens Bluff, the Way opens into a back alley behind a disused, rotting rooming house in Bitterstone in the Harbor District. Its precise location is the second (when moving north) diamond-shaped flagstone amid the weeds and rubble, in the lee of an old coaching shed; it functions only for beings standing on this stone while saying “All Praise Xavander.”

## The screaming swords

Magic cast on either *portal* terminus will cause it to emit four sword-shaped “flying needles” of magical force (and this will also occur if any individual Helemvo has previously touched and designated a “foe” approaches within 120 feet of either portal). These flying needles give off a pale white glow, swoop with great alacrity (fly 80 ft. [good]), strike once per round with an attack bonus of +12 (melee touch, 2d4 damage); they “fade away” the moment they have struck the same target twice or if there is no longer a foe within 120 feet of the *portal* that spawned them. Anyone trying to grapple a blade takes damage as if successfully attacked by the blade, as it passes “through” them and retains its freedom.

These flying blades are known as “screaming swords” for the high-pitched wailing sound they generate. Their attacks affect only flesh and life force, not clothing, armor, or items, and any foe ducking through the *portal* to escape them will suffer two automatic full-damage screaming sword attacks in the instant of traversing the Way. (The Way will successfully detect designated foes even if shapechanged or disguised.)

## The realm of the ready sword

Lying like a long, meandering swordbelt along the southern edge of the dense forest of Duskwood, this kingdom is one of the most lawless and chaotic territories anywhere in Faerûn. Ruled in name only by Harlakh Doroaver, “the King of Swords,” the Realm is home to brigands, misfits, and monsters of all sorts.

Harlakh Doroaver (CN male Halruaan human fighter 18, Str 18) is a cunning, battle-wise mercenary veteran. A huge man of

## THE BORDER KINGDOMS

bulging muscles, raven-black hair, and a much-scarred face—and seldom found out of his saddle or armor—Harlakh lives to fight, defend, command, and anticipate, leaving family life and farming to others. (He's unwed, but numerous lady "friends" across the realm would rather die than betray him—not that he ever meets them unprepared for betrayal.) Harlakh's shrewd forethought and strategies have kept his diverse subjects from slaughtering each other and made his kingdom safe enough that caravans have continued to use it as a preferred fast route between the Shining Sea and the Golden Road.

Harlakh is blunt and has no time for anger or tears; he keeps his wits clear at all times and has a keen interest in learning new things and hearing news, never trusting any one source at face value. (He often dines at an inn, keeping as unseen as possible, to overhear travelers' unguarded chatter.)

Harlakh watches over his subjects as if they were his children, each one precious, and as a result is either loved or respected by every Ready Swordsman. Yet his rule extends reliably only as far as the swordpoints of his bodyguards, the Crown Blades (sixty-odd mounted, armored knights with much experience in dirty tricks and stealthy fighting). The King has no "royal castle," but maintains homes at either end of the realm (The Keep of the Crows in the west, and Aldersund in the east) and one near its midpoint (Graaltower). Like almost all other dwellings in the realm, they are small, defensible stone fortresses.

The Realm of the Ready Sword is a long, pleasant valley between the cliffs that form the edge of the high plateau of the Shaar on the south and Duskwood to the north. It's always been enriched by caravans traversing the region—and has always

suffered fierce raids from the nomads of the Shaar. This strife gave the realm its name and winnowed its folk to the hardy few willing and able to defend themselves: semiretired mercenaries and outlaws, particularly orcs, half-orcs, ettin, hobgoblins, gnolls, fiend, wemics<sup>Mon</sup>, mongrelmen, and others not welcome elsewhere. Ready Swords are always ready for war.

The realm holds no cities or towns, but has many small streams and ponds, a few caves and simple stone cottages (most are abandoned, and were built with sod roofs and dug into hillsides for concealment; now overgrown, they can be difficult to spot) and many small, fortified keeps. These homes lack low windows or doors (ladders are often required for access, with portcullis-gates guarding wagon- or horse-entrances). Most have turrets, and all have stone walls enclosing a garden or orchard, a stone smokehouse or barn, and a stable (often with guest rooms above the stalls). All of these little fortresses are built over wells, most are home to several families, and a few function as inns.

"Upland" from the road are secretive dells outlanders seldom see, winding trails leading to quarries, woodcutting groves, and granary-caverns, where the fiery drink called "smokewine" is made and boar herds are slaughtered and smoked. Travelers are warned that many deadly traps surround the boar fields because most raids from the Shaar head straight for them.

Not a month passes in the Borders without a realm falling and another rising, and adventurers, ambitious priests, war-leaders, and agents of greedy neighboring lands are often the causes. Fortunes are made almost as often as lives are lost, and the lure of "the Land of Adventurers" never fails.

Illustration by Daarken



*Harlakh Doroaver, the King of Swords*

# HOW TO RULE

In Faerûn, kingdoms rise and fall as regularly as the sun, and today's king is just as likely to be tomorrow's brigand as to still sit astride his throne. In other words, a would-be ruler must fight every day to keep his "crown" (literal or figurative) just as hard as he (or his forebears) fought to earn it in the first place. The same truism holds for other "ruled communities," including armies, religious faiths, frontier regions, marketplaces, and trade routes.

Ruled communities usually overlap and rarely have a single sovereign. For example, Waterdeep, the City of Splendors, is ruled in the "court" and "army" sense of the word by the Lords of Waterdeep. The guilds and the noble families collectively rule the market. Multiple trade routes pass through the City of Splendors, each dominated by a different set of trading costers and noble families. The churches of Lathander, Oghma, Selûne, Shar, Sune, and Tyr, to name just a few, all have strong bases of power in the city, but "rulership" of those faiths is not concentrated in the city per se.

Regardless of the arena, all rulers have certain characteristics in common. First, a ruler must have "subjects," defined as persons who look to the ruler for leadership, grant the ruler some measure of authority over their lives, and look to the ruler to defend them from outside threats. Second, a ruler must be able to influence multiple organizations and arbitrate between them. For example, if the head of a city's thieves' guild is simply a guildmaster who runs an organization, then he does not truly rule. However, if that same guildmaster has high-ranking agents among the local courtiers (allowing him to blackmail the local lord) and merchants (allowing him to exact a tax—protection money—from every transaction in the local market), then he can be said to truly "rule."

There are two ways to handle the concept of "rulership" in a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, and wide range of intermediate

approaches in between. On the one hand, "rulership" can be thought of as a purely role-playing element of the campaign, the inevitable result of characters gaining power, influence, and positions of responsibility as a result of their actions and interactions. On the other hand, "rulership" can be thought of as a mantle to be earned and advanced, not unlike experience points and character levels.

The preceding chapters lay out the challenges and rewards of rulership that apply to both styles of play. This chapter outlines some new mechanics for those who prefer the latter style of play through an expansion of the Leadership feat and the addition of the Influence modifier.

## Leadership

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* details the Leadership feat, which gives powerful characters the ability to attract loyal companions and devoted followers. A cohort is effectively a "right hand man," while followers are effectively subordinates that you rule, so the Leadership feat can be seen as a proxy for sovereignty. A character's base Leadership score is calculated as the sum of the character's level plus any Charisma modifier, but that base Leadership score cannot exceed 25 unless the character has the Epic Leadership<sup>EL</sup> feat.

The level of the cohort and the number of followers by level is determined by the character's effective Leadership score, calculated as the sum of the base Leadership score plus any applicable modifiers:

- Reputation modifiers (such as having great renown or being known for fairness and generosity) applies in all cases; see page 106 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.
- Influence modifier applies unless attempting to recruit a specific individual as a cohort or follower when that individual is not a member of an organization in which you have influence; see below.
- Community-specific modifiers, as described in the preceding chapters, apply in specific communities, such as a religious faith or marketplace.

- Cohort modifiers (such as having a familiar or recruiting a cohort of a different alignment) apply only when dealing with a cohort; see page 106 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.
- Follower modifiers (such as having a stronghold or base of operations) apply only when dealing with followers; see page 106 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Note that this makes it possible for a character's effective Leadership score to be very different for his cohorts, his followers, and those occasions where he is recruiting from outside his sphere of influence. The effective Leadership scores of characters described in previous chapters include the character's Influence modifier, but not cohort- or follower-specific modifiers.

Example: Vaerdin has a base Leadership score of 23 (18th-level paladin, Cha 20), the rank of bishop (+2 within religious community), an Influence modifier of +2 (sphere of influence: the church of Tyr and the city watch), a special mount (-2, cohort only), and a stronghold (+2, followers only). Vaerdin's effective Leadership score for followers outside the religious community is 27 (23 + 2 influence + 2 stronghold), allowing up to 190 1st-level followers, 19 2nd-level followers, and so on. For followers within the religious community, Vaerdin's effective Leadership score is 29 (23 + 2 community + 2 influence + 2

stronghold), allowing a total of 260 1st-level followers, 26 2nd-level followers, and so on. These extra followers must be recruited from within the religious community (i.e. the church of Tyr); thus, he might have 190 nonchurch followers and 70 church followers, no nonchurch followers and 260 church followers, or any combination in between. When Vaerdin makes a Leadership check to recruit a specific individual as a follower (see below), his effective Leadership score is only 25 (23 + 2 stronghold) for individuals not currently in Vaerdin's sphere of influence, 27 for individuals in the city watch, and 29 for individuals in the church of Tyr. Finally, if recruiting a cohort from within the church, his effective Leadership is 25 (23 + 2 + 2 - 2), allowing a cohort of up to 17th level, but a cohort recruited from outside the church and city watch (effective Leadership of 21) could be no more than 15th level at the time he is recruited (but up to 16th level, effective Leadership of 23, once recruited and thus entering Vaerdin's sphere of influence).

Characters with an effective Leadership score of 10 or more meet some of the criteria for rulership in that they can attract followers who look to the character for leadership, grant the character some authority over their lives, and expect the character to defend them. As noted above, a character's base Leadership score cannot exceed 25 unless that character has the Epic Leadership feat; however, in a slight variant from the core rules, this

TABLE 9-I: EPIC LEADERSHIP

Leadership Score	Cohort Level	Number of Followers by Level									
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
25	17th	135	13	7	4	2	2	1	—	—	—
26	18th	160	16	8	4	2	2	1	—	—	—
27	18th	190	19	10	5	3	2	1	—	—	—
28	19th	220	22	11	6	3	2	1	—	—	—
29	19th	260	26	13	7	4	2	1	—	—	—
30	20th	300	30	15	8	4	2	1	—	—	—
31	20th	350	35	18	9	5	3	2	1	—	—
32	21st	400	40	20	10	5	3	2	1	—	—
33	21st	460	46	23	12	6	3	2	1	—	—
34	22nd	520	52	26	13	6	3	2	1	—	—
35	22nd	590	59	30	15	8	4	2	1	—	—
36	23rd	660	66	33	17	9	5	3	2	1	—
37	23rd	740	74	37	19	10	5	3	2	1	—
38	24th	820	82	41	21	11	6	3	2	1	—
39	24th	910	91	46	23	12	6	3	2	1	—
40	25th	1,000	100	50	25	13	7	4	2	1	—
per +1	+1/2*	+100**	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Leadership Score:** A character's Leadership score equals his level plus any Charisma modifier. Outside factors can affect a character's Leadership score, as detailed in Table 2-26: Leadership Modifiers in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

**Cohort Level:** The character can attract a cohort of up to this level. Regardless of the character's Leadership score, he can't recruit a cohort of his level or higher.

**Number of Followers by Level:** The character can lead up to the indicated number of characters of each level. For example, a character with a Leadership score of 31 can lead up to 350 1st-level followers, 35 2nd-level followers, and so on.

\*Your maximum cohort level increases by 1 for every 2 points of Leadership above 40.

\*\*Your number of 1st-level followers increases by 100 for every point of Leadership above 40.

†You can command one-tenth as many 2nd-level followers as 1st-level followers. You can command one-half as many 3rd-level followers as 2nd-level followers, one-half as many 4th-level followers as 3rd-level followers, and so on (round fractions up, except any fraction less than 1 rounds to 0). You can't have a follower of higher than 20th level.

book assumes that the character's effective Leadership score is unlimited.

The Epic Leadership feat, from *Epic Level Handbook*, is reprinted here along with the table from that source that gives information about cohorts and followers for characters with Leadership scores of 25 or higher.

## Leadership checks

The Leadership feat deals with attracting new cohorts and followers, but leaves vague the manner in which cohorts and followers are won and lost. Penalties for attracting a character with a different alignment are given, but nothing is said of the challenge of recruiting a cohort or followers from another organization. These issues are dealt with by means of a new mechanic, the Leadership check.

A Leadership check is required whenever you wish to attract a new cohort or follower or whenever your actions might drive a cohort or follower away. (For example, if you change sides in a civil war or struggle between power groups within a court, to decide which royal heir to put on a throne left vacant by the death of a ruler—or if you've professed to defend a city or temple but now astonish your cohort or follower by revealing that you're going to loot it.) A Leadership check requires you to meet or exceed the required DC by rolling 1d20 and adding your Leadership score with respect to your cohort and/or followers.

## Attracting cohorts and followers

Leadership checks come into play whenever you try to attract a specific NPC as a cohort or follower. In other words, an effective Leadership score of 10 guarantees you a cohort of 7th level and five 1st-level followers, but it does not guarantee who they are specifically. The default is to assume that they are cut from the same cloth as you, conforming as closely as possible to your economic and social class and your religious faith and vocation and therefore contribute little to your ability to influence others.

If you wish to build your influence by recruiting a cohort or follower from specific organization, see Table 9–2.

TABLE 9–2: DCs FOR ATTRACTING SPECIFIC COHORTS AND FOLLOWERS

You want to attract a cohort or follower . . .	Leadership DC
In an organization for which you have the Guildmaster <sup>DM2</sup> feat.	10
In an organization for which you have the Favored in Guild <sup>DM2</sup> feat.	15
In an organization of which you are a member.	20
In an organization of which you are not a member.	25
Who is hostile or unfriendly.	Impossible*

\*It is permitted to try to influence potential cohorts or followers with a successful Diplomacy check before making the Leadership check.

Certain modifiers apply to the Leadership DC for attracting new cohorts and followers, as outlined in Table 9–3. Note that in all cases you cannot recruit a cohort or follower of a level beyond that permitted by your effective Leadership score.

In general, it takes 1 day per level of the NPC to attract a cohort or follower. This is time that cannot be spent in other pursuits, such as adventuring, fabricating a magic item, or doing spell research. It is assumed that this time is spent making inquiries, doing background research on the prospective target, and negotiating the terms of service. Role-playing this interaction is encouraged.

As noted above, if the effective Leadership score includes any positive community modifiers and/or influence modifiers, then the additional followers (or higher level cohort) enabled by the community modifiers must be drawn from that specific community and/or sphere of influence. For example, if a cleric of Lathander receives a +4 modifier to his Leadership score because of his status as an archbishop of the faith, then all additional followers resulting from that modifier must be followers of the Morninglord.

## Losing cohorts and followers

Certain activities challenge your effectiveness as a ruler. These include ordering battlefield tactics that take your force into disastrous defeat and/or great loss of life; suddenly abandoning code of conduct, principles, quests, or tasks you've spent much time and trouble pursuing (especially if this has cost your cohort and followers much time, money, and involved wounding them or endangering their lives); repeatedly making stupid mistakes or forgetting things that imperil the safety of your forces or the success of their missions (forgetting the princess you rode to rescue in favor of scooping up gold or swording particular foes leads your cohort and followers to seriously doubt either your sincerity or your sanity); and ordering your cohort or followers into certain death on apparent whims or with a callous disregard for the worth of their lives ("You! Attack yon army—no, just you! Now! While they're butchering you, the rest of us can sneak away . . .").

In such instances, you must make a DC 25 Leadership check for each cohort or follower. If you succeed on this Leadership check, that cohort or follower continues to follow your lead. If you fail this Leadership check, that cohort or follower ceases to be considered as such. If you have a very large number of followers, instead make a single DC 35 Leadership check, and you

### epic leadership [epic]

You attract more powerful cohorts and followers than normally possible.

**Prerequisites:** Cha 25, Leadership, Leadership score 25.

**Benefit:** You attract a cohort and followers as shown on the accompanying table.

**Normal:** Without this feat, you must use Table 2–25: Leadership (page 106 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) to determine your cohort and followers.

TABLE 9—3: MODIFIERS FOR ATTRACTING COHORTS AND FOLLOWERS

Situation/Condition	Leadership DC Modifier
Specific individual who is helpful	-5
Specific individual who is friendly	-10
Specific individual who is in a position of influence within an organization	+5
Specific individual who is in a position of leadership within an organization	+10
Specific individual you previously lost as a cohort or follower	+5
In the same organization	+0
In an allied organization	+5
In a neutral organization	+10
In a rival organization	+15
In a hostile organization	+20
You are believed to abuse your authority (if you are the long arm of the law)	+5
You are believed to be a coward (if you are a military leader); this modifier can be removed by a public demonstration of valor	+10
You are believed to be a deal-breaker (if you are an economic leader)	+5
You are believed to be a heretic (if you are a spiritual leader); this modifier can be removed by a successful <i>atonement</i>	+10
You are believed to be a traitor to your espoused cause (if you are a temporal leader); this modifier can be removed by a public pardon or declaration of innocence by a recognized court of law	+10
You are believed to be indecisive (if you are a frontier leader)	+5

lose 5% of your followers of each level (round down) for every point by which you fail the check. (The specific followers lost are randomly determined by the DM, and he can always call for an individual Leadership check against DC 25 for specific followers such as those few who are highest in level or in the most critical positions of influence.) If you have different effective Leadership scores for different groups of followers (e.g. some are subject to a community modifier but others aren't), make a separate Leadership check for each of these groups.

TABLE 9—4: MODIFIERS FOR LOSING COHORTS AND FOLLOWERS

Situation/Condition	Leadership DC Modifier
Cohort	-5
Abuse of your authority (if you are the long arm of the law)	+5
Cowardly act (if you are military leader)	+5
Breaking a deal (if you are an economic leader)	+5
Act of heresy (if you are a spiritual leader)	+5
Traitorous act (if you are a temporal leader)	+5
Indecision (if you are a frontier leader)	+5

If you fail, that does not mean they immediately abandon you in the middle of a fight, but they do become “free-willed” NPCs whose attitude immediately shifts to indifferent or worse, depending on the situation. It might be possible to reattract such followers, or you can attract a new cohort or new followers over time to replace them, but energy expended to place those who follow your lead in positions of influence is lost, at least temporarily, and your base Influence modifier is correspondingly reduced (see previous column).

Typical situations in which a Leadership check is required to avoid the loss of cohorts or followers are detailed under the different categories of rulership in preceding chapters. In general, a Leadership check is required whenever your Influence modifier (not your base Influence modifier) is reduced, whenever you fail to defend your cohort or followers from an “attack” (literal or figurative), whenever your leadership is challenged by a rival, whenever your cohort dies, or whenever 10% or more of your followers die within a 24 hour period.

## influence

On its face, the act of ruling is telling others how to behave or think. The reason such orders or suggestions are obeyed or followed is because the ruler has a large amount of influence with his subject. At its core, exerting influence is a role-playing outcome you achieve through successful interaction with other characters. However, the exertion of influence can also be seen as the employment of a set of skills that allow you to affect the behaviors and thoughts of those around you.

A character's Influence modifier is a game mechanic approximating his ability to rule. Only characters with the Leadership or Epic Leadership feat and a base Leadership score of 10 or higher have an Influence modifier.

At its heart, the Influence modifier provides a circumstance bonus to core set of social interaction skills—including Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Perform, and Sense Motive—as well as bardic music and Charisma checks. A character's Influence modifier applies to Knowledge checks if the relaying of the knowledge is an act of rulership. For example, a spiritual leader might apply his Influence modifier to a Knowledge (religion) check if the check was intended to recall a piece of scripture that added to his authority. There might be other checks for which

TABLE 9-5: BASE INFLUENCE MODIFIER CALCULATION

Situation/Condition	Base Influence Modifier
Per cohort level	+1
Per follower level	+1
Per follower by proxy (regardless of level)	+1
Per organization with a follower or cohort in a position of influence <sup>1</sup> within an organization	+5
Per additional follower or cohort in a position of influence <sup>1</sup> within the same organization	+1
Per organization with a follower or cohort in a position of leadership <sup>2</sup> within an organization	+10
Per additional follower or cohort in a position of leadership <sup>2</sup> within the same organization	+2
Per organization with a follower by proxy in a position of influence or leadership	+1
Per significant, public victory	+10
Per significant, public defeat	-10

1 "Position of influence" is determined by the DM, but a good example would be a character with the Favored in Guild<sup>DM2</sup> feat.

2 "Position of leadership" is determined by the DM, but a good example would be a character with the Guildmaster<sup>DM2</sup> feat.

the Dungeon Master determines that the Influence modifier is applicable as well.

A character's Influence modifier is applied only when the character has influence over the target. A character is considered to have influence if the target is a cohort, a follower, a member of an organization or social group in which the character is a member or has one or more cohorts, followers, or followers by proxy. (If a cohort or follower has cohorts or followers, they are considered followers by proxy.)

Table 9-5 indicates how to calculate a character's base Influence modifier. The actual Influence modifier is calculated by dividing the base Influence modifier by 200 and rounding down. A significant, public victory is a widely known success that significantly advances your goals or agenda. Likewise, a significant, public defeat is a widely known defeat that significantly impedes your goals or agenda. The DM determines what constitutes such an event on a case-by-case basis.

## Rulership as its own Reward

Advancing in the rulership arena requires first and foremost a great deal of roleplaying. However, it is also possible to advance in the rulership arena using the game mechanics of the effective Leadership score and the Influence modifier and the positive feedback loop that exists between them.

The community-specific modifiers to the Leadership feat presented in preceding chapters can be viewed as a series of goals. For example, you can boost your effective Leadership score within a religious community by recovering a faith-specific relic. If you are branded a heretic, you risk a significant reduction in your Leadership score, but you might also gain a significant boost to your Leadership score.

If you increase your Leadership score, you can acquire new followers. If you "stretch" by seeking out followers in positions that extend your influence (which entails a higher DC for your Leadership check), you can improve your base Influence modifier (and hence your Influence modifier over time). Raising your Influence modifier also raises your Leadership score, allowing you to obtain additional followers—and so on.

Likewise, when you suffer setbacks, they can set off a negative feedback loop that reduces your ability to rule. If you fail a Leadership check, you lose a cohort or followers. The loss of a cohort or followers might reduce your Influence modifier. A reduction in your Influence modifier precipitates another Leadership check—and so on. Of course, this same negative feedback loop can be used to your advantage if you can manage to deliberately engender Leadership checks for your rivals in a bid to reduce their ability to rule. In other words, the negative community-specific modifiers to the Leadership feat presented can be viewed as goals by those seeking to undermine a ruler.

Note that loss of your ability to rule doesn't necessarily mean you become shunned, outcast, or powerless. Many a bandit lord or unsuccessful throne claimant has fled into hiding, only to be "lionized in legend" by folk nostalgic for the days when she "might have been queen." Tall-tale-tellers all tend to exaggerate both the good and bad traits of such a legendary person.

### Born Leaders

Certain individuals have an inherent facility to rule due to their position in society. This inherent facility can be represented by the Rulership feat.

#### NEW FEAT: RULERSHIP

You are a ruler of an economic, frontier, governmental, military, religious, transport, or other community.

**Prerequisites:** Leadership or Epic Leadership, effective Leadership score of 10 or more.

**Benefits:** You gain a +4 bonus to your base Leadership score.

You gain a +100 bonus to your base Influence modifier.

As a ruler, you have some degree of authority over members of organizations in which you have followers. Once per day you can exchange a follower you gained from your Leadership feat for a different follower from the same organization. The DM determines the actual pool of followers available to you.

## POWER OF FAERÛN ERRATA

### PAGE 108: TABLE 6–1: THE HERALD HIT DIE: D4

Level	Base	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	0	Spellcasting					
	Attack Bonus						Save	Save	Save	1st	2nd	3rd
1st	+0	+0	+1	+2	Secret	2	0	—	—	—	—	—
2nd	+1	+0	+2	+3	Lore, mindsee	3	1	—	—	—	—	—
3rd	+1	+1	+2	+3	Bonus language	3	1	0	—	—	—	—
4th	+2	+1	+3	+4	Secret	3	2	1	—	—	—	—
5th	+2	+1	+3	+4	Bonus language	4	2	1	0	—	—	—
6th	+3	+2	+4	+5	Secret	4	3	2	1	—	—	—
7th	+3	+2	+4	+5	Greater lore	4	3	2	1	0	—	—
8th	+4	+2	+5	+6	Bonus language	5	3	3	2	1	—	—
9th	+4	+3	+5	+6	Bonus feat	5	4	3	2	1	0	—
10th	+5	+3	+6	+7	Skill mastery	5	4	3	3	2	1	—
11th	+5	+3	+6	+7	True lore	6	4	4	3	2	1	0
12th	+6	+4	+7	+8	Spell resistance	6	4	4	3	3	2	1

**Class Skills (4 + Int modifier per level):** Bluff, Concentration, Decipher Script, Diplomacy, Forgery, Gather Information, Intimidate, Knowledge (any), Listen, Perform, Sense Motive, Speak Language, Spot, Use Magic Device.



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