

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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Lord Mantlepard's Homecoming

By Ed Greenwood

*How and where and when did the **Forgotten Realms** start? What's at the heart of Ed Greenwood's creation, and how does the Grand Master of the Realms use his own world when he runs **D&D** adventures for the players in his campaign? "Forging the Forgotten Realms" is a weekly feature wherein Ed answers all those questions and more.*

layers in the home Realms campaign are used to what I dubbed the "current clack" almost fifty years ago, now: a constant stream of news and rumors making the rounds of taverns, eateries, and shops due to caravans and traveling merchants. This passing lore helps keep the Realms feeling alive to players, feeds them all sorts of little bits and pieces of information, opinions, and falsehoods they can use in play ahead, and can even spur adventures.

Here's one of the wilder recent examples of current clack . . .

Word recently spread like fish-stink on a harbor breeze through the shops, hovels, high houses, and palace backrooms of Suzail: Lord Mantlepard has been murdered in Sembia! Speculation says he was done in by his wife and daughter, who were smuggling his body back home to the family crypt in a cart, hidden under lannath-lilies for their city mansion garden!

More than that, actual duels were fought for possession of his body, with one of the duels happening between the unfortunate lord's daughter, Ileireya, and a would-be corpse-snatching Sembian self-styled nobleman, the foul and sinister necromancer Ezegult Lareer of Selgaunt (the one who sometimes calls himself "Lord Skulis")! And when Purple Dragons intercepted the racing Mantlepard coach after it burst through a border post and into Cormyr, they found Lord Mantlepard's body had been bound hand and foot, and buried under a heap of earth that filled the conveyance right up to its seats—and that the nobleman was stuffed full of stolen rubies!

Rumor has a way of nigh-always swiftly and wildly embellishing even the simplest and clearest news, but in this case it's had very little embellishing to do, as the truths are wild and florid enough.

Let us assume some days have passed, nothing has been heard from the palace or elsewhere of the fates of the Ladies Mantlepard, and all of the usual rumors (The Wizards of War have mind-reamed the entire family, and their heads exploded! No, no, they were all revealed to be doppelgangers, and died fighting the War Wizards as they tried to escape! And so on . . .) have climbed aboard the bandwagon, flourished for a few nights, and then died down for lack of fresh revelations.

Let us further assume that the adventurers are loitering in Suzail enjoying a little leisure time. Boredom has just begun to sidle into their minds—or the minds of their players—and that said players are intrigued by what they heard of the unfortunate Lord Mantlepard's posthumous journey—or was he buried alive, and died horribly as the coach rumbled along? Not only do they want to know more, but they also have their characters go and hand over a few coins and stand some drinks and interview a few palace officials or guards so that they can personally find out more.

This is what will emerge, slowly and bit by bit.

Lord Jarlathin Mantlepard died of heartstop during some late-night revelry at an exclusive club in Yhaunn. It's an expensive establishment known as The Spouting SeaLyon that's actually a luxurious mansion patronized almost exclusively by Sembian and visiting nobility. It's notable for its indoor bathing pools linked by waterslides and for its beautiful and warmly welcoming female staff. The Lyon is owned and run by one Markalus Lyon, a stout and cat-purring successful local merchant proud of his extensive wine cellar and the waxed and perfumed mustaches that curl around so that the tips almost meet, above his nose.

The nature of both the revelry and usual activities at the club are seldom shared with the public, but it's clear that

Mantlepard's last evening alive was spent consuming much expensive wine in the company of beautiful and local "delicate-cloak ladies."

The staff couldn't conceal the lord's demise from his wife and daughter, who'd accompanied Mantlepard on his month-long visit to Sembia, because his wife was also in attendance at the Lyon. The Lady Dethelle Mantlepard is a petite woman much younger than Mantlepard, who was his third wife and an accomplished actress in her personal life, not to mention the quick-witted and calculating business head of House Mantlepard.

Upset but grimly controlling herself, Lady Dethelle sent for the daughter, the Lady lleireya ("III-EAR-ee-yah"), who was enjoying "Two Masked Dalliances and a Misunderstanding," a popular new minstrels' musical play, at another club, The Lace Harp, nearby. The two ladies had the body hastily removed to a city temple—which one isn't yet known—where priests confirmed Lord Mantlepard's demise. The body was then put in the Mantlepard coach and driven away personally by the grieving Ladies Mantlepard.

They apparently returned to their rental lodgings only briefly to pack and make certain preparations, before setting out in the dead of night to make the long and—they intended—uninterrupted journey back to Cormyr (where the Mantlepard have a sprawling country estate south of Monksblade, as well as a modest house in Marsember and a grand house in Suzail).

It seems their intent was to smuggle Lord Mantlepard's remains to the country seat, so as to keep his death a secret in Cormyr for long enough to shift some of his portable wealth elsewhere before Lord Mantlepard's son and heir, Lord Graer Mantlepard, found out about his father's passing.

Lord Graer, a lifelong military man who is currently a constal in the Purple Dragons, stationed at High Horn, is known as a humorless, ruthless stickler for rules, etiquette and propriety. He is the deceased Lord Mantlepard's son by his first wife, Yimgraetha, dead these twenty years, and he has little love for either his stepmother or his sister lleireya. They see little of each other, their meetings are curt at best, and they agree on very little; most Court officials believe the lives of both Ladies Mantlepard will be grim and penurious from the moment Lord Graer is in full possession of House Mantlepard. (The second wife of Lord Jarlathin Mantlepard, Darndrella, a Horncastle by birth, left him and Cormyr abruptly some seventeen years back, for a life with llreth Rondever, a wealthy young Athkatlan man of stupendous wealth and great good looks. Mantlepard then successfully petitioned the Dragon Throne to have the marriage dissolved, by royal decree.)

As is often the way in matters of deceit embarked upon precipitously, complications arose.

It seems Lady Dethelle Mantlepard is a skillful thief, and she had purloined a lot of gems from various city jewelers while in Yhaunn. She hit upon the notion of getting them back to Cormyr undiscovered by feeding them to her dead husband, literally stuffing them down his throat.

Not knowing how to hide the body and keep it from rotting during the heat and dust of the daylight hours of the high summer journey, the two Ladies Mantlepard stopped the coach in the countryside west of Yhaunn, did some digging in the darkness, and literally buried their dead lord under a heap of earth that—as reported in the rumors—filled the coach up to the level of its seats, for Lord Mantlepard was a "robust" (a polite term for fat and big-boned) man.

When the fleeing nobles later stopped at Waygate (a roadside hamlet just east of Selgaunt) for fresh horses, they purchased lannath-lilies at The Proud Fist of Flowers (the shop of Tazandra Methmaer) and planted the tall, strikingly orange-to-pink, and very expensive flowers in a row atop Lord Mantlepard's heap of earth.

As they were caught in heavy traffic in the streets of Selgaunt, a passing water-carter in Selgaunt helpfully watered their purchases with his delivery-hose, half in jest, through the coach window—and in doing so uncovered enough of Lord Mantlepard's body to be shocked.

The carter reported what he'd found to local lawkeepers, who pursued the coach through the city streets until a desperate Lady Dethelle whipped the horses through a handy open gate—that helpfully closed right behind the coach. It happened to be a grand entryway no sane Selgauntan will enter: the arch permitting access to the walled city mansion of Lord Lareer (a crazed-wits recluse and necromancer who prefers to be called Lord Skulls).

Lord Ezegult Lareer welcomed the Cormyrean noblewomen as guests and insisted they stay to supper. They reluctantly agreed, but courtesies ended abruptly when Lareer's stablemaster discovered the body in the coach, and Lareer tried to take possession of it. A coldly polite dispute ensued, escalating into Lady lleireya challenging Lord Lareer to a sword-duel for possession of her father's body.

To his surprise, but not her own, she won the duel and so kept her father's remains from becoming one of Lord Lareer's experimental undead—but he declared himself smitten by her and swore to "pursue her and claim her

hand, some day soon."

He then sent his undead out through his gates to attack and distract the constables of Selgaunt, allowing the Mantlepard coach to escape and resume the flight to Cormyr (for Selgaunt's gates now stand open day and night, that trade not suffer).

That duel fought by Lady lleireya may have been good preparation for what she had to do just before the coach reached the border with Cormyr—fight another duel, this time against a would-be highwayman on the road, who tried to seize the coach before it reached the border post.

The brigand paid for his contemptuous gallantry with his life, falling to the lady's blade, but other brigands riding with him tried to seize the coach regardless. The Ladies Mantlepard whipped up their exhausted horses amid wild swordplay, and fled headlong—right through the border post.

The Purple Dragons on duty there turned back the brigands, then chased and intercepted the racing Mantlepard coach. They found Lord Mantlepard's body under the lilies and the dirt, and further discovered that the corpse was bound hand and foot—something the Ladies Mantlepard claimed had been done by the necromancer before they could stop him.

These discoveries caused the post commander (Lionar Abdrin Baelbrook) to detain the Ladies Mantlepard for the suspected murder of a lord of Cormyr—and when rubies were seen to spill out of the body when it was lifted from the coach, Baelbrook requested the spell-assistance of a duty War Wizard to interrogate the Ladies Mantlepard.

As it befell, by the humor of the gods, that wizard (one Jestrel Halroaltaen) proved to be a childhood friend and lifelong admirer of Lady lleireya, who sternly took both ladies into custody—and promptly vanished, with them.

And at that, word started to spread across Cormyr—small wonder, given the generous array of wild adventure and farcical mischance involved in the unfolding tale.

It's tempting to assert that you can't make up such far-fetched tales, but quite obviously you can.

Moreover, what may seem ridiculous when laid out in print may seem very different when you're caught up in the unfolding midst of it.

What is pure gold for this old DM is watching the unfolding fun as adventurers try to derive some adventure and some financial reward from learning all of this.

Right now, bounty hunters hired by Lord Graer Mantlepard are hunting the adventurers with murderous intent; a person or persons unknown has stolen some of the gems from the body when it was in Purple Dragon custody; the body of Lord Jarlathin Mantlepard itself has subsequently vanished from Purple Dragon custody; War Wizards are investigating both thefts and the duty War Wizard at the border post, who has vanished; both Ladies Mantlepard have gone into hiding, after first loudly declaring that Lord Jarlathin Mantlepard lives and therefore Lord Graer has no right nor authority to make any decisions or dispositions regarding House Mantlepard; other sinister hirelings of Lord Graer are hunting both Ladies Mantlepard; and according to palace gossip that's now raging through every corner and back alley of Suzail, several Highknights are apparently "secretly" investigating everyone involved in this matter.

It remains to be seen how it will all turn out, but in the meantime, the adventurers are about to walk smack into some real adventure.

You know, the sort that features dungeons . . . and even some dragons . . .

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, and he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.