

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Forging the Realms Archive | 8/22/2013



The Library Code

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.*

Note: *Ed Greenwood Presents Elminster's Forgotten Realms* won the Silver ENnie (Best Art, Interior) at this year's [Gen Con](#)! Our congratulations to all other winners and nominees. To help celebrate the award, we've also presented the [art gallery](#) from the book.

The problem with running organized villainy as a business, on a large scale, is the need for bookkeeping. This practice is necessary to keep from being double-crossed by shady partners, but it provides evidence against all villains involved if it falls into the wrong hands. Wherefore it needs to be both covert and secure—or else. This is a lesson certain nobility in Cormyr, Sembia, and Waterdeep are about to learn, to their cost.

Unless, of course, they realize what's going on in time.

There's an old Faerunian saying, "Cross not a librarian, for they hold the keys to all lore." This goes double for scribes charged with counting coins and keeping records. They may be your cowed underlings and your daily salvation—but if they turn on you or just grow careless, they can also very quickly become a deadly chink in your armor.

One such affair is about to unfold in the Realms soon. Meek and mild-mannered backroom scribes working in the households of nobles in Cormyr and Waterdeep and self-styled nobles of Sembia have discovered they have personal ethics. They are furious with an ongoing activity their masters are engaged in: slave-running.

Every one of these nobles stands high in societies that legally and socially forbid the keeping of slaves and dealing in slaves. Still less would the general citizenry be pleased to learn that some nobles have fallen into the secret habit of using hirelings or trusted personal agents to kidnap business rivals or individual commoners who've displeased them, and selling the kidnapped into slavery to remove all who sufficiently displease or hamper them.

Specifically, Namaldrick Anteos and Alanzelo Gralhund of the Waterdhavian nobility have quietly taken to this livelihood, without informing fellow family members, though in both cases brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles have begun to suspect something of what's going on. As have the Cormyrean noble family of Hlombur, desperate to pay off mounting debts. They joined a secretive cabal of the Sembian families of Amaerd, Malantaver, Reliykard ("Rell-EYE-card"), Sarlamshard, and Torvreth, who took up slave dealings (using the ports of Saerloon and Selgaunt) as just as one more way of making coin—moreover, one that's relatively swift and easy.

All these nobles trade in slaves with each other, with the shady many-wares merchants Talbur Suskar and Yandaerlo Immurrusk of Westgate, and with the slavers Indyls "Red" Handroth and Nornra "Tallsails" Taulsaerma. Both Indyls and Nornra are formerly pirates of the Sea of Fallen Stars who've now turned to legitimate fleet shipping that's largely a cover for slaving and smuggling).

In every case, scribes working for the nobility know exactly what's going on in detail—because they do all the daily bookkeeping. And they're planning on hitting back.



They have no desire to destroy the families who employ them (and lose their own positions and livelihoods in the process). They just wish to expose the illicit slave-related activities of particular nobles, preferably in ways that can't be traced directly back to them, in hopes those individuals taste some justice "for once."

They are wise enough to know that disaster for themselves will be avoided only if things are done exactly right, so they are slowly and carefully discussing and coordinating with each other—without ever meeting in the flesh.

They are doing so by means of something they refer to as "snacking" (to head off any suspicions on the part of anyone who might overhear), but which I think is more accurately called "the Library Code."

It works like this: Scribes involved in this conspiracy to expose the slavers, and caravan merchants paid by the scribes to act as their go-betweens but who are kept in the dark (said merchants aren't stupid and have figured out what's afoot, more or less, but are taking care to learn no more), are entering certain civic (open to the public) and guild libraries in Waterdeep, Suzail, Marsember, Saerloon, and Selgaunt, and consulting specific books. When there, they notice particular underlined or marked (by the "filling in" of a closed loop of a component letter within the word, for example) words, which they string together with other underlined words, to derive a sentence or fragmentary line of communication. The books involved are tomes the scribes and merchants might logically consult in the course of their ongoing legitimate daily business.

This is a very slow, painstaking way of communicating—but the conspirators involved prefer slow and painstaking to getting caught.

Just for the record, some of the scribes involved are Renver Selshaws (who works for House Anteos of Waterdeep and is a great-great-grandson of Gandelhard Selshaws, the last Anteos household slave agent from the late 1200s DR, when the family last openly dealt in slaves), Alandreth Hendsaer (employed by House Gralhund of Waterdeep), Sartren Imdur (of House Hlombur of Cormyr), and Brenthur Bahaldyn (of the Sembian House of Amaerd).

Their go-between merchants include Dalandra Tannamar of Suzail, a young, energetic, and ambitious trader and model (former dancer) who deals in scents, textiles, and high-end fashionable clothing and accessories; Galathgurt Hasker of Arabel, who trades in raw mined gems, quarried stone, and carved stone house ornamentations; and Korlyn Klansczil of Westgate, a caravan wagon fleet owner who makes regular overland runs between Westgate and Waterdeep. All of these go-betweens are using a "cover tale" (that they haven't actually needed to call on yet) of starting to dabble in the buying and reselling of books, and needing to know content, value, and reputation of particular writers and tomes.

The libraries known to be involved are as follows: in Saerloon, the Dethil; in Selgaunt, the Omnium and Hethcaunt's House; in Suzail, Harbrittur's Librium; in Waterdeep, the Haelar and Thurdran's Chamber; and in Westgate, the Lakdar.

The Dethil occupies a floor above an exclusive eatery (The Golden Spit), separating the din of the eatery below it from the raucous noise of a festhall (The Velvet Hind) above. Dim, dark wood-paneled rooms here are hushed and obsessively tidied, but furnished with many large tables where users can spread out books, make notes, and so on to their hearts' content. Copying takes a tenday; there's no "on the spot" service available.

The expensive Omnium is an annual-fee "members only," gargoyle-studded stone fortress, largely devoted to maps (and charts of the Sea of Fallen Stars), business reports, and local histories (family and regional). "House scribes" provide a fast but expensive copying service.

Hethcaunt's House is an untidy and sprawling series of reading rooms, stocked with whatever Hethcaunt can turn up, accessed for a small per-visit fee. Many books go missing or have pages surreptitiously sliced out, so the House is used by the conspirators only as a fallback (on occasions when the Omnium is closed because it has been "hired for the day" by this or that group for closed meetings). Hethcaunt's busy house scribes like to copy only short passages, but will alter text (adding and deleting and changing words) for under-the-table payments—useful to most users for adding explanations, and to the conspirators for making their messages clearer.

Harbrittur's Librium is busy, bright, and noisy—a meeting place of sorts for the citizenry willing to pay the 2 sp entry fee—busy enough that there's little privacy, but also little likelihood of attracting attention. The library is vast and heavily used, with many books in poor condition and lots of scribbles and underlinings done by many patrons, sometimes causing confusion for the conspirators.

The Haelar is a guild library, started by (and formerly exclusive to) the Guild of Apothecaries & Physicians, but now open to everyone to earn its guild a steady side income. This guild library is in a nondescript former warehouse on the west side of Caravan Street just north of Coach Street in South Ward, and it is infested with both pigeons and rats. The guild removed a handful of valuable texts of formulae and medical procedures to a

tiny private library in the guild headquarters before opening the Haelar to the public. "Haelar" was the guildmaster who approved and endowed the original library.

Thurdran's Chamber (on the west side of Flint Street, just north of Delzorin Street, in Sea Ward) is an ornate, upscale, hushed, and haughty place of white-gloved attendants, private reading cubicles, and a large and valuable book collection. Begun as the guild library of the Scriveners, Scribes & Clerks Guild, it is free to guild members and apprentices, and it costs 76 gp/year to all others. The Waterdeep-based scribes involved in the conspiracy are members, and Thurdran's is where they prefer to do their "snacking"—but when certain merchants (who just can't afford the Chamber's fees) are in town, the Haelar is where the scribes must go to receive or send messages that will go by way of those merchants.

The Lakdar is an upstairs warren of book-filled rooms, a private venture begun and maintained by Ulthos Lakdar, an aging man who's now just the librarian. His heavy debts were bought out by several small local guilds as their initial founding acts, and thus they gained shared meeting rooms stocked with reference tomes that could earn them income (there's a 4 sp entry fee, per visit) from the general public whenever they're not using the rooms for meetings. The collection is large and eclectic ("odd" is the description used by several visitors).

A complicating factor has recently arisen for the scribes' conspiracy. An anxiously attentive, shy young scribe named Daervor Malduth, was sent to the Librium in Suzail to find and copy down certain lore regarding now-deceased wealthy individuals of Cormyr for his master, the wizard Irvelt Enduskoun (an ambitious and impoverished wizard who hopes to find the locations of rich tombs he can plunder to quickly gain a little coin). Daervor has noticed that the scribe Sartren Imdur returns often to the Librium and consults the same books repeatedly, and he is beginning to wonder why. He's reported as much to his master, who has asked him to "get good looks at any browsing folk" with an eye to covertly identifying them without ever speaking to them, and to try to find out what, specifically, they're looking up in the tomes. Malduth hasn't drawn any conclusions thus far, but he has found the underlined words and started writing them down, and he or Enduskoun may discern something soon.

Unknown to Malduth, he has been noticed by two sinister kidnappers and slayers who do a lot of the work of procuring and handling the slaves: two ruthless, agile, shrewd and observant men (both formerly of Westgate, where they lived by thievery): Caladaeros Malkuth and Beloraun Tanalansur. They are spying on Malduth for the moment, but have traced him back to Enduskoun in one direction, and noticed Imdur in the other, and are getting suspicious (though right now, they think it's one of the slaving partners they're working for preparing to swindle or even kill other partners, using the wizard to do so). They don't want to alert or harm Malduth or Imdur until they learn more.

A tangled web, to be sure, and certain to become far more tangled if, say, any adventurers blunder into it—or the War Wizards of Cormyr or other agents of various governments get involved.

Which is when the adventuring will get swift, violent, and interesting.

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.