

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

Forging the Realms Archive | 7/2/2014 **New!**



## The Sardolphyn Gambit

### Forgotten Realms

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.

**T**he Cult of the Dragon is an organization of many ambitious members working on many diverse undertakings, some of them smoke screens to conceal core Cult business. We've already seen some of these distractions or maraudings (as they've been variously called), and a few of them concerned covertly co-opting noble families of Waterdeep to the Cult cause. Those missions are ongoing, and whether or not they succeed, there will probably be more cult attempts to subvert Waterdhavian noble houses in future; the potential gains are just too good to be ignored. The right noble families have wealth and property in the City of Splendors and so will both bankroll the cult and prove useful in an ongoing way. For example, it's easier to quietly establish a safe house to hide in, within Waterdeep, if you're in cahoots with someone who already owns thirty or forty city houses, than it is to start from having no properties at all, just a need.

### Co-opting the Powerful

The everpresent problem in winning control of, or at least substantial influence over, a Waterdhavian noble family is this: how? And more than that: how to do so without the attempt being noticed by the Lords of Waterdeep, their agents, or the many spies working for as many private interests in the city?

That previous glimpse of cult maraudings identified three noble houses having current weaknesses that make them promising cult targets: the families of Phylund, Snome, and Zulpair.

However, there's another way to gaining power over nobility in the City of Splendors—and it's already well underway.

More than a few heads of noble houses have become bored and jaded pleasure-seekers, who lack all enthusiasm for the cut-and-thrust of mercantile business, and who also happen to lack trusted relatives within their walls who are happy or eager or competent to oversee family business concerns. Now, as in the past, the usual solution is to hire "factors" (trade agents) to see to keeping the family coffers healthy and the family well-positioned for future market share, respected by guilds and wealthy non-noble investors, and aware of trends and coming short-term calamities and opportunities.

The perennial complaint of "One just can't get good servants, these days!" applies to trade factors as it does to chamberlains (butlers) and chatelaines. Younger generations of factors tend to be less loyal to their noble employers and more apt to cut corners or be prone to corruption—and it has become the norm for them to have hidden sideline personal businesses that profit from the work they do for their noble family. Or in other words, as Lord Halburton Silmerhelve grumbled recently, "I'm feeding, housing, clothing, and paying my own leech, empowering him to bleed me white—and not even behind my back, to boot! Why, the rascal has the gall



to sneer at me!"

## Proxy Representatives

One possible solution, which would seem fraught with more potential for corruption unless the greater numbers of people involved are so deployed as to police each other, is gaining popularity. It also answers the needs of an increasingly numerous, powerful, and frustrated element of Waterdhavian society: wealthy non-noble families who can live like nobility, but lack the titles, privileges, and social status of the established nobles. Some of these "wannabe" nobles have undertaken to—for a flat percentage commission, that often seems to be around twelve percent—administer the trade affairs of noble houses. It is understood that they will use their position to further their own trade dealings and make their own side-profits; the opportunity to do so is advanced as an argument for trusting them, because if the noble family suffers reverses, so too will their non-noble employees.

## The Rising Sardolphyns

One of the most successful of these proxy families is the Sardolphyn family of Mendever Street in Sea Ward—and they include a brother of the patriarch, and three of the patriarch's five sons, who (unknown to their kin) are firm members of the Cult of the Dragon. So cult coins and cult expertise have subtly aided the Sardolphyns in mercantile success, making them seem worthwhile to many noble houses seeking to engage "representatives." More importantly, ruthless cult muscle has spied on rivals of the Sardolphyns and stymied sabotage attempts by some of those rivals that would have darkened the reputation and unbroken success of the Sardolphyns.

As a result, the noble houses of Cassalanter, Durinbold, Gundwynd, and Lanngolyn have all engaged the Sardolphyns to represent them. So the Sardolphyn family now runs the Lanngolyn fleets, the Durinbold farms, and the myriad investments and small businesses of the Cassalanter and Gundwynds. They have made some real improvements in efficiency, partly by themselves providing faster and larger-capacity shipping of goods and needed materials between the various locations of all of these business concerns. They are making good profits for their noble patrons, as well as themselves. In turn, the cult, through its Sardolphyn family members, is profiting steadily from the success of the Sardolphyns.

## Inside the Walls of Dolphynturrets

The Sardolphyn family mansion, Dolphynturrets, is a gaudy stone mock castle on westfront Mendever Street, the third door north of the moot of Mendever and Whim Street. It is expanding, the family having purchased the two adjacent properties immediately adjoining it to the north (that front on the south side of Zarimtar Street, which is mislabeled "Zarimtar" on most maps) and the property abutting it to the south, on Mendever. Right now, all those buildings are being renovated and aren't yet directly connected to the existing mansion, the plan being to pierce the walls and join them when they are "ready."

The mansion is more showy than comfortable, and several of the sons have rented their own small but luxurious apartments in North Ward or Castle Ward, the better to entertain both lovers and their dashing young friends. The Sardolphyns are energetic, politically and socially engaged folk, too busy with individual interests to watch each other very closely or get on each other's nerves. They come and go, showing up for family meals when it suits them, the only constant (and quietly watchful) being the family matriarch, Feldelmra.

The cult members in the Sardolphyns are Trawask (the brother of oblivious Sardolphyn patriarch Dolmund, whose chief aim in life seems to be building an ever-larger wine cellar), Belmeern, Adreth, and Lharant (the three sons in the cult; their younger brothers Chelandor and Parldar, and their sister Emrythra, are all thus far unaware of cult involvement). Their mother Feldelmra is a passive cult spy, keeping close watch over her family with an eye to calling on certain of the mansion servants (one doorjack and three maids) to do whatever's necessary to keep the oblivious family members unaware of the cult's presence and to keep the cult members from getting funny ideas of their own and doing things that might expose the cult's hand in everything.

One growing danger is the enjoyment Adreth and Lharant derive from participation in orgy-like cult rituals held secretly in a cellar somewhere in North Ward. Lharant is a sadist with a growing hunger for branding bared flesh, and it's only a matter of time before he causes a death or disfigurement that brings him to the attention of the authorities.

Although increasing "stiffstab" (arthritis) is making Trawask hobble and is restricting his former relentless energy, and Dolmund is a dilettante and a dreamer, all the other Sardolphyns are smart, swift-to-learn

workaholics. Emrythra has had a personal problem of "growing a tummy" from childhood. She has built a tiny business that designs and makes stomachers and other stylish corsets and cummerbunds into a well-respected Waterdhavian success. She and her staff make good-looking midriff reshaping garments bought and used by Waterdhavians of all wards and walks of life (aging warehouse loaders swear by her support trusses) under the name "Dolpynar." The other Sardolphyn males are all forehead-deep in tirelessly running and expanding various family businesses (and now, handling client noble family business, too).

Trawask is discovering that he really enjoys being a spymaster, and the cult is increasingly using him in that role to oversee its various small networks of spies across Waterdeep; Trawask is becoming "the wily old watcher who watches the watchers" for them, though certain senior cult members resent his being chosen for this and are watching him closely for any pretext to discredit him or just slip a knife between his ribs.

## **The Road Ahead**

So whereas the attempts to directly subvert or seduce noble families are ongoing and in early stages, the Sardolphyn Gambit is well underway and charging ahead from success to success.

Certain cult members, however, see the wisest way onward in putting energies behind rival proxy representatives, so the Sardolphyns won't stand out and seem rivals to any Lord of Waterdeep or guild who might decide to thwart them or bring them down—and so that if the Sardolphyns do fall, the cult has two or three other controlled families they can profit from and use as their tools in Waterdhavian politics and society.

As a result of this thinking, the cult is currently spying on the wealthy, rising, "wannabe" noble families of Eskult, Tramnur, and Yeldred (all of North Ward), with an eye to co-opting any or all of them and creating a "new Sardolphyn."

What will happen, of course, lies in (as Elminster puts it) "the hearts and arms of humans, spiced with the whims and fancies of the gods."

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## **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.