

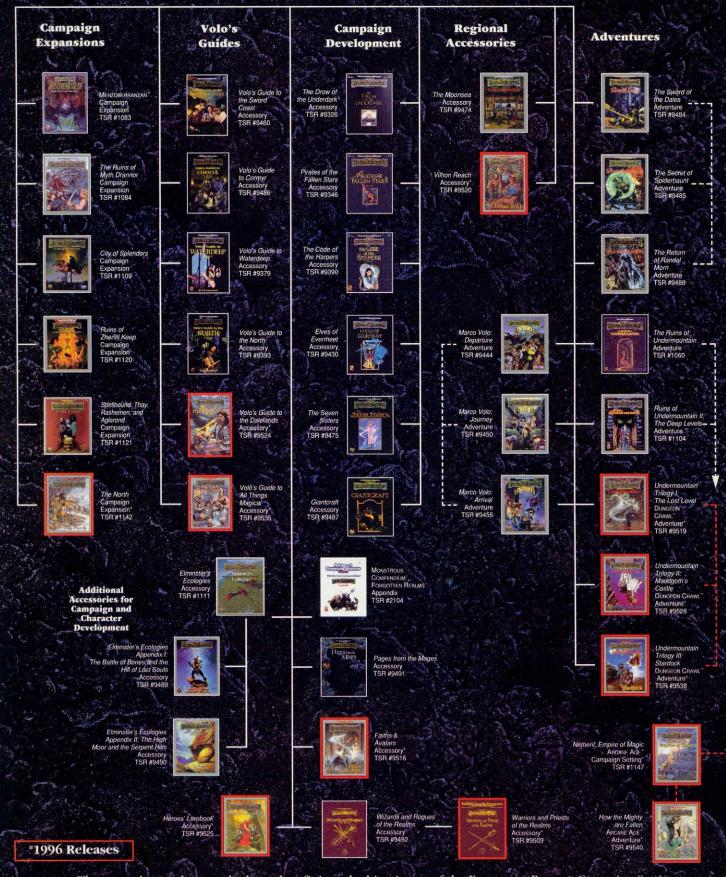




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-2550 L gives b

Well met! Know, O reader, that I am Alaundo of Candlekeep.

It has been given to me to see glimpses of the future, moments of the measureless time that lie ahead for this world of Toril, called by some the Forgotten Realms. I sit here among halls upon halls and chambers upon chambers crammed with books—books that capture something of our great past. All too often, folk want to know where the bones of great kings or legendary dragons lie...or more precisely where their treasure may be found, if the truth be told. There are a few questers, however, whose eyes hold the light of wonder, and who want to know more of this vast, glorious, historied world...

And to them I speak first of the shining past—of the glory that was Netheril. These Realms were once home to folk whose mighty magic could change the very sky, trees, and land around us, humans who would seem as gods to us if they walked the world today: the sorcerer-kings of Netheril.

They were the first humans to rise to power from the Dawn Days when men were devoured like cattle by dragons who swooped down from the skies, ruling all the Realms-and spending their days fighting with each other like great cats for dominion over the lands. The Netherese tamed those awesome dragons, crafted castles that flew high in the air, and created glowing gates that took the brave, the curiousand the foolhardy-with but a step into other, stranger worlds that sages call the planes of existence. Many mighty and terrible things the sorcererkings did, created, and became, and in time grew proud in their power, and decadent. In the end they were swept away by their folly and the spells of the evil creatures called

Only fragments of the splendor that was their sorceries remain to us now—but despite the lact that world-taming magic (or, some say, because humankind has flourished down the years since fall of Netheril. Bards tell rich tales of valor, love high achievements...and those tales are both manever-ending. Come to Candlekeep if you would them, or seek out a true bard, and listen well. For the time you read this, my chair will surely sit er as my bones crumble in the crypts beneath us.

I set down these words out of love—love of t world, called "Faerûn" or 'home' by folk hereab for it shall endure when you in turn have passed as it has bustled and sparkled and roared out the of its storms and earthshakings and eruptions of from below, while its beauties have entranced e and dwarves and men alike these thousand years.

If you are but newly come to the Realms, or a setting out for the first time from the place of your rearing to taste its beauties and perils, I envy you much glory awaits your eyes. Hearken to some full the things I have observed in Toril...

I have seen deep green glens where the Danc Folk gambol among the ferns, scudding mists, at ancient gnarled trees—using magic to sink into very stones beneath their hooves when danger of too close. Some of them dwell in forests so vast an elf straying not from a chosen straight route of walk for a summer and not cross through from of tressedge to the other.

I have seen dragons erupt out of the sea and sinto the air to strike with breath, fang, and claw rival wyrms, aloft—while terrified sailors strain their ships intact through the raging heart of such a battle.

I have seen knights—lords and ladies both, the armor bright—riding along forest paths with propenhants fluttering from their lances, as they the down to jousting fields where crowds wait, king envoys among the press of excited bodies, alert which of these fair combatants will make good.

1088 Annual trade begins at the future sight

-290 The Fall of Netheril.

the Phaerimm.

261 Elminster aids in the crea Mythal at Myth Drannor; "Lac agrees to head the Harpers."

26 Cormyr is founded.

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Only fragments of the splendor that was their lost sorceries remain to us now—but despite the lack of that world-taming magic (or, some say, because of it) humankind has flourished down the years since the fall of Netheril. Bards tell rich tales of valor, love, and high achievements...and those tales are both many and never-ending. Come to Candlekeep if you would hear them, or seek out a true bard, and listen well. For by the time you read this, my chair will surely sit empty as my bones crumble in the crypts beneath us.

I set down these words out of love-love of this my world, called "Faerûn" or 'home' by folk hereabouts for it shall endure when you in turn have passed away, as it has bustled and sparkled and roared out the fury of its storms and earthshakings and eruptions of fire from below, while its beauties have entranced elves and dwarves and men alike these thousand years.

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I have seen knights—lords and ladies both, their armor bright-riding along forest paths with proud pennants fluttering from their lances, as they thunder down to jousting fields where crowds wait, kings envoys among the press of excited bodies, alert to see which of these fair combatants will make good agents

for the crowns they serve.

I have seen forgotten castles crumble to ruin amid choking brambles, sprouting trees, and the claws of chill winter. Towers crash to the ground, stones larger than men cracking and rolling...and when the dust settles, monsters slither in to lair in the shadowed inner chambers. Chests of gold and coffers of gems stand in some of these hidden rooms—and in others, old magic lurks, flickering feebly over scrolls and wands and enchanted things as it awaits those brave enough to intrude

I have seen ghosts and worse things rising from graves to menace the living. In dark cellars and desolate places skulls fly about at night, and in some crypts skeletal hands chill intruders with their bony clutchings. Not all of the fallen lie peacefully in the earth.

I have seen men in the crowded cities of Faerûn whose fingers have gained great skill over long, painful years of labor, so that they can set a gem scarce large enough to see into the eyeball of a carved statuette no taller than my hand...or fine-forge a lock so intricate that six keys must be turned to make it vield.

I have seen close-beamed and smoky taverns where women dance in the firelight and sing laments so sad and sweet among harping or piping that hardened dwarves howl in grief and proud elves weep silent tears that glisten back the leaping flames, as all folk under those roofs are briefly brethren, close-knit and moved by the same stirrings.

I have seen villages where heavy-laden havcarts groan along lanes that roam almost lazily across rolling hills farmed by halflings, gnomes, men, and half-elven alike, and folk come out at dusk to sit and smoke pipes or sing softly and toast the setting sun with vintage of their own making, while their barns and byres fill up with food to feed realms they've never seen...and gentle brooks chuckle endlessly past the hooves of lowing cattle as night comes softly down again.

I have see verdant land such reavers mountains... to their door to truly live.

I have see MageFairs, w as beings of their powers down throne world away, who would s observed wh

I have see float forever monsters tha enchantmen or struck sile dreamed of t

In the end of those scril see that the doom of mer concerns of heroic deeds have earned. here in Cand upon halls of fire-that pro world I know

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290 The Fall of Netheril.

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714 Fall of Myth Drannor

1350 Elminster

1302 Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsi

1282 Azoun IV named King of Corr

1) The Standing Stone is erected. Dalelands are recognized by the Elves of Cormanthor. 661 Height of Myth Drannor.

500

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I have seen proud men striving to seize such verdant lands by the sword, or defend them against such reavers or the grunting orcs of the mountains...and I have seen adventurers ride laughing to their dooms because to dare dire perils is to truly live.

I have seen gatherings of sorcerers known as MageFairs, where hundreds of spells flash and sparkle as beings of all races strive to impress each other with their powers, make pacts for employment or to strike down thrones and feuding families and foes half a world away, and sell their magics or teaching to those who would grow more mighty in the Art. And I have observed what such magic has wrought..

I have seen ships that sail the skies, bridges that float forever in the air, and gleaming spell-driven metal monsters that walk or dig or climb until their enchantments fail or they are rent by rival constructs or struck silent by the deaths of the artificers who dreamed of them

In the end, all dreamers die, and it is the proud task of those scribes around me, here in Candlekeep, to see that the dreams don't die with them. For it is the doom of men that they rush about, consumed by the concerns of the moment, and forget the splendid and heroic deeds they witness along with the wisdom they have earned...and should have learned. Wherefore here in Candlekeep we keep many thick tomes—halls upon halls of them, spell-guarded against rot and fire—that preserve the proud sagas of the greatest world I know. A world that lies before thee, waiting.

I have seen the glories of the Realms in my day, and glimpsed something of what lies ahead. Perils that shake the very world, and dark days for Faerûn, lurk among the shining sights: bold and brave adventurers will be needed.

If you are stirred at the thought of wielding sword or spell in this most splendid of worlds, hearken. I am Alaundo of Candlekeep, called by some Alaundo the Seer, and I say to thee: the Realms wait for thee.

- By Ed Greenwood

Elminster aids in the creation of the ythal at Myth Drannor; "Lady Steel rees to head the Harpers.

Dalelands

ormant

922 Red Wizards wrest control of Thay from Mulhorand.

1350 Elminster retires to Shadowdale

1356 Syluné dies while

906 Shadowdale founded. 714 Fall of Myth Drannor

1302 Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun is born. 1282 Azoun IV named King of Cormyr

1358 The Time of Troubles lyachtu Xvim, Godson of Bane, imprisoned below Zhentil Keep Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul die and are replaced by Cyric Menzoberranzan raids Mithril Hall.

1500

661 Height of Myth Drannor.

761-767 Birth of the Seven Sisters

1150 Khelben Arunsun the Elder arrives in Waterdeep.

1344 Elven Retreat begins.

throne of Cormyr.

1336 Azoun IV takes the 1368 Zhentil Keep is







Blowhards, all of them! I am Volo, and have traveled more of these Realms than any other. To hear the truth listen to me.



ELMINSTER

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 Ah, yes, clear nights—handy for seeing the beauty of local ladies...and the best hasty escape routes from their bedrooms.

2 · "Shadowdale offers freely what all the magic of Faerun cannot"? The only thing I've found that most places in Faerun offer freely is: poverty.

·"Filled with such contemplation"? Elminster's probably the only man in all Faerún who can make his having a nap sound like a decisive act of Realms-shaking importance. Then again, he's one of the few men whose sleeping habits are of Realms-shaking importance. If he woke up grouchy of mornings there'd probably be little left east of Shadowdale but a wild-magic waste, instead of Ravens Bluff and Mulmaster and Thay and...hmmm. Perhaps the Realms needs someone heroic (or stupid) enough to steal the Old Mage's morning meal once or twice, at that...

That's the trouble with wizards. Their disagreements over policy always result in battles, and in battles many innocents always get killed. You'd think they'd have run out of innocents long ago...

- 4 •Aye, I've heard Elminster has just enough spellfire in him to nicely cook up dinner—or devious plots—or people who annoy him (myself, for instance).
- •When great mages say they've retired, it really means they're now up to something they don't want to tell you about.

Many have asked what possessed an old mage like myself to retire to the sleepy village of Shadowdale. In my defense I can only claim that it must have been the clear nights, frothing ale, and warm laughter in the company of good friends that finally swayed me. Shadowdale offers freely what all of the magic of Faerûn cannot.

From the pond near my tower I smell the honey-mead that Jhaele brews for the Old Skull Inn. I hear the labored breaths of Durman as he chops wood for the inn's hearth followed shortly thereafter by a pounding hammer as he performs some minor maintenance on a shutter or door. And from time to time, Jhaele brings up a mug of fresh mead or ale and talks to me about the rumors she's heard at the Old Skull.

Not all of the time spent in Shadowdale is filled with such contemplation, however. Shandril Shessair's appearance in the dale sparked the match of danger, forcing me to spend time in the Twisted Tower with Mourngrym and the Knights of Myth Drannor—a worse fate I cannot imagine—as we turned back tide after tide of Zhentarim that sought to control the young spellfire-wielder. Many innocents died in the resulting battles, and all involved in the battles learned the extent to which others stoop to possess that which they cannot have.³

Aye, 'tis true that I possess spellfire, but only a spark when compared to Shandril. The lass's mastery of the fire is truly remarkable; ask any mage that crossed spells with her; if any is yet alive, that is. I remember the blackened corridors of the Twisted Tower after Shandril defeated a Zhentarim mageling intent on possessing her power and the smell of burned flesh that wafted through the halls; I can also taste

her tears as she cried over the death that she caused. 4

Shadowdale has its history; no chronomancer of Zhentarim can take that away, but it also has its present. It will need both to remember how to get along with Daggerdale now that Randal Morn is back in power, and it will have to keep on the lookout for the rise of Zhentil Keep from the ashes of its fall. Such tasks are hardly my responsibility; I'm retired.5



KHELBEN



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DRIZZT DO'URDEN

As I compare my two lives—the current life I share with Bruenor, Catti-Brie, Regis, and Guenhwyvar and my darker past life living in Menzoberranzan—I can't help but reflect on the decisions I have made and the price they have exacted. From the very first moment I vowed to leave the dark and twisting caverns of the Underdark, every turn I made has had unforeseen costs.9

My leaving Menzoberranzan cost my family their lives, cast down by my actions of leaving the evil city. That my sisters and mother were evil there can be no doubt, but what right do I have to make such life-and-death decisions for others?10

I am hardly responsible for the actions of an entire society, nor did I establish the penalties to which my family answered. I did, however, realize that my leaving Menzoberranzan would place my family's lives in danger. Yet I still left.

My decision to remain in Mithril Hall brought the entire might of Matron Baenre down upon me. The army that marched to the dwarven halls sought not just simple conquest—they sought my capture for the glory of Lloth. Wulfgar, betrothed of Catti-Brie, lost his life in that battle. His absence is an emptiness that pulses with

an absent heartbeat.

And yet, my own heartbeat goes against my judgment, betraying both my heart and the memory of Wulfgar. I love Catti-Brie, and yet the pain in my own heart—and in the eyes of Catti-Brie and Bruenor—over his death prevents me from acting upon my desires.11

Even through all of this emptiness I have found a place to live where I can be respected for who I am. I am no longer looked upon as a "dark elf" by the dwarves of Mithril Hall. I am finally just Drizzt, ranger and friend to King Bruenor. In that regard, Mithril Hall is a comfortable place.12

With Matron Baenre dead and the

political power of
Menzoberranzan in flux,
perhaps I can at last
cease worrying about
Lloth's watchful gaze. Yet
I don't trust my evil sisters
and brothers of the

Underdark, and I fear that they are hatching yet further plots that will involve both Mithril Hall and myself.¹³ • If Drizzt Do'Urden ever stopped agonizing over his every little mistake, he'd discover that folk in the Realms can get into trouble and get themselves killed quite handily without him.

there's a place of new opportunities. Just bring a small army, a few dozen wizards, a big smile, and lots and lots of torches. Don't forget your spider repellent.

11 It's amazing how many folk in Faerun keep from declaring their love for someone because of dead people; I've never noticed dead people to be all that good at kissing and cuddling. Memories of their love? Well, yes, life is all about making memories—so tell her you love her, and make some new ones!

12 ·ll's nice to know that
the deadliest drow in Faerun
doesn't trust his fellow dark
elves. I'd hate to think he'd become
some sort of idiot. Drizzt finds
Mithril Hall a comfortable place
because they accept him for who
he is. I'll bet the heaps of gold
and kegs of ale didn't hurt his
estimation of its comforts
overmuch, either.

find time to reflect on the decisions they've made after they've gotten a lot of people killed. Wouldn't it be nice if they thought about the implications of their bold deeds and decisions before making them?

THE SIMBUL

nardly my responsibility; ·When great mages say they've I'm retired.5 retired, it really means they're now up to something they don't want to tell you about. KHELBEN ·Can you see why the bard **ARUNSUN** Alagus once said "Archmages are the most arrogant, stuffy bores I have walked these imaginable?" Suffice it to say that I Realms for an untoward am a learned and number of decades, and well-traveled mage, too. So there. I have seen many wondrous and chilling things ·"Embrace the wonders," the I have seen civilizations rise to wizard advises, and I'd just spectacular heights, only to fall due to the like to endorse that advice wholeheartedly. The visitor to arrogance of their power-mad rulers. I have Waterdeep should not miss seen them rise again from the ashes by a simple the embraces of Sharleene of Slop labor of a good man. I have seen the death of gods and Street, Dancing Darella of the birth of new divinity sharing the same sunrise. Suffice it Lackpurse Lane, or llyth of the Gentle Tentacles, to say that I am a learned and well-traveled mage.6 on...but no: the truly The Realms, "forgotten" though they may be in your reality, are not only a place adventurous should march right up to Blackstaff Tower of wonder and delight, but also a place of chaos and danger. Take care to they and ask Khelben which embrace the wonders and phenomena and avoid disturbing the peace with heal wonders he takes care to thoughts of furthering your own power at the expense of others. I am but one embrace. Go on. I dare thee. (Ah, The denizen of this place who wishes his home to remain orderly and full of light and your next of kin ...?) quio "Avoid disturbing the laughter; do not make me an enemy, and you too shall see an untoward number as w peace"? Of where? If you're of decades here upon the Realms.7 not an archmage so powerful cha that folk quiver like Many believe that Waterdeep is "my city," but I take no untoward credit for its the beached jellyfish when you rise and fall. I am merely an archmage who desires Waterdeep to remain the walk by, you'll have a hard If yo haven that it is, free of the taint of a thieves' guild and free of the rotting hand of time finding any peace in Wit the Realms to disturb! I the Zhentarim. Thieves operate in the city—and the Zhentarim are undoubtedly WOI love my world, but it's a-crawl with hiding somewhere as well—but their actions are severely limited when strife...and fair Waterdeep is a The compared to other cities. When either group sticks its head out of the sewers, I'll deadlier corner of it than the make sure to limit their actions even more.8 most. Beware the high-nosed advice of wizards; their grasp bett If you're looking to come to Waterdeep and inflict a great change upon of reality is just a be o it, begin by venturing into Undermountain. In those winding halls, an wee touch diffe tenuous. adventurer can find lost magical lore, countless monsters, and-for the The truly fortunate-perhaps Halaster himself. Of course, more often than not the only thing an adventurer finds in those long halls is death. for: siste Oh, and if you find a spell down there that can turn a large amount of yet air into stone, please bring it up here for me. I've been meaning to fill up Nat Undermountain for some time now. . . . true dec 8 ·Friendly notes to visitors: when a wizard speaks of "severely limiting your actions," he means he'll kill you. Personal special way. Undead are under the control of the wizard—or priest—who created them. So be good or you may eternity washing Khelben's socks and underthings. Adventure is where you find it, sure, but I suspect yo things in mind if you come to Waterdeep. So obey the "Warning: Khelben At Work" signs, and if y must burgle a home, don't make it Blackstaff Tower. Laeral live makes Khelben look positively gentle and kind. I know-no, do and Queen of Aglard loose the reins of change

healthy element of change.

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I'll

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up

they are hatching yet further plots that will involve both Mithril Hall and myself.¹³

THE SIMBUL

There are those who are content to keep the Realms as it is, forever resisting change that is demanded by nature. But as one of Mystra's Chosen and Queen of Aglarond, it is my duty to let

loose the reins of change and effect a better world for my people.¹⁴

But the change that the Red Wizards of Thay would inflict

upon Aglarond is not a good thing, so I resist with every ounce of resolve and magical might at my command. They have already proven that they will do anything to achieve their goals, and victory at any price is hardly a

The Realms change; seldom at the speed desired of those who strive, but far too quickly for those who resist. The fall of Zhentil Keep—and its eventual rebuilding—as well as the return to power of Randal Morn are all elements of change. Such changes will undoubtedly tilt the balance of power in the region, and I will be on the lookout for changes that affect Aglarond.¹⁵

If you wish to thank me for your protection, I honor your faith in me with great joy. With that joy comes a warning, however: Do not try and deceive me with kind words and promises for my revenge is quick and deadly. 16

There are those who think that I am uncaring, but nothing could be further from the truth. While I freely admit to being blunt in my views, I work only for the betterment of Aglarond; I care not what others think or say. I merely do what must be done. If doing what must be done places me in the path of others who have different goals, then I accept what Tymora and Mystra have in store for me. 17

There have been a few times when I feared that my resolve in doing what is best for my people would place me in opposition to Elminster of Shadowdale, my sisters, or others I respect in the Realms. Such a confrontation has never occurred, yet I fear that one day it must. When that day comes, I will be ready. 18

Nature, time, and the gods are unfathomable in such regards. History is the only true reflection. I fear that Alaundo of Candlekeep has already seen my future but decided not to write about it. 19

and queens, who after all can do just what they want to do, use the word 'duty' or some blurf about the good of their people, just when they're about to let loose war, devastation, and life-shattering changes on us all? Is honesty (still) in such short supply? Why don't they just face the guilt, er, responsibility, and say: "I changed the world last month because I darned well felt like it"?

15 'Her duty is to "let loose the reins of change"? I thought the duty of a ruler was to grab the reins of change, hold on tight, and try a little steering!

think all life in the Realms
dances on their hands, and
lasts from day to day only
because they work
constantly to keep us all
alive? How do they think we
survive when they're in the
bathroom?

17 •I would like to go on record here and now as never having tried to deceive the Queen of Aglarond with kind words and promises. I meant every one of them, and still do. I'm not stupid enough to try to trick a woman who can tame the Red Wizards of Thay, Elminster of Shadowdale, and a conclave of a dozen beholders!

(Who does she think is?)

the day when she'll take on Elminster, the rest of the Seven Sisters, and the other Chosen...but I don't think the rest of us will be. I don't think there are enough gravediggers in all the Realms to make our kingdoms ready for that day, either. I hope it isn't tomorrow.

ne means he'll kill you. Personally, and in a very of them. So be good or you may spend the rest of ou find it, sure, but I suspect you have other shelben At Work" signs, and if you absolutely e it Blackstaff Tower. Laeral lives there, and she gentle and kind. I know—no, don't ask...

•Do all wizards grow so grandly and sorrowfully paranoid about their fates? Or do they just get depressed that for all their power to destroy the world as they know it, some sort of Realms will stagger along after they've gone...and all too soon forget them?





