

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the FORGOTTEN REALMS®, the world I began crafting when I was six, before there was anything called DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® or a role-playing game industry. The world I still work on, every day.

It's been a long, rich, rewarding road, and the Realms now grows around me courtesy of many loving creators, toiling busily. We're building a world that never has to end, a setting that can forever be home to novels and roleplaying campaigns and board games and much, much more.

This book is a peek at the beating heart of the Realms, at what makes it work and seem alive. A bright buffet of lore, with buckets of little details about all sorts of things. A grand gallimaufry of matters Realmsian, for your perusal and enjoyment.

There is no "right" way to play D&D® or to conduct a Realms campaign, and many gamers won't use or want everything in this book. Yet if it spurs adventure ideas, or provides elements an overworked Dungeon Master can pick up and use rather than having to think through and create anew, it will be useful. It's not an attempt to convince anyone to abide by every detail of canon, but rather to provide lore for those who want to use it, to make more time for unfolding adventures around the gaming table.

Real-world medieval or Renaissance conditions, arts, world views, religious beliefs, or standards of medicine don't directly correspond to the Realms, just as steampunk fiction is seldom accurate Victoriana. So, DMs should feel free to twist matters to make their Realms seem excitingly—or unsettlingly—different.

By my deliberate design and my players' preferences, play in my home Realms campaign has always featured these three characteristics.

1. Player characters have the freedom to do their own thing. Play unfolds in a large and detailed setting so I really can allow PCs the freedom to choose to stroll north today, instead of returning to that mystery in the alley to the south they stumbled into yesterday. No Dungeon Master's carrot-and-stick, no railroading. I present the world, and the players around the table decide where to poke their characters' noses. They control their destinies, and they impose their wills

upon the world. (Yes, they see they can accomplish far more working together, as a united band of adventurers, and act accordingly.) My players run characters of various classes with different interests and obligations. For instance, clerics are under constant pressure from church superiors to do this, that, and the other. And yet, they also continuously pursue their own pet projects (notably investments and trade negotiations), as well as engaging in adventures with the Knights of Myth Drannor. Many play sessions begin with the characters holding a council wherein they debate and decide what to do next, rather than running through a prepared adventure. I lay out the buffet, and they sample what catches their eye.

2. The Realms is constantly unfolding. I keep a flow of current events (and rumors) burbling past my players' ears to make the world seem alive around them and to present a continually renewed, rich selection of adventuring and role-playing opportunities. Part of this ever-changing world is a steady stream of new nonplayer characters (NPCs), which make up the cast of thousands that is the Realms. The key to the Realms is not just that it has a past, but that things happen; history is being made every day. So, over time (and game editions), prices fluctuate and currency morphs. If values given here in gold pieces (gp), silver pieces (sp), and copper pieces (cp) don't seem right for your campaign, change them. Merchants overcharge when they can, and undercharge when they must.

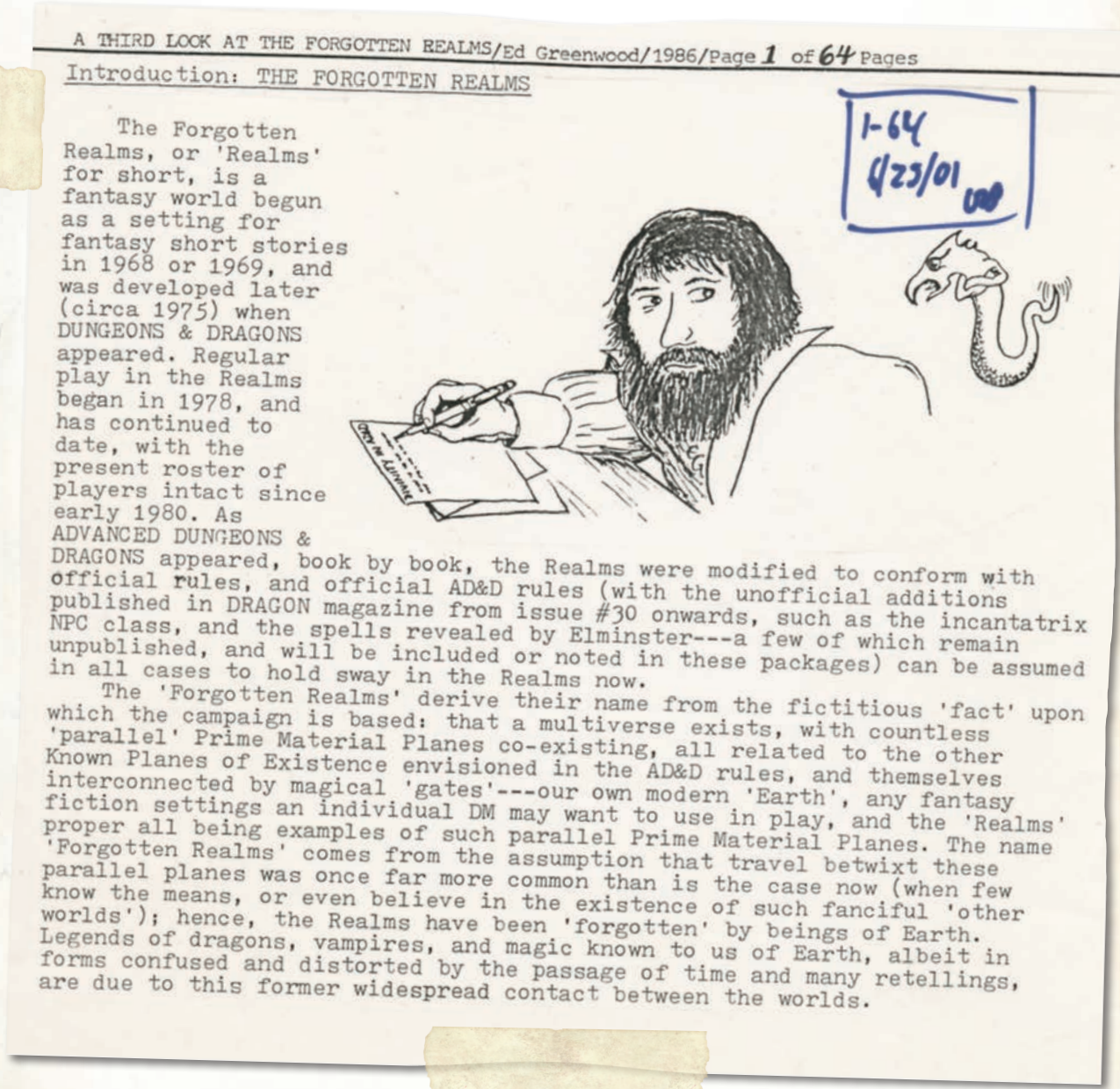
3. Subplots and intrigues abound. I love them, and so do my players. This means mysteries large and small, little secrets and big ones, clever and sinister behind-the-scenes villains (if I wrote Sherlock Holmes, his landlady would eventually turn out to be a sweetly manipulative crime boss, hiding behind his notoriety and proximity), and power groups galore. I try to keep my players so busy their characters have a hard time finding enough time to go off adventuring; there have seldom been less than a dozen subplots in play at a time. Tied to this is the clear understanding that people, groups, and events are all connected in the Realms, so every word and deed has consequences, just as in real life. Of course, in the Realms, the stakes are higher, the pace faster, and the mundane and boring elements are minimized. Clear and swift rewards keep Realmsplay from ever being a daily grind.

These characteristics are key to the longevity and depth of my home Realms campaign, and the thirst for detail that my superb players exhibit has spurred me to build it into the Realms. This in turn made it seem more real to my players, making their imaginary achievements matter more.

My first players were the Company of Crazy Adventurers. Then rose the Swords of Eveningstar, who became the Knights of Myth Drannor. With other players, I explored the Realms in short-term public library games whose participants portrayed

chartered adventuring bands in Cormyr and the Dales such as the Company of the Unicorn and the Company of the Manticore. At conventions for two decades, on three continents, the Baron's Blades (hired bodyguards and agents of the baron of Hawkhill in the remote farming foothills of northeastern Amn) have fared forth into adventure. It's all been a lot of fun, and along the way the Realms has gained far more lore and depth than could ever be published.

Well met! Mount up and join the ride!



A self-portrait of a much younger Ed Greenwood. Take a peek at what I'm writing; "Divinity in AD&D" was my title for "Down-to-Earth Divinity," in issue #54 of The Dragon (I did this sketch to go with that article). It's a reminder to me and everyone that when writing about the Realms---deities in particular!--one must Get It Right. The flying beastie (stated out in 2nd Edition format, somewhere in my houseful of handwritten Realmslore notes) is seemingly none too pleased about what it thinks I'm going to write. Wise little beastie.

A TOUR OF THE REALMS

The name 'Forgotten Realms' comes from the fact that the fantasy world of the Realms is linked to our Earth of today and other parallel Prime Material Planes that a DM wishes (such as the World of Greyhawk, and any favourite worlds depicted in fantasy novels; for example, Fritz Leiber's Nehwon); in the past, there was much travel between these parallel 'worlds' (hence, our legends here on Earth of vampires, dragons, unicorns, et al) but today, most on Earth have forgotten the Realms and the ways to them, hence the name. The Realms proper, the fantasy world of my AD&D campaign, is medieval-level but surprisingly diverse and tolerant; a Prime Material Plane surrounded (as are its parallel 'cousins') by the Known Planes of Existence, as set forth in official AD&D material.

This 'Realms proper' is presently as follows: a vast continent with sea to the west and south (the sea being detailed along the coast as to islands—such as the Moonshae Isles and the perhaps-mythical Isles of Anchóromé mentioned in the DRAGON—and including such island realms as Evermeet, retreat of the elves (who have largely fled the continent as men have grown more numerous and destructive of the woodlands), Ruathym, Lantan, and Nimbral), and an unknown, largely undetailed northern (arctic & glacial), southern, and eastern extent.

The known parts of this continent can be seen on the rough, extremely simplified players' map included herein, and can be summarized as follows:

- *'The North'—a rugged, alpine land of wilderness, monsters, mines, the ruins of earlier civilizations, particularly dwarven kingdoms (i.e. many 'dungeons'), and fortified city-states.
- *Waterdeep—a vast, cosmopolitan New York/London/Paris/Rome-type dominant city, with a proud history and much activity and intrigue.
- *Amn—a merchant kingdom of intrigue and far-travelling explorers and caravan-companies.
- *Cormyr—detailed herein (I have far more material on Cormyr than is here)
- *Anuroch—the Great Desert, which has swallowed up at least two kingdoms within written memory, and is home to lamia, etc.—a possible setting for the existing Desert of Desolation modules.
- *Tethyr—a feudal kingdom; many small and diverse holdings loyal to a powerful monarch; the scene of a recent usurpation and the setting for continuing intrigue and unrest.
- *Calimshan and 'the South'—hot, exotic Middle East/Arabian Nights-style city-states and small kingdoms—including deserts and jungles (and many non-human races). Much of these areas are lightly detailed, leaving lots of 'elbow-room' for designers.
- *the Dalelands—a forested temperate area with many small, autonomous 'dales', strategically located for overland trade.
- *the Moonsea area—a region of recent, fiercely military city-states, most hostile to their neighbours, and all built on the mineral wealth of the bleak lands to the north (such as Thar, seized from the beast-men (= ogres) in the last few hundred years, and the vast 'Great Glacier', still largely unexplored).
- *Impiltur—another feudal kingdom, dominated by rival noble houses of long standing.
- *Thay—most dominant land of the East, a China/Far Eastern-style mysterious and menacing empire, feared for its Red Wizard rulers, who have magical powers unknown elsewhere (Thay and the lands under its sway being suitable Oriental Adventures play settings).
- *The Shaar—separating the Inner Sea lands from the South, a vast plain inhabited by nomadic tribes

(there are also many other, smaller lands on my master maps and in my notes; if they have been developed to any extent, they are noted in the inventory listing given in the covering letter).

In 1986, I began sinking the upper floor of TSR's Lake Geneva headquarters under the weight of many, many typewritten sheets. The principal sufferer was Jeff Grubb, a superlative game designer who became a great friend—and who first suggested that TSR acquire the Realms. Every week, Jeff asked for specific lore, and I assembled and typed it up, and sent it off. This is from the first of many packages; my response to being asked to briefly outline major regions of the Realms for anyone unfamiliar with the world.