



2 LAWS AND ORDERS

Many an adventurer has had to flee from, lie low to avoid the attention of, or deal with the Watch or some form of local law keepers, what the old Amnian ballad calls “the grim stalwarts who face the night armed with lantern, badge, and sword.” And the law these stalwarts enforce isn’t the whim of a Watch officer, but something written down somewhere and meant to be upheld by trial.

In short, there is a justice system with codes of laws that define it, built with the intent to achieve justice—and it is what has made the busy mercantile successes of Faerûn possible. Many years ago, the sage Alaundo wrote: “If proud civilization is a

rampant, roaring dragon, laws and their keepers are its mighty skeleton.”

In the realm of law, as in many other areas of life, those with the most clout usually get to make the rules. In Faerûn, an appropriate synonym for “those with the most clout” would be “the members of the noble class.” No discussion of legality and justice in the Realms can avoid the fact that social class and noble standing (or lack of it) are critical to how the system works for each individual.

As the saying goes: If you don’t handle nobles, nobles will handle you.

CLASS AND NOBILITY

Almost all societies in the Realms are divided into classes based on genealogy and wealth. Individuals can move from class to class, but such is never easy—unless one moves from society to society, leaving the neighbors who have known him or her from birth. Although recent centuries in the Realms have seen a steady rise in the power and status of merchants, most lands have a titled nobility, a ruling class that dominates by birthright—and often also by wealth and competence. Many a poor rogue who lives by wits and desperation dreams of becoming a noble.

In the Realms, some of them even manage it.

Lower Classes: The Haves

In most locales in the Realms, non-noble men and women are considered equals but have traditional roles or fields of dominance. For men, this dominance extends to warfare, sea voyaging, and smithing, and for women, hearth and home and shop keeping. In guilds, members' rights and privileges are never based on gender.

In addition, while most Faerûnian lands have social classes based on wealth and heritage, rigid castes that a person is born into and dies without leaving are found nowhere in the Realms.

The closest thing to a feudal society in the Realms is Tethyr. Almost all Heartlands and more northerly farmers in the Realms are freemen, though a case can be made for serfdom (in fact if not in name; the term “serf” is unknown in the Realms) in Tethyr (before the Black Days), and in present-day Calimshan. Arguably, those latter two countries have more high-yield farmland due to climate, so perhaps some form of serfdom is used in the highest-output farmlands.

The most common Realms term for the equivalent of a serf is “bondsmen,” meaning someone who holds lands under a contract that sets forth conditions. Of course, the duties and rules for a bondsman don't directly correspond to those of real-world serfs.

Certainly the duchies of Tethyr and the border baronies of Amn, such as Cormyr, are feudal in nature, but that term isn't used to connote a serfdom. Rather, it means that the local lord has to render military support to the ruler when called upon, and in turn has the power to commandeer

portions of crop yields from the farms under the local lord's protection (and in some cases “yeoman warriors” from among the farmhands) when the need arises.

No farmer in the Dales is anything but a freeholder (“freeman” or “freewoman”) or a hired “crofter” working and living on lands owned by another and paying rent to that owner in the form of either coin or a portion of the crop yield.

In Sembia and upland Cormyr, crofters are the norm. Except for the strips of land alongside major roads and in the most remote locales, almost all the tilled land is owned by one wealthy family or another. In “downland” Cormyr (roughly, south of Immersea and Waymoot), some wealthy families own large numbers of separate city buildings or small farms, but their properties are scattered among the small holds of independent Cormyrean citizens (“freefolk”).

Nobles: The Have-Mores

What advantages does being noble give someone?

In most places, being noble gives you special treatment under the law thorough kinder investigations and fairer trials. Nobles tend to have rights lesser folk lack, even something as trivial as being allowed to stop and leave their coach in the middle of a street, or being allowed to enter or leave a city at all hours, when gates would remain firmly shut for others.

Most important: Nobles have connections. Nobles grow up knowing the right people to get things done—everything from quietly arranging investments, to giving jobs, to where to find (“source” in polite speech) almost anything. They are taught the local ways of successfully commanding, demanding, and influencing—and are expected to use them. Most certainly do.

By and large, nobles do not exercise their influence in an outright malicious way; to do so would be to unnecessarily invite discontent among those wronged. Exceptions exist, however.

For example, in the largest and most prosperous cities of Faerûn (such as Waterdeep, Athkatla, Suzail, and all the cities of Sembia), there are wealthy youths who because of their family prosperity have leisure and coin enough to pursue fashions and interests at idle whim. They often do so in ways that disgust or unsettle their parents, as a form of rebellion. Some young nobles play at