

Netheril: Empire of Magic

by slade with Jim Butler

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Netheril evokes images of a mystical territory of glistening beauty and cultivated extravagance—of days unfettered by care and nights untouched by the hand of darkness. Most think of Netheril as the land of plenty—of the magical dream come true. Paradise.

Was everything so perfect? Was Netheril the age that should be instead of the age that was? Was Netheril really the climax of humanity? If so, why did the kingdom abruptly collapse with so few survivors? Within the pages of these books, mysteries are revealed. Here, you and your character will experience—first-hand—the awesome power and lavishness that was Netheril.

Many rules have been altered to fit the peculiar setting of Netheril, but with little adjustment, play can commence immediately. DMs and players alike will easily find the rules needed to play in the setting. In particular, arcanists, priests, deities, spells, and magical items are altered slightly to fit in with the "primitive magic" permeating Netheril.

So, welcome to paradise, and live in cultivated extravagance for as long as the magical dream stays true.

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December 31, 1995

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Netheril

Welcome to the Netheril: Empire of Magic campaign expansion for the Forgotten Realms® Campaign Setting. This boxed set contains all the information a Dungeon Master requires to begin a series of epic adventures Faerûn's past. From the birth of Netherese society until it's thousands of years later, this campaign expansion contains all of the relevant facts about one of the Realms' most magical of kingdoms.

It's important that the Dungeon Master read through all of the materials before beginning play or allowing players to create characters for the setting. This allows the DM to better answer player questions regarding events that their characters would have knowledge of. Players should read the Campaign chapter so that they can become familiar with the changes that Netheril bestows upon character classes, relying on the DM to answer other questions that their characters might have concerning Netheril.

History

The dusty corridors of Warlock's Keep led everywhere and yet nowhere, but Szass Tam knew where he was going. Walking through seemingly solid walls, Thay's Zulkir of Necromancy felt his body magically whisked away to deeper and darker chambers of Keep. The lich glanced around the halls as he walked, noting the many traps that would have destroyed a mortal form that walked these halls.

"Larloch!" Szass called out, entering an ancient library. "I bring part of the payment that I promised you. Show yourself."

"Ashrath," intoned a rumbling voice some distance away. The library slowly illuminated itself in a flickering red glow, casting a fiery light across the assembled tomes. "I've been expecting you, Tam," the voice intoned. "But you're still three weeks late with payment."

Szass Tam walked toward the sound of the voice, rounding the end of a bookshelf and strolling nonchalantly toward an ornate golden throne pushed into a corner. Larloch, the ancient lich who hailed from Netheril, sat amidst a clutter of books and braziers.

The Shadow King's body was in stark contrast to that of Tam. While the Zulkir of Necromancy strove to maintain his human appearance, Larloch was nothing more than a collection of bones partially covered in fine garments. The Netheril lich's bones were bright white in color, and trails of emerald energy traveled across his form. More than two dozen ioun stones circled his skull, and globes of red light gazed up at Szass Tam as he approached.

"As I expected, we ran into some Harper resistance," Tam replied, taking a seat opposite the Shadow King. "They weren't going to give up the mantle without a fight."

"If they had any inkling of its power, they wouldn't have given it up in death, either," Larloch grumbled. With a wave of his hand, the entire collection of books that lay before him scattered back to their appropriate shelf. His skeletal hand then reached toward Tam. "The mantle?" he asked.

Szass reached into a pouch and pulled from its magical confines a metal vest enveloped in a violet glow. Larloch's red eyes shimmered briefly for a moment, determining the magic surrounding the mantle to be a form of preservation spell. He then took the vest from Szass and laid it on the table. A moment later, Larloch glanced up at Szass Tam.

"Why are you still here, Tam?" questioned the ancient lich. "This part of your payment is completed."

"The search for this ancient magic has raised my curiosity," the Zulkir replied. "I wish to know more about what Netheril really was."

A long moment of silence descended over the two undead creatures, their gazes locked on one another. If Szass would have had a heart, it would have been racing. Finally, Larloch replied.

"You are both vain and impetuous," the Shadow King replied. "All who have visited me in the past have been destroyed, regardless of their allegiance."

"That's because the others who came before me were inept," said Szass.

"True," replied Larloch. "You have not failed me," he intoned. "Not yet."

Another long moment of silence filled the library. Years could have passed for all either of the undead cared. Time was meaningless. Finally, without warning or preamble, Larloch, the Shadow King, revealed the secret past of Netheril.

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The First Age

Netheril's history began nearly 5,000 years ago at the site of seven fishing villages during the time of the First Flowering. Those who follow Dalereckoning would place the date at -3859 DR, but to the Netherese, it was the dawn of the new age. Within a scant few decades, the citizens of the fishing villages of Fenwick, Gers, Gilan, Gustaf, Moran, Nauseef, and Janick referred to the years as NY, which stood for Netheril Years (unless otherwise noted, all years past this point are in Netheril Years). The birth of Netheril was known as the First Age, lasting up until the year 326 NY.

The villages had made the decision to band together for mutual protection against marauding orc bands. The shaman king of Gers, called Nether the Elder, created a calendar to celebrate the union. The coalition of villages was named Seventon, since the marriage of seven villages created the newfound nation. Great joy reigned through Seventon, the people celebrating both their first steps toward civilization and the wisdom of their leaders.

A few years later, however, King Nether renamed the kingdom Netheril, which meant Nether's Land. He demanded more and more tribute from the united villages, and many feared that Seventon would collapse. The citizens from the united villages cried out in protest, and the future for the kingdom began to look very dim.

A poisoned dirk signaled the end of Nether the Elder's reign, however, and a strong and just successor—Nether the Younger—stepped in to take control. No one ever learned who held the lethal blade, and frankly, no one was really in any hurry to find out. The stress of living under a tyrannical and egotistical leader fell away, and the people lived in peace once again, free to concentrate on trade. The nation's name, however, stood the test of time.

The Netherese chose a new form of government—one based loosely on democracy. They had a single king whose surviving firstborn was destined to take the place of the elder, but the leaders of each village had a single vote. The vote of the king was worth five votes, however, giving him more political clout than any single leader.

Fourteen years after the formation of Netheril, the Earlanni elves approached the loosely tied villages. Until this time, elves were a mere myth—imaginary creatures sent by the gods to lend a hand and redirect erred humans to the correct path. Netheril bowed its head in awe to these "messengers of the earth spirits" and venerated them. It took several years for the elves to convince these scarcely civilized humans that they were mortals. With this accomplished, the elves established trade with Netheril beginning a friendship that lasted for centuries.

One of the many things the elves traded was magic. Nether the Younger's friend, Therion Gers, was the first Netherese to learn this new trade. After one year of tutelage in the ways of cantras (0-level spells), he cast a spell to start a campfire. Two years later, the community considered the first human arcanist (Netheril's name for a wizard) the third-most-important person in their society, under Nether the Young and Spiritsummoner the shaman. The people changed the mage's name to Therion the First of Gers, since he was the first arcanist of Netheril.

For the next century, trade continued with the elves, and magic use in this small nation grew in leaps and bounds. Unlike many other cultures, magic use was considered essential, and everyone who turned the age of ascension (13 summers) was taught the ways of magic. Those showing an aptitude were taught more than those who had a lazy, careless attitude toward it. The importance placed on magic helped bring Netheril to the top of Toril's magical nations.

Word of a nation of "humanlike rock beings who dwelled in earthen mountains and hills" reached the ears of the Netherese around year 132. The brave traveled south and far to the west in search of these strange, stone creatures. To the south, the trail turned cold, and the scouts returned empty handed. The scouts who traveled west headed farther and farther with each expedition, and each time, the trail seemed to get warmer.

By 204, the western-reaching scouts intercepted a Rengarth hunting party and befriended them. These nomadic human barbarians told tales of the peoples populating the underground and revealed the location of the rock creatures to the Netherese. The scouts sent word back to Seventon, reporting their new-found information, and immediately headed toward the mountains to the north.

As they approached the Barren Mountains south of the Cold Forest, the adventurers were beset by one of the largest orc hordes ever to hit the area. No one survived to warn the Rengarth people or the Netherese of the approach of the horde.

As the orcs cut a 20-mile-wide swath of death and carnage across the Rengarth ancestral lands and swooped south and west toward the elves, the Eaerlanni and Illefarni nations prepared for war. With aid from Netheril (a token—but sincere—gesture compared to the might of the elves, considering Seventon's low population and magical ineptitude), the elves began a long-running campaign to remove the orc threat.

The elves of Eaerlann were the greatest threat to the orc invasion, and their warriors and arcanists fought with such fervor that the Netherese were in awe. Behind Netheril, the Illefarn elves battled the orcs. It was believed Illefarn had importance in only two battles, their presence elsewhere barren of results.

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The Nether Age

The year 326 marked one of the most important dates in Netheril's history-the discovery of the *nether scrolls* (these scrolls are detailed in the *Encyclopedia Arcana* supplement). This set of 100 scrolls provided the Netherese with an incredible jump in spellcraft unseen in the history of Toril. This was an age of tremendous learning in Netheril that lasted until the birth of its greatest archwizards.

The person responsible for unearthing these vital pieces of magical lore was unknown; he's referred to as Finder. While searching the area west of the Far Horns Forest, Finder ran across an ancient ruined building that appeared to have been inhabited by a race who utilized the walls as well as the floor. The chairs and utilitarian furnishings seemed to indicate the species possessed more than two legs—possibly four.

Finder searched every nook and cranny in this old, dilapidated building, hoping to find something of value to sell when he reached home. When he discovered the gold scrolls, he realized he had found something worth far beyond the scrolls' monetary value. He returned the scrolls to Netheril and studied them incessantly. Finder discovered that the 100 gold pages were actually two sets of 50 scrolls. One set looked much older and tarnished than the other. He called the gold foils the *nether scrolls*, named after the nation of his birth, and shared his newfound information with the arcanists of Seventon and Zenith a few years later. Within a few short decades, everyone in Netheril was blessed with the knowledge contained in the scrolls.

Congenio's Pebbles

Few spellcasters existed that commanded the respect of their peers, and fewer still are those whose names survived millennia after their death. Congenio Ioun was one such arcanist; his name is still known 4,000 years after his death in the form of *ioun stones*. These magical stones floated above the head of their owner, bestowing a variety of special powers, and they were highly sought after by the arcanists of Netheril.

Congenio was born in the year 364 and, in an unprecedented feat of skill, created his first magical item at the age of 33: *Congenio's pebbles*. During his lifetime, he created over 30 *Congenio's pebbles* that did everything from allow a creature to see in the dark to provide a temporary level increase.

In the year 451, he changed the name of the pebbles to *Ioun's stones*, and in 1319, he passed away to the realms of the gods, living an abundant 955 years. Congenio was considered the first major arcanist to come out of Netheril and was always looked upon as a genius before his time.

Delzoun

In the year 401—after 269 years of searching—the Netherese finally discovered the realm of the stout, short, humanoid creatures who dwelled within the hills and mountains. The creatures were none other than the dwarves of Delzoun. The long search to find the dwarves didn't make establishing ties any easier, however.

It took a few years to discover what each culture wanted from the other. The Netherese found it nearly impossible to sell their new magical items and spell research techniques to the dwarves, since the dweomers failed to function some of the time (the Netherese believed this was due to the dwarves' closeness to Jannath, whom Netherese sages saw as being a very nonmagical being). The dwarves found a steady purchaser of finely crafted metal weapons in the Netherese, however, and that single commodity consumed most of the trading between Delzoun and Netheril.

The Netherese established trade routes across the Narrow Sea between the dwarven port city of Ascore and the Netherese cities of Harborage and Zenith. They also created the Lowroad, which passed through a heavily guarded passage through the Underdark. Back before the days of the phaerimm, this was an area actively patrolled by the dwarves in order to keep it free of illithids, drow, and other denizens of the evil Underdark.

Mythallar Era

With the discovery of the *nether scrolls* behind them, the Netherese now concentrated on spellcasting. The Mythallar Era provided the one invention that would shape Netheril's future in ways no one could possibly foresee. It took its creators to amazing heights of power.

Ioulaum

One of the greatest human archwizards to ever grace the lands of Toril—quite possibly the longest-lived creature known—was born in 544. Ioulaum was a major catalyst for Netherese spellcraft, training over 3,000 arcanists. Without his imposing presence, the magical *mythallar* (discussed below and detailed in the *Encyclopedia Arcana* supplement) that allowed Netheril's cities to float in the air might never have been created.

Ioulaum led a major battle in 714, bringing thousands of Netherese spellcasters and warriors to mount an attack against the largest concentration of orcs in Netheril's land at the time—leading them into the Rampant Peaks. Fourteen days later, the orcs retreated, but not before over 18,000 bodies lay rotting on the slopes and valleys of the Rampant Peaks, 10,000 of whom were orc corpses.

Ioulaum, however, was not finished. He wanted to find out where the orcs were stationed, and he wanted to remove the threat forever. He tired of the loss of people, food, and caravan cargo to the looting beasts, and nothing was going to stop this conflict until every orc was exterminated. After years of scouting, tracking, and scrying, Ioulaum's outriders and seers found their major habitats: the knolls surrounding the headwaters of the Canton River.

With more than 50,000 troops, Ioulaum began his greatest campaign—a war that lasted 16 months. Called the "Excursion into Extinction," Ioulaum led 32,000 troops to their death, but he succeeded. No orc was able to escape Ioulaum's gauntlet, since the whole area was surrounded and magical *gates* set up throughout the hills allowed the instantaneous transport of troops from one location to another in order to block all points of desertion. Over 140,000 orcs were slaughtered, their bodies reddening the snows of two mountains that became known as Bone Hill and Thunder Peak.

The First Loss

In the year 764, a tragedy occurred in Netheril: Half of the *nether scrolls*— one complete set—were stolen. The two copies, luckily, were separated in order to assure that one copy would remain in case of fire or other loss. The newer-looking set was stolen and never found. The storage vaults used to contain the scrolls were sealed, alarmed, and trapped to the best of Netheril's magical ability, but the scrolls were nonetheless removed without setting off the alarms, unsealing the vault, or activating the traps.

The Mythallar

Ioulaum proved his importance in the year 845, when he created the *mythallar*. This magical device dug deep into the weave of magic (controlled by the goddess Mystryl) and gave access to raw, unfiltered magic. It allowed Netherese arcanists to create magical items without need of a *permanency* spell and provided the constant magical force that allowed entire mountains to hover in the air.

Before this device was created, Netherese arcanists could place only simple dweomers on small objects with limited abilities—at the supreme cost of a mage's vitality. In times before the *mythallar*, arcanists who made multiple permanent magical items could be picked out of the crowd: Their bodies appeared much older and bent than their years. The process of making an item with permanent effects took its power from the mage's body, a process not many arcanists were willing to succumb to.

With the advent of the *mythallar*, arcanists were able to create magical items that would, in effect, be permanent incantations as long as they stayed within the one-mile-radius effect of the *mythallar*. The first of these quasimagical items was created in 848 by Ioulaum himself. He created an elaborate mantle that allowed the wearer to see in the dark and hear the thoughts of all those within 20 feet.

Once this magical item was created, the floodgates were opened, and the nation of Netheril was suddenly faced with a glut of magical items. The prices of such quasimagical items dropped to one-tenth the going rate for "real" magical items.

Sample file