Volo's Waterdeep Enchiridion

A Visitor's Guide to the City's Splendors



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By Volothamp Geddarm

Under the generous patronage of the Lords Melshimber

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I, Volothamp Geddarm, verily attest to the veracity of the words printed herein. "Set your course by the truth and you shall never be lost, no matter how far you wander." I coined this well-worn adage myself years ago, and it has served me well in all my travels.*

*Consider any antinomy, jactitation, mendacity, obloquy, pasquinade, parapraxis, traducement, or similar found in this document to be corrigendum. Address all claims of such to:

Abricade Fellswop, Solicitor
17 Mulgomir's Way, Castle Ward
Waterdeep

Welcome, Traveler! You have in your hands the foremost and most up-to-date guide to the city—smiled over by none other than its Open Lord, Lady Laeral Silverhand. This chapbook will serve you well until my seminal work on the subject, *Volo's Guide to Waterdeep*—sadly long out of print, but now a tome prized by collectors—can be updated and printed anew. Ask any broadsheet seller, innkeeper, shopkeeper, tavern owner, or bookseller if they'll soon have copies of the new edition for sale!

Entering Waterdeep

Likely you have already arrived in Waterdeep and borne witness to some of its many wonders. But in case this pamphlet has found its way beneath your worthy eyes in anticipation of your visit, due to the commendable efforts of some friend or family member who loves you dearly, I shall explain briefly the circumstances of entry.

You will have traveled through lands claimed and controlled by the Lords of Waterdeep long before you see its walls. If you've come from the south by the Trade Way, you'll have met the City Guard at their post at Zundbridge. From the north by way of the Long Road, you'll have passed under their watchful eyes at the town of Rassalantar. And whether by land or sea, you'll likely also have been spotted by the Griffon Cavalry—even if you have not spotted them.

Worry not. Waterdeep is a welcoming city, and you have nothing to fear from these guardians unless you lead a rampaging army of orcs, a horde of gnolls, or similar. They don't even require a toll be paid. (Beware any City Guard who demands a toll, and report the incident to a magister of Waterdeep at your earliest convenience.)

If you travel in a large caravan or on a ship, you will be required to register with a magister at the gate at which you arrived or with the harbor magister. Magisters can easily be recognized by the black robes they wear (and, in fact, are commonly called "black robes" as a result) and the City Guard force that always accompanies them. Be aware that magisters can pass a sentence without a trial. It behooves you to treat them with proper respect.

If you travel overland in a small party or alone, you aren't required to register with a magister unless your stay extends beyond a tenday. At that point, you must register with a magister either at the harbor, the gates, or the city courts. Discovery of your failure to do so can result in a fine or forced labor. Of course, registration subjects you to monthly taxation. But as a truculent old acquaintance from the Dales once told me, "The sheep gives the shepherd its fleece or there'll be mutton for dinner." That is, the magisters will get you either way, so you might as well register up front.

That said, many canny visitors with business for a month or a season betimes avail themselves of the hospitality of inns in Undercliff, the pleasant farmland east of the city proper. The less well-off often find accommodation in the Field Ward. Because neither are official wards of the city, they aren't subject to taxation. Note, however, that because both these areas have yet to be formally accepted as wards of the city, they don't benefit from the securities of Guild Law or the protection of the Watch. If you choose to follow this path, be on your guard. Fools rush in where auditors fear to tread.

Regardless of what size party you arrive with or by what means, if you arrive by night or in winter, expect to register. In winter and at night the gates are shut. Ships aren't expected at night or as a regular occurrence after the first frost of the coming season, and are often met at docking by a magister—or by a contingent of the Guard who will hold travelers aboard until a magister can be summoned.

None of these rules apply to the city's least used gate, the West Gate. This smaller gate opens onto the Mud Flats—a mucky beach used by clam diggers, shore fishers, and those brave enough to bathe in the cold waves. Those who make a living through fishing with nets or traps also use this gate, keeping their small boats on the beach to avoid docking fees. Locals register with the Guard as they exit and as they enter. No magister is stationed at the gate, but no new arrivals to Waterdeep are accepted here.

If you approach by air, expect a vigorous pursuit by and confrontation with the Griffon Cavalry. Only specially licensed individuals and mounts can fly over Waterdeep. It is best to land well outside the city and approach on foot.

Your Arrival in the City

The splendors that await you in Waterdeep are legendary. Each of the city's wards is detailed in this work, telling you what to expect depending on where you are, as well as what thrilling things you might see and do. Before that, however, there are the small matters of knowing something of the history of the place you visit, and of understanding how to comport yourself in the Sword Coast's grandest metropolis.

A Long History (in Brief)

"There shall come a time when our city and its deepwater bay shall grow in fame and fortune across many realms and many worlds. Folk shall know of Waterdeep, our City of Splendors, and sing its praises. I have seen it thus, and I endeavor to make it true."

—Ahghairon, the first Open Lord of Waterdeep, circa 1032 DR

People have inhabited the plateau upon which Waterdeep stands for longer than human histories record. But as is the way across the dangerous North, civilization at the foot of Mount Waterdeep has crested and ebbed in great waves. Elf scholars assure me that it was once the site of Aelinthaldaar, the capital of their ancient empire of Illefarn. So it was already a glorious place when a dwarf prospector named Melair discovered mithral beneath the mountain. In agreement with the Illefarni, Melair called kith and kin to mine under the mountain and in the plateau, and thus Clan Melairkyn came to rule below as the Illefarni did above.

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The Sea Maidens Faire parade

But this fruitful alliance lasted less than the lifetime of a dwarf, for the emperor of the elves—what they call a "coronal"—commanded that all leave in the Retreat, that great exodus of elves from Faerûn to their mystical isle of Evermeet. Not all elves agreed with this edict, and many were determined to stay. Well, what emperor has ever willingly allowed another to sit in his throne? The coronal had all of Aelinthaldaar razed by magic, and the remaining elves splintered into separate kingdoms. The Melairkyn, of course, saw this as a breaking of their bargain, and never again did they deal with elves. Instead, they tunneled ever deeper under the mountain, never to be heard from again.

So it was that the humans who came to the deepwater harbor found it empty and suitable for their own purposes. For more than a thousand years, folk lived and traded at the site of what would become Waterdeep, but their identities remain a mystery—with a curious exception. We know that at some point during this period, the wizard Halaster Blackcloak built his tower at the base of Mount Waterdeep and came to rule the lands around—until he, like the Melairkyn, vanished under the mountain.

Various warlords later claimed the plateau's harbor as their own, but it was one known as Nimoar who is best remembered. *A History of Waterdeep: Age One, The Rise of the Warlord* records how Nimoar raised a wooden stockade to protect the settlement around the harbor, claiming rule over the town that by then was being called "Nimoar's Hold, the Town of Waters Deep."

War between orcs and elves in lands farther north drove hordes of trolls south to claw at the fledgling city, and amid this danger, Nimoar died of old age. Many bloody struggles unfolded between local folk and trolls, until the magic of a youth named Ahghairon turned the fortunes of war against the "everlasting ones," which were destroyed or scattered. Ahghairon improved slowly in skill and power with the passage of the years, until he became a great mage. He is said to have discovered a supply of *potions of longevity*, or learned the art of making such, for he lived on and on, still physically in his prime for decade after decade.

A History of Waterdeep: Age Two, The Lords' Rule Begins records that in the year 1032 DR, Ahghairon (then in his 112th winter) argued with Raurlor, who was then Warlord of Waterdeep. Raurlor wanted to use Waterdeep's acquired wealth and strength of arms to create a northern empire. Ahghairon defied him before all the people, and Raurlor ordered the mage to be chained. But when Ahghairon magically turned aside all who sought to lay hands on him, Raurlor struck at the mage with his own sword. Ahghairon then rose into the air, just out of reach, and used his magic to transmute Raurlor's blade into a hissing serpent. When the serpent struck Raurlor, he died in full view of his shocked followers.

Ahghairon then gathered the leaders of Waterdeep's armies and powerful families. While runners sought to bring them to the castle, flames roared and crackled in the empty warlord's throne at Ahghairon's bidding, so

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that none could sit there. Then, when the gathered host of worthies met in the audience chamber, the wizard seated himself on the flaming throne. Immediately the fires died away, leaving both the throne and Ahghairon unharmed.

From this seat—the very one on which the Open Lord sits to this day—Ahghairon decreed how the city would be governed. While he would sit as lord openly, a council of other lords of nearly equal power would rule with him. But the identity of those other lords would be hidden even from each other, thus preventing any of them from being approached and influenced by bribe or threat. So it was that Ahghairon established Waterdeep's system of governance.

Ahghairon was instrumental in establishing many of Waterdeep's other institutions, such as its black-robed magisters, its Griffon Cavalry, and the city's many guilds. The first Open Lord ruled wisely for over two centuries before the magic sustaining his health failed. He now lies entombed in his tower, which you can still see standing in the courtyard of the Palace of Waterdeep. Beware that you don't approach too close, however, lest you stumble into the invisible barrier—a "force cage," I am told—that surrounds the tower.

Within that barrier lie additional protective wards, as demonstrated by the floating bones of the last person who tried to defy them. The name of this poor soul has been lost to time, but the miscreant was likely a wizard who sought to steal the magic treasures that had been entombed with their former owner. Now they hang in the air beyond the invisible force cage in rough semblance of their natural position, occasionally displaced temporarily by strong winds or mischievous children with long sticks.

Ahghairon's wise rule is celebrated on the first day of Eleasis, which has come to be known as Ahghairon's Day. For more about this day, see "City Celebrations."

Many significant events stand out in Waterdeep's history. But none have had so great an effect on daily life than the three apocalyptic periods known as the Time of Troubles, the Spellplague, and the Sundering—the most recent (and hopefully final). On all these occasions, the actions of gods at war with one another led to the loss or the twisting of magic in the world. During the Time of Troubles, Waterdeep stood at the center of events. But the effects of the more recent crises can still be seen in the city today, even though they occurred a great distance from where Waterdeep stands.

When the gods walked among mortals during the Time of Troubles, they were cast down to the world by the mysterious Overgod Ao in 1358 DR. Until then, none but the gods had known of Ao's existence, and since then, we have learned little more. As all know, the crisis began with the theft of the *Tablets of Fate* by the vile and ambitious gods Bane and Myrkul, later joined by Bhaal. These mystic artifacts supposedly determine the extent of the gods' power, and dictate how they use that power. As punishment for this affront, Ao cast down the gods (or the ones that humans worshiped, at any rate) and then demanded that they return the tablets to him.

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