

ARTICLE

A STATUESQUE AFFAIR

Statues can be works of art—or a means to move other items. Find out more about Mirt's interest in statues.

Longtime Realms fans may be aware of the saga of Ilserv, the mind flayer who was petrified by the beholder Xanathar (in the twelfth issue of the classic *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* comic, from DC) and ended up as a statue in the garden of Mirt's Mansion. In the *Forgotten Realms Annual #1* comic, this statue was later smashed, presumably killing Ilserv—but according to the Realms sourcebook *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark*, Ilserv was safely returned to fleshly life from statue form.

Aha! A continuity contradiction! Verily, a canon-shattering error!

Well, not so fast. Or as Mirt said, with a chuckle and a dismissive wave of one hand, "Not so!"

After a stealthy night assault on his Castle



Ward home that involved hired hostile mages using dispelling magic that “undid” a lot of things better left undisturbed, Mirt decided it was too dangerous to have statues that were petrified living creatures out in his garden, where malicious or merely misdirected magic might unleash them to maraud through the city—or his home. Such sculptures, he reasoned, were better placed in some of the Mount Waterdeep caverns linked (behind doors concealed in some very nice dark shadowtop paneling) to the northwestern ground floor of his mansion, which served him as private cellars.

Since he was already in the habit of having all his statues (and small table and pedestal statuettes, too) moved around thrice a year or so to ward off becoming bored with them, this was easily done without arousing the curiosity of either his servants or various guests he hosted.

So the “Ilserv” that got shattered was a mere stone shape, a duplicate done on commission by the visiting wizard Emmer Halarkenbrand of Athkatla, who was mastering various stoneshaping spells at the time. The real Ilserv spent some time in one of Mirt’s nicely furnished cellars—the very room, as it happened, where the rotund lord was wont to game with close friends (often playing something they called “Crazed Lords of the City,” that bears a striking resemblance to a boxed game known in our world as *Lords of Waterdeep*), before being released from stony durance vile.

Now we must ponder this: just why does Mirt, a wine- and coin-loving ex-mercenary, enthusiastic intriguer, and sometime adventurer, have a thing for statues?

A few of his decorations were magnificent depictions of immodest femininity that might be expected to appeal to a man of Mirt’s known appetites, but beyond those salacious handful, his collection spanned a wide variety of subjects, media, sizes, and styles. Some were gifts, others were investments or given as part payment of debts, and still others were lent to him for “safer storage than I can manage.” Mirt professed to love the arts and to buy sculptures for their own sake, and when it comes to such sultry pieces as “Lureeauna Surprised” and “Battle in the Boudoir,” Elminster accepts that claim—but as for “Inspired by a Spiderweb at Dawn” or “Moondew Nightmare,” the Sage of Shadowdale believeth Mirt not.

The truth? El wormed it out of the Old Wolf much, much later, during the first year of Mirt’s new life in Cormyr almost a century after he was last seen in Waterdeep. It seems that sometime in the late 1340s DR, Mirt had hit upon the idea of using statues to hide contraband (readily identifiable stolen goods, prohibited items, and even captured

pretenders to thrones and “too hot to have out and about” criminals and agents provocateur) around his mansion.



THE FAKE STATUE DODGE

Though it passed unnoticed at the time, it now appears that the use of fake duplicate statues was popular among a handful of Waterdhavian lords and nobles back in the 1100s DR. Certain statues in the walled grounds of nobles' city mansions could stand up to scrutiny of guests at a revel, but then be switched out when more suspicious house guests were expected, and “put into storage” on noble estates. What really happened was that hollow “storage statues” made the trip, while the solid ones were immersed in fish ponds, fountains, and ornamental pools on the city estate; the storage statues could take items or wealth out to the country estates, and bring back taxable items into the city unseen by tax collectors. Under the laws of Waterdeep at the time, imported magic items and spell scrolls were subject to stiff duties or

confiscation by the Watchful Order, depending on their nature.

Once knowledge of this deceit spread, it fell out of favor, and subsequent changes in the laws made importation of magic cheaper and easier and removed much of the incentive. After all, dragging statues on and off wagons is costly work, and nobles aren't immune to the urge to pinch coins.

A few nobles have more private reasons for statue-related deceptions. In at least one later case (that of the murderous Lord Velmar Snome, 1389–1446 DR), statues in his grounds contained the bodies of slain guests and servants.

MIRT'S RECENT STATUESQUE DOINGS

These days, as the 1400s DR draw to a close, Mirt is a resident of Cormyr. His statues are half a continent away, scattered to various places in and around the City of Splendors.

Including one, it seems, Mirt wanted back.

Rather than recount the endless half-truths and speculations surrounding the Old Wolf's recent statue-related deeds, Elminster has generously shared in plain words what he eventually learned (after a request from an exasperated Vangerdahast to uncover the truth, following on the Wizard of War Glathra Barcantle asking the former Royal Magician to look into the matter, and his failing to learn much).

During the 1350s DR, Mirt had a statue of a rather ugly and forbidding old woman made for him, carved out of wood by a poor carpenter in Amphail. Then he hired a visiting outlander wizard to petrify it with a particular spell—worded so that it would not affect what the statue contained in an interior cavity: a large sack of rubies, emerald, sapphires, and other valuable gems.

Desiring to reacquire this small fortune to live on, in his new life in Cormyr more than a century later, Mirt hired some adventurers to “steal back” the statue for him—from the room in Piergeiron's Palace to which it had been relocated since his own disappearance and presumed death. He specified that the statue must reach him intact, and so it did.

While hiring a certain daring band known as Thultan's Triumph, Mirt posed as a caravan merchant under the assumed name of Ils Braszjalakh (the original owner of

that name was a former and long-dead rival of his), who was hired to watch over the conveyance of that statue to Suzail, to a purchaser there, one “Lord Elesker” (who was, of course, Mirt himself, under another assumed name).

Mirt used the name of a dying Cormyrean lord (the last of his line, who expired within days of the statue’s arrival) to import the statue and so avoid a customs inspection. Nobility of the Forest Kingdom are allowed to freely import and export works of art, since they serve as alternatives to moving large amounts of coin, gems, and trade-bars out of the country, which would create temporary localized shortages.

The stratagem worked, but aroused the suspicions of certain Cormyr-resident Zhentarim, who, tipped off anonymously by a certain Manshoon, believe Mirt is covertly importing monsters he has magical control over, so as to form a criminal band and make his bid for behind-the-scenes power amongst Cormyr’s nobles. Manshoon has also misled some War Wizards into believing this, purely to inconvenience Mirt—because the Old Wolf is one of the few people in the realm who knows exactly who and what Manshoon is, and is up to.

So the Lord Warder Vainrence is now investigating the “old woman” statue recently imported from Waterdeep, and its importers. Mirt wasted no time in toppling and shattering the statue and making off with the gems when the real Lord Devaunt Elesker died, but had to depart so hastily that he couldn’t damage the statue thoroughly enough to obliterate all signs of that interior cavity.

So the Lord Warder, and therefore every last Wizard of War in the realm, is now doubly suspicious.

Mirt is taking care to pose as a retired and indolent toper and womanizer who neither possesses nor tries to spend or exchange any gems at all, but this deception is now complicated by the fact that an old enemy of Mirt’s, the sorceress Nelaskra Ulbrinter (a ruthless noblewoman of Waterdeep, the “black sheep” of her generation of the family), has come to Cormyr looking for him. Born in 1349 DR, she survived the Spellplague in self-induced stasis, having long ago mastered the ability of petrifying herself to elude searches in relative safety. However, the Spellplague wreaked havoc with her “changing herself back again” timing, so she stood in stone for nigh a century.

Only her utter lack of hesitation in hurling magic at anyone who displeases her has kept her from reaching Mirt thus far. She disputed the right of some War Wizards to

curb her behavior very soon after arriving in the Forest Kingdom, and she eventually had to flee from the reinforcements they called in, then take on another name and guise. She's somewhere in Suzail right now, hunting Mirt.

Nelaskra is one of those delightful people who must blame someone other than themselves for everything bad that happens, or situations that don't meet with their approval. She blames Mirt for the many years she spent petrified. Elminster commented dryly that the Old Wolf can't even try playing statue to escape her, as it's one dodge she's a thorough expert at.

What will happen? As Elminster added dryly, "I believe the appropriate expression in thy world is: Stay tuned."

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