

## ARTICLE

# AFTER THE FALL

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Venture with Ed Greenwood into the events that happened after *The Herald*—but be wary. If you wish to avoid spoilers, consider reading the novel first!

This time around, we're looking at an element of the Realms after the events of *The Herald*, in the waning months of 1487 DR, so please consider these first few lines a spoiler warning.

Cue gentle and melodious background music, as I soothingly tell you about this year's bumper crop of thaethe flowers—those large edible mauve blossoms used for salads and garnishes in the Vilhon, that are now growing wild over the hills of Tanistan, and are finding their ways onto tables throughout ErIkazar. And now I'll touch upon the intriguing rise in popularity of traveling bards who intersperse their ballads and laments with short, cynically humorous one-act plays about the changing expectations of gods regarding mortals—and the changing nature of daily life in every kingdom they happen to be performing in. The brilliant comic and mimic Imlith Khaldregarr is fast becoming famous across Faerûn.

Right, warned and spoiled enough?

Good. On to our main theme: the fate of the surviving Shadovar after what happened in *The Herald*.

Simply put, life ended abruptly for some inhabitants of the Netherese city of Thultanthar, also known as “Shade,” and it changed markedly for others (the survivors). Herein, we take a look at what happened to the city and what some of those survivors are now up to.

## THE DAY A CITY FELL

In the final battle for Myth Drannor, mercenary armies assembled, paid, and led by Shadovar laid siege to the elven city in a tightening ring. The elves defended the city fiercely, inflicting terrible losses on the besiegers, but the defenders were outnumbered twenty to one or more, and not a single elf that fell could be replaced. The outcome was inevitable.

And it was all a sideshow, to prevent the elves from mounting any sort of coherent and sustained magical defense of their mythal.

*That* was what Telamont Tanthul was after, that and the many-layered wards of the monastery of Candlekeep half a continent away, all on the orders of the goddess Shar, who desired to seize the Weave and become the goddess of magic to usher in utter and ongoing chaos, loss, and despair—or destroy the Weave in trying, and bring about the same result. If Telamont failed in the attempt, then he was just one more unworthy tool to be used and tossed aside—one more personal instance of loss and despair.

And it all came so close to succeeding.

The Most High girded himself with magical power by draining magic items galore. If all he'd had to contend with had been the Coronal—herself fighting hand to hand in a last stand to defend the ever-shrinking heart of her city—he would undoubtedly have triumphed.

The problem with reaching for great magical power in the Realms is that there are so many contenders, so many others hungry for power who have been waiting in the wings, biding their time for what they see as their best chance.



So Telamont Tanthul, an undeniably arrogant and overconfident ruler used to having his will backed by many arcanists of skill and power, came up against a Chosen of Mysteryl, Larloch, who had decided to set aside his usual diffidence and caution and make his own bid for the Weave. After all, in his opinion, the Mystras who came after Mysteryl were inferior guardians of the Art (arcane magic); who better than he to take up Mysteryl's mantle and govern all magic? And this certainly seemed to be his best chance.

Larloch had successfully seized the power of Candlekeep's wards, and although he was overextended and knew it, the prize was worth it. He was more powerful than Telamont Tanthul to begin with, and where the Most High had augmented himself with the magic of a city and many of its most puissant magic items, Larloch began with more power than that, and far more experience, plus the energy of Candlekeep's wards.

Unfortunately for Larloch, Myth Drannor had a defender even more powerful than he was, who struck at him at just the right moment: the Srinsee.

And unfortunately for Telamont, the infamous Chosen of Mystra Elminster, smarting from being tricked by Larloch, showed up to try to defend the Weave he'd worked for so many years to strengthen, extend, and repair. Elminster considered Telamont an overconfident, uncaring, irresponsible tyrant, but he wasn't interested in besting him in a duel—a contest he might well have lost. Rather, he was interested in winning at all costs and defending the Weave by denying Telamont the power of Myth Drannor's mythal.

So Elminster didn't engage Telamont in a spellhurling duel of the sort wizards engage in at MageFairs. Rather, he desperately used the Weave itself, which he had over the preceding century slowly mastered through the many, many repairs he'd wrought on it—a Weave already damaged and imperiled, and probably doomed if he didn't defend it. With it, he took all Telamont's might and lashed the Most High with it, ravaging him and pinning him in place so he couldn't teleport himself away to safety (for the Weave can be curved around into a cage, so translocation brings you back to where you departed from). It was something Elminster would never have dared to do if the Weave wasn't so endangered already, and he wouldn't even have known how to do forty or fifty years earlier.

So with Telamont trapped in it, Thultanthar crashed down onto the center of Myth Drannor and shattered with great loss of Netherese life. The Most High disappeared, possibly destroyed and at least suffering the destruction of his body.

That does not mean he is clearly gone for good. When the city of Thultanthar began flying from its usual location above Anauroch toward Myth Drannor, the Srinsee foresaw the danger to the Tree of Souls, which had been planted at the heart of the resettled elven city. So she started visiting all of the surviving baelnorn guarding family crypts under Myth Drannor, and she commanded or cajoled them (whatever worked for each guardian) to get to the Tree of Souls and magically shield and defend it with all their might. Scores of them obeyed her and warped the Weave around the tree to form

a conical protective barrier around it—so when the Netherese city came crashing down, the Tree survived, and the cone of baelnorn and their magic punched up through the stone of the descending city like a great fang or spike.

Their magic was of the Weave, and they were of the Weave; there is a slender possibility that Telamont Tanthul became of the Weave, too, surviving as a sentience within the Weave, as so many of Mystra's fallen servitors already do.

So in the wake of that fall, a few blocks of central Myth Drannor are rubble under the shattered remnants of Thultanthar. Scavenging monsters are roaming the battlefield, which is a huge stretch of forest littered with elf and human mercenary corpses (for Myth Drannor was a city of living forest, not a paved-over area crammed with buildings, like most human cities). All living elves have temporarily abandoned the city and the corpse-littered vicinity, and the disheartened and leaderless surviving mercenaries are foraging (pillaging) throughout the forest and into northern Sembia and the Dales. Of the ruling Tanthul family, there's no sign—but that does not mean the princes are all dead. Some of them may well be destroyed or reduced to "voices in the Weave" (their minds surviving, but their bodies gone). To a citizen of Thultanthar on the ground, their fates are simply unknown.

The dazed surviving Netherese are suddenly homeless and left with no chain of command—when they had been used to a daily life of order in obedience to absolute command—and with the everyday magical wards and effects prevailing in Thultanthar gone with their city. Moreover, the surviving Princes of Shade—if any—have also fallen silent. They may be recuperating in hiding, they may be humiliated and preferring to keep hidden until they are whole once more, and they may be as bewildered as "ordinary" arcanists far below them in rank, and concealing themselves while they try to make some sense of it all.

Whatever the reasons, the surviving Thultanthans are scattered in a hostile world, with their own confidence in their innate superiority shattered. It's a world some of them are woefully unfamiliar with, and a world that hates and fears them—if it knows of them at all.

So, now what?

## **THE THREE**

Three ambitious heirs to the rule of Thultanthar—a city that no longer exists, though there are other surviving Netherese cities that could be taken over, and plenty of newer, non-Netherese cities that could be conquered, for that matter—survive and are working together.

Two are the beautiful and cunning sisters Lelavdra and Manarlume, both daughters of Prince Dethud and therefore Princesses of Thultanthar in their own right, a pair of unscrupulous, ruthless manipulators quite willing to seduce and cozen to gain their own ways. Manarlume is the elder sister and the more thoughtful, and Lelavdra is the more

assertive and impulsive; neither wants to work or govern without the other. The third is the able arcanist Gwelt, whom the Most High trusted with organizing a resistance movement to the rule of the Princes, so malcontents could be gathered, identified, and later mercilessly dealt with in relative ease.

Now calling themselves “the Three,” these young and ambitious Shadovar seek to gather together surviving Thultanthans under their command, the two women claiming their right to rule by blood inheritance, and Gwelt claiming to be carrying out the orders of the Most High—authority Telamont expressly gave to him—in asserting his right to command.

At the moment, the Three are in firm accord and consider themselves good friends, though who knows what the stresses of decision-making over time will lead to?

Their initial actions have been to find and rally surviving Thultanthans (almost threescore arcanists of low rank, and just over twenty non-Shadovar Thultanthan citizens) to “the Court of the Three,” with Gwelt doing most of the hunting down and persuading. Their professed aim was to “continue Thultanthan society in a remote refuge and to seek a new role on the altered Toril we find ourselves in, keeping to ourselves more than we did before, and devoting ourselves in the short term to finding allies, identifying foes and likely foes, and hiding ourselves until we are strong enough to withstand challenges.”

Gwelt privately advised the sisters to establish close relationships with the best survivors, to tighten their loyalty, and to set them all to seeking other survivors and likely allies (working separately and in disguise). “Our pride was our folly,” Gwelt says often. “We shall make mistakes, but let it not be *that* mistake, again.”

Gwelt himself traveled about on this work, while the sisters set to work building a home for all Thultanthans who want to stand with them, with cached supplies, in one of the least ruined fortresses of those that were formerly part of the Citadel of the Raven. They are using their magic to conceal themselves from (and spy upon) the handful of Zhents already there and rebuilding the central citadel, trying to judge who to co-opt, who to eliminate, and who to deceive for as long as possible.

Gwelt found many more survivors than he’d expected to, but was rebuffed by a surprising number of them; individuals who now personally find freedom from the Tanthuls to be a sudden flame of vital life and refuse to step back under the heel of anyone. From now on, they’re going it alone, or cooperating with fellow Shadovar on an individual, probably temporary basis, on their terms.

Or, in other words, Faerûn has just acquired a large new supply of independent, opportunistic “loner” wizards who are far from novices and whose world-view has been rocked (so they are changing).

For them and for Toril, the future could hold—anything.