

# So saith Ed

*Responses to questions and Realmslore requests  
By Ed Greenwood on the Candlekeep Forums*

*Part 2*

*May - Jul 2004*

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**Candlekeep**

May 1, 2004: Well, Kuje31, this is indeed your lucky day. Ed had a few spare moments just now (fresh from explaining Chaucer to a young lady patron at the library), and was able to pound out a quick reply, to whit:

Yup, that passage seems pretty clear to me. Can one hint any more directly? I suppose one could mistake that passage to mean the Srinshree was a goddess, but if one doesn't reach that conclusion, I don't think one can read objectively and twist it to mean she isn't a Chosen. :}

So let me state it baldly, here and now: as far as we mortals can tell, looking briefly through the eyes of Vangerdahast, a man quite familiar with magic and with the company of certain Chosen, the Srinshree IS a Chosen.

While I'm at it, let me reiterate: Mystra is the most powerful deity of the Faerunian pantheon, by virtue of the fact that Toril is so overwhelmingly governed, sourced, and powered by magic. (If Ao the Overgod exists, Ao is for purposes of this argument "more" than a deity.) This is why Mystra's power (the silver fire) is divided up among many mortals: her Chosen. The "Chosen" of Mystra are different than the "Chosen" of other deities (who tend to be champions, advocates, servitors, and so on, who if they have any of the direct power of the deity, are lent it by the deity in a manner quite different from Mystra's probably-unwilling sharing).

There are other Chosen of Mystra besides her willing servants (Elminster, Khelben, and the Seven), many of them as yet unidentified in Realmslore. All of them serve Mystra in their own ways.

The precise nature of what it is to be a Chosen of Mystra still hasn't been fully revealed, and is too vast and complicated to be easily expressed in terms of prestige classes or other rules forms and details. On the other hand, mortals can never perfectly understand the gods, because mortals can only see things with mortal perceptions and senses.

So (as they say) continue to talk amongst yourselves. :}

So saith Ed.

I should underscore that his "your characters, and for that matter the game designers and fiction writers of our real world, can't possibly know and understand everything about the gods" theme is one he has reiterated to us original players for 25 years now - and for that matter, as an original player who had to "sign off" on the original Realms agreement with TSR, let me remind everyone that when Ed speaks about the Realms, he does so with absolute authority: if he says the Srinshree is a Chosen, she IS. Realms game designers and fiction writers can change that, later, with an in-game, in-the-Realms explanation or series of events to bring about the change (like the Avatar/Time of Troubles products), but in any lore dispute about the Realms, Ed wins. Sorta like Tolkien wins if we're talking Middle-Earth, McCaffrey if we're talking Pern, and so on.  
THO

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May 4, 2004: Hello again, everyone. Ed tells me that EI's Daughter officially goes on sale May 19, but started shipping early so as to "follow him around on his signing tour." He says there were certainly "over thirty" copies sold at Great Canadian Baycon, and wouldn't be surprised if some lucky folks find it elsewhere "from now on." The Chapters store in Peterborough is his next stop (May 6).

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He bought a copy at Baycon, BTW, so \* I \* could read it, and I have, and it's a great romp. I can see places where an editor ahem, curbed Ed's enthusiasm, but it's worth reading at least twice. More for the nuggets of Realmslore. And he made me laugh out loud and even cry a few times, too.

As for the GenCon events, Ed says he hasn't chatted with either the WotC or the GenCon staff about his detailed schedule, yet, but not to worry: he's been invited as an Industry Guest of Honor, and the early event listings are really for people to pounce on the quick-to-fill-up, limited-slots 'hard gaming' events. It was several months later than this last year before things got finalized (usually generic event tickets work for the things Ed's involved in). Failing all else, grab him at the con (he LIKES being grabbed, and I say this as one who should know :) and sit down for a talk: if he's not rushing to some promised appointment, he'll be happy to talk. That's what he goes to GenCon FOR.

As for the Shadow Weave question, Ed had this to say:

Rich Baker is THE expert on the Shadow Weave, but I certainly agree with him that it extends only as far as the Weave itself does: that is, throughout the Prime Material Plane of Toril (or the crystal sphere of Realmspace, if you prefer), NOT onto other planes. The best way to think of the Shadow Weave is this: it's the echo, or literally the shadow, of the Weave itself, and therefore can't exist where the Weave doesn't - and the Weave, in turn, is our mortal name for the flows of natural energy we call "magic" because we can harness it (spells, spell-like powers, psionics, et al being the ways in which we accomplish that harnessing), that permeate Toril and are an integral part of all life in, on, and in the atmosphere of Toril. Such natural flows, and magic, exist on other planes, and permit travel and energy flows from plane to plane, but only on Toril are the flows known as the Weave, administered by Mystra, and possess a 'Shadow Weave.' Elsewhere, there may or may not be similar 'dark counterparts' to the forces spellcasters can harness as magic, but those counterparts, if they exist, aren't linked to the Shadow Weave, part of the Shadow Weave, or governable in precisely the same way as the Shadow Weave (i.e. a character who can harness the Shadow Weave on Toril can't necessarily reliably use any similar 'dark weave' on another plane. For that matter, spellcasters using the Weave on Toril often get a few surprises when they try to use (or regain) spells while on other planes. Not everything works the same - and results can also vary over time and location, and from individual to individual. Travel away from home, as they say, is always an adventure. :)

And while I'm mentioning Rich Baker, let me not miss the chance to urge everyone to check out his Realms novel THE FORSAKEN HOUSE (first of The Last Mythal trilogy) when it comes out later this year.

And then, of course, it's only fair that I mention the forthcoming Thomas Reid book, THE RUBY GUARDIAN (second in his Scions trilogy), and the rest of the rip-roaring Richard Lee Byers trilogy (that I always privately refer to as "Dragons Go wild!" or just "Dragons Wild!"). Don's book THE YELLOW SILK is a great romp, too, and it's out already - as is Lisa Smedman's VENOM'S TASTE, first in HER trilogy. To say nothing of Paul Kemp's tril- what? Get back to work on MY unfinished collaboration? Yes yes yes of course!

So saith Ed.

So there, and all that.

Ed also wants everyone to know he'll dig into the three-pages-plus of meaty Realmslore questions posted in this thread ASAP (finishing Waterdeep MUST come first), that he hasn't

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forgotten you all, and that he misses "the daily answering session." He gave me a lift a few hours ago, and I noticed he's put 1000 km on the odometer of the old minivan since last week (going to Hamilton and Kingston for his tour). He musn't sleep much, these days, as usual.  
THO

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May 4, 2004: Hello, all. Ed sent this reply for Malaug, late last night:

I enjoy Robert E. Howard for the colour and verve of his storytelling. At times (e.g. his suicide note) he could be lyrical, and at times (the Gent from Bear Creek tales) hilarious, but as he was writing for the pulps, most of his tales tend to follow familiar patterns. Yet there are still few writers who can match the sheer drive of his storytelling (what sf writer and critic Elton Elliott calls "the power of the plain tale"). I must admit I rarely re-read Howard, these days, but some of his Conan tales are justifiably classics. And I treasure a brief chat I had, years ago, with Lin Carter about HOW he and deCamp worked on their Conan pastiches.

So saith Ed.

Me, I just liked hopping onto the altar and wearing the chains as Conan came hacking his way through the nasties to rescue me.  
THO

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May 4, 2004: Well met again, all. Your Hooded Lady returns, with the first of a few more replies from Ed, who's tackling your queries peacemeal, thus:

Bruce, when I first envisaged Evermeet, I was thinking of a mist-shrouded, deep blue forest island realm shrouded by spells that kept the rest of the world out, but didn't yet know who lived there (or have a name for it yet). It was 'a great mystery' to mainlanders in Faerun, whom I saw (once the name came along) as often saying things like: "We'll learn THAT sometime after we lay bare the secrets of Evermeet!"

Then along came D&D in its earliest form, and with it the humanocentric rules that made human PCs paramount. That's just fine for a game designer to decree, but a WORLDBUILDER has to come up with some in-the-setting explanation for why elves and dwarves (in particular, out of all the demi-human and humanoid intelligent races) don't dominate in the rules. Like all folks writing for DRAGON, my task was to add to this glorious game, not pick fights with official rules, so I laid the groundwork for why elves and dwarves were 'in decline' in the Faerunian lands, in a way that kept their allure and mystery (Ruins full of "lost" elven magic? Woo-hoo! Lead me to them!) and made for maximum play possibilities.

Either my elves and dwarves had to be too few in number to have kept any of their knowledge and culture in an unbroken manner, or I had to come up with a 'Great Go Elsewhere.' My postulation of the orcs as breeding like rabbits and sweeping over the lands in periodic orc hordes, plus my desire to have demons and devils OCCASIONALLY spice up play but as much as possible protect PCs from the "they can summon their buddies endlessly, so you're automatically toast" problem, gave me some reasons why the power of some elf and dwarf settlements could have been worn down or broken. The old "you grew too proud and big for your own britches to avoid bringing doom down upon yourselves" argument was, of course, another.

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I made the dwarves go the route of "too few offspring, desperate grim survivors go away or go extinct" (akin to some real-world Native American peoples), and the elves go the route of hiding themselves behind magic walls in the heart of the nicest forest that are left. Nice forests -- Evermeet -- oh, NOW I know who lives there! Having the elves lurk among and around largely-uncaring human settlements maximizes their air of mystery and "specialness," but must go hand-in-hand with making PC elves sundered from a lot of that power, to keep play balance at the party level.

TSR designers added the name and overarching concept of 'the Retreat' to this realm-by-realm, city-by-city individual withdrawal idea of mine, and over the years, yes, comments by many and writings by some have reinforced the Tolkienesque feel of this. I even once heard a TSR foreign sales rep explain D&D (to Milwaukee-area business executives dropping by GenCon to see what all this lunacy was about) as a game in which "you act out the roles of characters like those in the Lord of the Rings: elves, wizards, dwarves, fighters...magic works, and so on."

In your posting, you hit upon a good design and commercial reason for "getting the elves out of the way." Most readers of novels want to read books about humans they can relate to, and understand (Hamlet published in Klingon is great fun, but isn't going to hit the bestseller lists, because your average American reader can't understand or read Klingon, and doesn't want to; the same goes for Dr. Seuss done in Latin). Logically, in many situations in Faerun, the elves would dominate and be center stage, and this creates a problem. (Right now, as a librarian and an observer of the field, I'd say that Wizards has this problem actively on its hands in the form of the drow: the tendency to use the dark elves becomes a tendency to overuse them, and what happens to your publishing line if, overnight, the reading public tires of them? Remember the Goosebumps popularity of R. L. Stine? Or the pick-a-path fad, before that?).

Unfortunately for some of your line of questioning, Mystra is dedicated to seeing that magic is as widespread and popular in its use as possible, NOT to preserving existing magical constructs, or the status quo of "who's on top in the magical world."

Perhaps Corellon and the other Seldarine view the increasing reliance on magic as a corrupting, expanding weakness in elves that should be weeded out the hard way, forcing those surviving elves to become more hardy, practical, and in touch with the changing world (i.e. more adaptable, like those successful humans) and less jaded, arrogant, overconfident, and fixated on pursuing dreamy goals of magical sophistication.

It's hard for mortals to know the motives of gods. All we can do is endlessly examine and speculate about their actions (or what we're TOLD are their actions), and draw our own conclusions. It may be that all patron gods of races see the necessity for purgative, restorative cycles in the careers of their races that none of us know about, and the Seldarine are enthusiastically "driving down" the elves of today in just such a cyclical downturn, to renew them as stronger, brighter, and different. We just don't know, do we?

Now as a designer, I agree that we haven't been shown enough of elves or dwarves (or, hey, halflings, who tend to get the one-note "smartass tricksters and thieves" treatment, or gnomes, the truly FORGOTTEN folk of the Forgotten Realms) in published Realmslore to DM their societies properly. That's why I pushed so long for certain fan writers to get their dwarf novels published, and one of the reasons I'm so excited about Rich Baker's forthcoming trilogy.

And yes, I agree that the "add a race" tendency of 3e products, like the "Hey, I'm SURE we need another dozen prestige classes!" tendency, must necessarily take up product space that means development of existing elements get shorter shrift. That's an aspect of the crunch vs. fluff

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argument that, as a freelancer, I'm in exactly the same position as you are: I can snarl about it, and make suggestions, but ultimately, those decisions are made by others.

Perhaps that's a good thing: I've no idea if an Ed Greenwood-helmed Realms would have been as commercially successful (and therefore still published at all) if TSR had hired me along with my world, right from the start. I understand loyalty and consistency and pleasing customers very well, but everything else about the business world is a mystery to me...and as the real-world headlines show us, a lot of 'big business,' these days, has forgotten all about those three root things to chase other goals, and done so very successfully (in some cases adorned with scandals, but hey, they still have the riches and the power, and I'm still a guy who lives in the country and struggles to pay the bills :}).

So saith Ed.

We traded tax tales when he was giving me a lift in his van recently, and let me just say this: most of you would probably be very surprised at how little Ed made, last year, as a writer and game designer. He doesn't, despite the persistent gamer myth, get a royalty on every last copy of every Realms product sold (if he did, then yes, we WOULD be talking millions).

And then he could make his own Realms movies, with all of us players starring in them. Sigh; I could be embracing Sean Connery right now...

(Why, THANK YOU, Wooly. Of course I'd have to properly thank you first...if there was anything left of me after properly thanking Conan, of course.)

THO

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May 4, 2004: Well met again, all. Herewith, another of Ed's replies:

Hi, Abizoath. In answer to your question: we mortals don't know.

Sylune very much did want to be resurrected at the time of her death, though she now seems content with her lot (as a spectral harpist, able to possess the bodies of the living or manifest in ghostly form within a certain distance from any fragment of stone taken from the floor of her hut in Shadowdale [such fragments being carried by all of the Chosen, and also carefully placed in strategic places elsewhere]).

However, Sylune's desires and the powers her sisters wield lead to the inevitable conclusion that there IS some sort of reason that prevents her from being resurrected.

The nature of that reason is where the debate rages. Strongest among the current theories is the thinking that Mystra (not yet Midnight, but she who was mother to the Seven) didn't want her resurrected, or that Ao or some circumstances involving her silver fire prevented that resurrection.

Azuth and Elminster believe something else, however: that Sylune, in some ways the wisest of the Seven, was 'ready' for another step in the progression or 'life-cycle' of a Chosen of Mystra, ascending to another form of existence more closely bound to the Weave.

And that the Weave itself, or Mystra's innermost self, or Ao or some greater power or intellect, was aware of this, and saw Sylune's transformation as necessary.

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Perhaps we'll all know more someday. Perhaps I can seize the chance to write a novel about it, a few years from now. The debate will doubtless continue. What we do know for sure is that Sylune's abilities continue to change and grow, that she is now almost an intelligent, mutable mass of silver fire more closely attuned to the Weave than any mortal, and that she knows only a little more of what she can now do than the rest of the Chosen do.

I'm thinking she's going to surprise us all..

So saith Ed.

GOOD question, Abizoath, because these are the sort of answers Ed has always given us, as our DM, when his mind is leaping ahead into new cleverness. You've sparked something (probably turned him back to thinking about something he left unfinished), and we may all be richer for the result.

Ah, I love the Realms. Thank you, Ed.  
THO

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May 4, 2004: Well met again, all. Ed replies to Arthedain:

Hi, Arthedain. Well, it's like this: Harpers' Hill is a place of eerie beauty because it's a center of natural power (a focus or node of magic that 'grew' out of the natural processes of the land, not out of any casting or work by intelligent creatures). These rare locales, when in woodlands, are sacred to the elves, and are thought by some to be the work of Eldath, Silvanus, or other gods. (Those underground are of course sacred to dwarves and gnomes.)

By long-standing agreement with the elves of the Elven Court and among each other, the Harpers have kept the Hill clear of any permanent structure and any dedication to a specific god (no altars, though one can perform a ritual using any stone, and no buildings, though one can pitch a tent on the Hill, if one doesn't mind being under constant Harper surveillance).

The Harpers (and the few elves who've clung to life in the woods around the Dales, throughout all the recent troubles) will want to keep the Hill clear.

Moreover, Harpers often use it as a rendezvous, and Elminster and others performing powerful castings sometimes use the 'shield' of its powerful magic as a cover for their work (i.e. show up on the Hill to hurl and even augment their magics). The Hill 'twists' translocation magics (teleports, etc.), and thus, no gate/portal/teleport will work [to a precise destination] directly to or from it (though the air above it and the land immediately around it are fair game).

If I was the DM, in this situation, I'd send the PC some visions from Solonor discouraging use of the Hill itself, and "suggesting" a particular, hitherto-unknown tiny glade or pool in the forest near Shadowdale. Finding that spot will be an adventure in itself (trying to work out some way to share the memorized vision with Storm Silverhand, say, or the ghostly Sylune, or a resident elf, so as to be guided), and in that locale there may well be another adventure to uncover, such as an underground mini-dungeon. Cryptic guidance from Solonor could well continue.

As for building any "official" temple or shrine in Shadowdale: your PC must apply to Mourngrym, who is VERY suspicious about such things (after years of Zhent envoys trying to persuade him to

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let them found this temple, or that, and his own personal mistrust of self-important, self-interested clergy of ANY faith). Siting the temple deep in the forest is the obvious solution, because it allows Mourngrym to officially ignore it. The very application would bring down a covert Harper investigation on all of the PCs, not just the half-drow ranger (whose blood heritage should lead Those Who Harp to already be keeping an eye on him), to make sure that the ranger isn't being duped by other PCs, or the party being duped by someone else, to establish something they can use as a base, smuggling cache, or hideaway. (If I was a Red Wizard wanting to spy on Elminster, hiding out in the attic of a temple is probably as good 'cover' as I can get.)

Of course, this is YOUR Realms campaign. If you would like your player to succeed in having his PC establish a temple on the Hill, let him succeed. I wouldn't for the reasons outlined above, and because I always want PCs who try to build a temple to find themselves thigh-deep in headaches right away (fees, permissions, and permits from local authorities, vandalism from those who dislike the particular faith, organized opposition from clergies of rival faiths, attempts by clergy of the PC's faith to control everything AND coerce the PC into running the temple or at least serving as its full-time, on-site caretaker ["What, you want to go on adventuring? No, no, the holy god wants you to do THIS now! He personally told me so last night -- me, the Highest of all his high priests! Of course he said nothing to you: you are but as the dullest and most clumsy of his servants, a barely-forged tool that it is my sacred duty to temper and develop! So obey!"], and so on, and on, until the player groans, "How did I ever get mixed up in all of this?"). But then, I am the gentlest and fairest of all DMs. :}

So saith Ed, grinning evilly as he buffs his halo.

You don't fool ME, old Weirdbeard! Oh, no! I've seen your other side, felt the edge of your tongue (it felt very nice, actually ), know better than to...well, no, I think I'll stop now. Blueblade and Wooly are probably already straining for control at their keyboards.  
THO

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May 6, 2004: Hello, fellow scribes. The Lady Hooded steps out of the night to the light of our shared fire once more, with another answer from Ed:

Thanks for dredging up the Realms linguistics, Faraer. I'll see if I can find a few more as-yet-unpublished terms to add to them, in the weeks ahead. I'll tackle a few more of your questions right now:

I believe the FRCS dates the Zhentarim conquest of Daggerdale at 1336 because what's being referred to therein is the most definitive and complete occupation of the dale, wherein the Zhents established laws and enforcement, built roads and fortifications, and dwelt everywhere (as opposed to establishing on-road guardposts and garrisons and raiding the dale continuously from them). Daggerdale "fell" (with the Morns going into hiding 'for the first time') soon after the fall of Teshendale, but wasn't continuously occupied, especially in winter -- and it became a magnet for outlaws, dalefolk who wanted to fight the Zhents, bored young Cormyrean and Sembian adventure-seekers, and folk from the Vast wanting to seize land for themselves... all of whom delighted in killing Zhents. So Daggerdale has had a troubled history for a long time.

The timeline in the FRCS is of necessity simplified, and yes, there are errors. I agree with you that the statement about the most common form of government in the Heartlands being the feudal monarchy IS an error (perhaps the Faerunian source material consulted by the writer of that section was Cormyrean in origin). "Most successful" would probably be nearer the mark,

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considering the longevity of the Obarskyr dynasty and the overall safety and prosperity of the realm of Cormyr. Almost all Heartlands and more northerly farmers in the Realms are indeed freemen, though a case can be made for serfdom (in fact if not in name) in Tethyr (before the Black Days), and in Calimshan right now -- and arguably those latter two countries have more land area yielding more crop outputs due to climate, so perhaps one can say some form of serfdom is a part of 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 ("bond") that sets forth conditions. The duties and rules don't directly correspond to those of real-world serfs, either in England or on the Continent.

Certainly the duchies of Tethyr and the border baronies of Amn, like Cormyr, are "feudal" in nature, but that term isn't used to mean serfdom. It merely means the local lord has to render military support to the ruler when called upon, and in turn has the power to commandeer portions of local crop yields from the farms under the local lord's protection (and in some cases "yeomen warriors" from among the farmhands) when the need arises.

So far as I know, NO farmer in the Dales is anything but a freeman or a hired "crofter" working and living on lands owned by another, and paying rent to the owner in the form of either coin or a portion of the crop yields.

In Sembia and upland Cormyr, crofters are the norm: except in strips of land fronting along all major roads and in the most remote locales, almost all of the tilled land is owned by one wealthy family or another. In 'downland' Cormyr (roughly: south of Immersea and Waymoot), wealthy families may own large numbers of separate individual city buildings or smallhold farms, but their properties are amongst the smallholds of independent Cormyrean citizens ('freefolk').

I'm not a fan of tinker gnomes in the Realms except as VERY rare, comic-relief individuals (or families). The folk of Lantan and other Gond-worshippers fill the necessary 'Professor Branestawm/Rube Goldberg' mad inventor niche quite capably, and I see individual, urban-dwelling (in predominantly human trading cities) halfling and gnome families as the source of small, clever inventions (intricate double locks, fold-down doorstops, removable boot scrapers that double as other useful implements, heat-reflecting stove hoods and fans whose blades are turned by the heat of cooking-fires, and so on).

I see the native gnomes of the Realms (except for the 'deep gnomes' of the Underdark) as being the quiet collectors-and-refiners of good ideas from all cultures, who keep low profiles, and make good livings through trading useful items. For instance, I think the majority (and the best) of spectacles, magnifying glasses, spyglasses, and other devices involving glass lenses in the Realms are made by gnomes. Gnomes have perfected the most practical intricate non-magical locks and hinges, long ago mastered industrial-output papermaking and bookbinding, are experts on waterproofing (garments and portable containers for scrolls and flat paper), and are working on building bigger and better looms for "everyday" cloth. Many gnomes are working to perfect wire, and fashion everyday items from wire.

I've got to get that gnometalk Volo article into print some day. Hmm; perhaps with Volo shorn from it, it could become a WotC web piece. Must talk to the good folks...

So saith Ed.

As for me, I must go now, before I say something else to earn that "increasingly flirtatious" reputation (for which much thanks!).

THO

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May 6, 2004: Dost thou like what thou dost see? Yes, it can all come off, except for the hood... or I'd not be: The Hooded One.

And that I am.

Bearing, as usual, the latest Words of Ed:

simontrinity, I'd love to write a LOT about Cylyria Dragonbreast, because she's another of those fascinating loose-end/prime mover Realms NPCs, but I believe doing so, here and now, would hamper other creative people in their own future projects. I'd say this is another of those unfortunate NDA things. For now. Would you like to hear about her 'black sheep' little sister? :}

Dargoth, the archdevils have been very active in the Realms, but not in the same high-profile manner as various demon lords. It's a matter of style (the preferred devilish way is sly and subtle manipulation of mortals: brutish force is for lesser devils and lesser beings of all sorts, such as, ahem, demons) and self-preservation (unless one happens to be an outcast devil, in which case one is frantically searching for allies, dupes, and 'secret weapons' on Toril and elsewhere, one operates fleetingly outside of the Nine Hells, except through intermediaries, because every moment one spends away from one's own ruled level is a moment that an ambitious underling or rival archdevil can use to wreak havoc [or subtly damage] one's own rule and military strength).

Alathayn, your point about Set is a good one, and there's of course no reason at all that Set can't be worshipped by individual Thayan NPCs or PCs in your campaign. The problem that has hampered widespread veneration of Set among Thayans is the autocratic, ruthless tactics of Set's clergy in Mulhorand. Wizards seeking to rise in personal power tend to be unwilling to embrace a faith in which they know priests are going to pop up and try to control them -- and they're also going to be very wary of that same faith spreading amongst their underlings and apprentices, because they'll believe those same priests are inevitably going to order the faithful to do something that challenges the authority of the wizard (suggesting the apprentices and underlings slay the wizard, for example, or steal crucial magic from him). Red Wizards tend to look to deities who allow wizards to personally grow in power without suffering the dictates or energetic intrigues of a controlling priesthood.

As scribes can see, I'm selectively answering parts of questions right now, trying to tackle some of those I can easily and swiftly answer before too many queries get backed up. If you notice I've only answered some parts of your questions, please don't think I'm ducking the other bits: I've just set them aside until the Waterdeep novel is done, that's all.

Which reminds me: those of you who read ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER will discover several works of fictional Realms literature referenced therein. Through the 'good offices' of Volo (I know, you hadn't dreamed he had any), I have procured one page -- just one-- of Rauthur's favourite reading material, and I'm debating just how to get it into the hands of fans of the Realms. I must discuss this highly sensitive matter with my friends in Book Publishing at Wizards first, but I'm open to ah, creative suggestions...

So saith Ed.

As for me, this Hooded Lady remembers that page very well. I think it would make great background reading material. That is: I'm sure you're all familiar with one-page advertisements for

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various things that have what purports to be the page of an open book in the background, partially obscured by something else -- with tantalizing snippets of VERY interesting prose drawing you into the ad. I wonder if Ed could get someone at Wizards to use his 'Purple Page' in that manner. Hmmm (stretches languorously, remembers she's wearing just a hood, and pauses to adjust it rakishly)  
THO

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May 7, 2004: Hi, SiriusBlack. Ed's toiling away on the Waterdeep book right now, and asked me to quickly answer your Rhauligan question.

No spoilers for ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER follow, but merely a summary of all we know about Rhauligan.

Glarasteer Rhauligan wasn't (as far as I recall) in BEYOND THE HIGH ROAD, which Troy wrote. He was introduced in CORMYR: A NOVEL, got 'his own story' in REALMS OF MYSTERY ("The Grinning Ghost of Taverton Hall"), and appeared as a supporting character in Ed's REALMS OF SHADOW story ("When Shadows Come Seeking A Throne").

In addition, Ed's Dragon Annual piece on Cormyr included the Purple Dragon Highknight prestige class, and explained that the Highknights are something akin to the James Bonds of the Cormyrean government (Rhauligan is, of course, a Highknight).

Ed confirms that he created Rhauligan long, long ago for fiction purposes (an as-yet-still-secret long-term plot idea that predates TSR's publication of the Realms, and that may never see print if the published Realms takes another direction), used him in play exactly ONCE with us Knights (he remained a non-speaking, nameless background character assembled in a room with some Knights, and was never developed more fully because our characters didn't say or do things that would have caused that level of involvement in play), and put him into the Cormyr novel to give Dauneth Marliir a plausible way into protected Palace and Court areas.

Rhauligan is a Harper, a bit of a rogue, and has demonstrated his personal loyalty to Alusair and Filfaeril often enough in the past to be trusted to remain far more independent and mysterious than many Highknights (though Vangerdahast insisted on prying into the minds and habits of all Highknights, Rhauligan included). The Crown turns a blind eye to the smuggling and minor-stolen-item-fencing activities Rhauligan's turret-top sales business has often provided a cover for.

So saith Ed.

Rhauligan's obviously becoming one of Ed's favourites, and Ed once remarked to me that he'd love to do a book wherein Mirt, Rhauligan, Sharantyr, and Storm all get thrown together in some sort of adventure. I want to assure you and all scribes who read this that I forcefully expressed my extreme enthusiasm for this idea. Ah, several times.  
THO

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On May 7, 2004 THO said: Well met again, gentles. This time, I'm tackling Maskanodel's question (for Ed, who's still pounding away at his keyboard as I post this).

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This has been asked before, and Ed emphasized that almost all of the Chosen would be piles of bone-dust by now if they were unaugmented mortals like me and thou. He pointed out that all of them can choose the bodies and appearances they customarily inhabit (within limits; they can't use the silver fire to give them stable augmentations to their abilities or physiques, so no growing tails or wings at will; spells must be used). The Simbul made a career down the years of Realmsplay of appearing as various birds, cats, fenceposts, discarded hats, and even stranger things. So the old wizard you see is Elminster's chosen appearance of the day.

Obviously, he changed his favoured appearance.

What REALLY happened is that Wizards of the Coast wanted a different look for El for 3e to move him away from looking like the popular conception of Gandalf/Merlin/whatever. Precisely why they did that is an answer only they can give, but moving El away from Gandalf could quite easily be a part of it. Ed didn't object, but it wasn't idea. As I recall overhearing him say to Jim Butler of WotC (in the lobby of the Milwaukee Hilton, at GenCon) at the time: "Sure, as long as El and Khelben don't end up looking too much like each other to confuse people."

I've handed the Sharess and Dragonbreast 'dark sister' queries to Ed, and he'll get to them ASAP, but I know he's off to the Avid Reader in Cobourg tonight for another ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER signing. After the inevitable reading (of some Bezrar and Malakar scenes, I believe), this one ought to be the most cozy "family chat" atmosphere of the entire tour, so if you have deep Realmslore queries and can get there, this'll be your best chance to quiz Ed for an hour or so...  
THO

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On May 7, 2004 THO said: Hello again, all. Thy Lady Hooded yet again, tying up some loose ends.

Dargoth: I'm sorry. Ed tells me Mount Hotenow is one of those can't-say-a-word-due-to-NDAs topic.

Alathayn, I'd say that your Red Wizard venerating Set will just have to keep things secret -- and show me a Red Wizard who DOESN'T have secrets!

Now, I myself have a question for a questioning scribe:

Athenon, you're already familiar with the Calaunt information in the FORGOTTEN REALMS ADVENTURES hardcover rulebook, right?

Fair riding, all, for now!  
THO

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On May 7, 2004 THO said: Why, Sirius, 'tis my pleasure!

You were right to chastise me for my overreaction in the Moon Doors thread (for which I also owe Shadowlord an apology - sorry!) and I owe you. So chastise me some more... it makes me purr.

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As for Elaith, what other tidbit can I throw you? Hmmm, not much, just now. I can say the novel will PROBABLY let readers briefly visit a revel hosted by Elaith, and you might get a slight glimpse of Elaith as a landlord, but Ed's not saying much about the book as it unfolds, out of respect for Elaine (Ed created Elaith, but wants Elaine to be free to tell any tale she wants to about the character, because she's depicted him so wonderfully, and so says as little about Elaith as he can manage, so as to give her as much freedom in future for storytelling) and because novels have a way of changing during editing, and he doesn't want to mislead with promises about things you'll end up not seeing.

I do know he's been involved with future game information about Waterdeep, and done some things for the WoTC website on doings in Waterdeep that haven't yet been posted, so there should be more Waterdhavian lore coming your way in the months and years ahead.

As a player, I sometimes find myself squealing with excitement and then knowing I can't pass a single word of what I've heard or know along to anyone else. Let's just say I hope even a tiny fraction of what I've seen of Waterdeep someday becomes available for you and other scribes. My main character has hidden to eavesdrop on balconies of noble mansions, made love on rooftops in North Ward, chased thieves down sewers in Castle Ward, opened tombs in the City of the Dead, impersonated drunken sailors in Dock Ward dives, skulked through City Guard tunnels inside Mount Waterdeep, and even fought a VERY strange monster in Mirt's Mansion.

Ahhh, the memories.

Thanks, Sirius. My smiler is brighter now. (See?)  
THO

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May 9, 2004: Hello again, scribes. Thy Lady Hooded doth bear the latest words from Ed, this time for tauster (who waited so patiently, and then reminded SO humbly that I was moved to interrupt Ed):

Ah, yes, the mysterious Glen. Here we go, questions answered by number:

1. From dragons (ha ha). Specifically, from a few [mainly evil, obviously] draconic individuals who enjoy mating (and sometimes even slaying a mate and seizing a new hoard), but have no intention of hatching young who may become rivals in time to come, but who see a ready way to increase their own wealth by selling eggs to a few bold dwarves who offer ready coin, by means of moots on peaktops (arranged by signal banners; dragons swoop down only if interested) rather than by daring to approach lairs and thus becoming eliminate-at-all-costs perils.
2. Therefore, very few of the eggs traded in Dale are stolen. Yes, gates/portals are used by some of the egg-traders. Concentrations of dragons are a logical source for eggs (being as the elder wyrms "on top" in such a community would see the dangers of population outstripping food supply, younger wyrms becoming frustrated at being shut out of power and so ganging up on older wyrms), but the locations of those concentrations are dwarven secrets. And yes, dragon-egg thief would be a VERY rare occupation.

The Low Road is a long Underdark route, known to certain dwarves, connecting Glen to the subterranean dwarf realm east of the Great Rift (see the map included with DWARVES DEEP). Rather than being a single long tunnel, the Low Road is a mental map of 'safe' passages known

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to certain dwarves, 'the best way through the maze' of natural and creature-made Underdark tunnels.

The dwarves have constructed small, defensible strongholds along it (including, yes, one just 'below' Glen itself), and also crafted many small refuges (hiding-chambers with caches of food, drink, weapons, splints, ropes, and tools) 'on' the Low Road, but the long route is neither a clear and obvious one, nor an unchanging one.

Drow and Underdark predators know that dwarves frequently travel north-south in this area of the Underdark, and are constantly attacking travellers they find and dwarf holds they discover-but it's wrong to assume that "a quite large underground-keep must be necessary to secure glen" against drow surface incursions, because drow have their own ongoing wars and their own foes, too (including deep gnomes and some quite greedy mind-flayers), and are kept quite busy with daily patrols and strife. Moreover, many drow communities are controlled by powerful drow trading families who dislike the trade expenses and disruptions of large-scale warfare, and avoid or discourage it whenever possible (it's always easy for drow elders to allow hot-headed 'warbrands' to mount their own expeditions off into the Underdark, to either return victorious or -- far more often -- never be heard from again).

3. Therefore, Glen is one end of the Low Road, and Rimmitor (the DWARVES DEEP maps say "Rimmito" but this is a misprint) is the other, but there are many side-branches and various routes in between these two places.

4. Dwarves keep the names and locations of private family holds as secret as possible, so I can only say that as one travels south from Glen, the small communities of Fell's Axe, Adaern, Muranthor, and Udel's Leap lie along the Low Road -- but precisely where they are, and the names of other places on the Road, remain mysterious. There's also an aboleth-governed subterranean lake (name not known to Volo) along the Road, that as it passes this lake winds through a maze of half-flooded tunnels to discourage drow and other attacks.

5. The phrase 'the Low Road' is becoming well-known among dwarves and gnomes all over the Heartlands, and starting to creep into human awareness (although, among humans, only a few well-connected travelling merchants properly know what and where the Road is; thanks to a fanciful ballad, many humans think it's a long, clear tunnel that runs deeper and deeper into the earth, that dying dwarves traverse in a pilgrimage to die before their gods in a vast cavern of bones). Dwarves and gnomes all know correctly WHAT the Low Road is [purpose, general route, and some features], but only a few know the correct route of the Road (in other words, a handful of hardy and daring traders enrich themselves using it, and on rare occasions serve as 'guides' to all others). They are the only group to use it (though of course drow and other interests raid small portions of it), and most of them are fierce individualists, rather than any sort of organized power group (though most of them share a fellowship of mutual respect, and from time to time form small, usually short-lived alliances and pacts).

6. Around all surface connections (there are rumored to be at least two others along the Road, neither of them in settled areas or near any surface hamlet), dwarves tend to prepare many 'false door falling block' traps, teeter-totter-floor fall-shaft traps, and the like, so that only those 'in the know' can safely pass between the Underdark and the Realms Above by choosing exactly the right route. In addition, the dwarves maintain garrisons in rooms built with firing-ports and many crossbows. A defender in one of these chambers commands a field of fire down the length of a long stretch of passage, and can snatch up a succession of crossbows or fire large ballistae. 'Beneath' Glen are three of these chambers, commanding passages that wind so as to pass all of them -- and two of the chambers are equipped with levers that let fall ceiling-frames weighted with

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rocks and fitted with spikes, onto the heads of unwelcome travellers moving around a 'dogleg' of passage (the trap being the entire ceiling of the dogleg, ten feet wide by about seventy feet long, and therefore impossible to avoid). In addition, the defenders of Glen keep a pack of wardogs that they can release into the tunnels through doors only they control -- and take care to keep these menaces hungry. They also have at least one 'blindrun' side-passage that ends in a chamber where a fearsome monster (reports vary as to its nature, probably because slain monsters aren't always replaced by exactly the same sort of beast) is confined.

7. Traffic along the Low Road isn't as frequent as one might expect, but all manner of goods can be carried. Small, portable and yet valuable items (such as gems) are favoured over bulk goods, but food (especially to surface folk, in really hard winters, and Underfolk, when drow and monster attacks are really fierce) can often be more valuable than the rarest gem.

8. A meeting between antagonistic races along the Road would almost undoubtedly be a battle. Among dwarves, and between dwarves and gnomes, there's a "peace of the road" code, yes (though some dwarves probably only honour it if they think there might be witnesses to any attack on a hated rival), and some gnomes even operate a 'rescue and healing' service somewhere along the Road . . . but yes, hostile and rapacious races aren't welcome on the Road.

I hope these replies are of help, tauster; sorry it's taken me so long to hand these to the Hooded One (the Waterdeep book still rules me). And you're welcome; we both enjoy doing sharing Realmslore. Fair fate for now!

So saith Ed, and I echo his sentiments.

I'd happily recline and, er, bask here for a time, but I'm afraid if I fall asleep like this, wearing only my boots and the hood, Mr. Krashos might come along and slather me with butter! Ugh! Honey, yes, whipped cream even, but butter?  
THO

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May 9, 2004: Well met again, gentles. I bring the words of Ed, as usual, and some swift answers of mine own, to whit: SiriusBlack, 'tis my understanding that Ed is being consulted (as in: Realmslore e-mails are flying back and forth) rather than officially being involved as a writer.

And, Sirius, you say the sweetest things ("Why do I have a feeling with a character you run this might have taken place all in one night?"). I shall have to \* twinkle \* in your direction. There. As for your touch and purr musings... well, now, we'll just have to see, won't we?

Ahem. I find it's getting rather warm in here. So, without further ado, the words of Ed:

As promised, a glimpse of Cylyria Dragonbreast's younger sister Amaleene. It now seems as if this lithe, thin, raven-haired accomplished mimic and actress is as ruthless and cold-blooded as humans get. For years, she played the part of Cylyria's devoted and loving sister, acting as a Harper go-between and nurse to wounded Harpers as Those Who Harp grew stronger. Amaleene has a good singing voice and is skilled with the lyre, has rather plain looks but is usually well-dressed, and is always alert (seeing and hearing EVERYTHING around her) and forgets nothing. She has very good balance, and can move very quietly when she wants to.

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She's also a shrewd judge of individuals and of human nature, and is a sympathetic listener. For years she received Harper training and gathered knowledge -- and yet was adroit enough to become the secret lover of no less than two patriarchs of 'first folk' (noble) Berduskan families: Caunter and Jalarghar. In the case of Irwyn Caunter, she carried on a dalliance with his ambitious son Roryl at the same time.

Amaleene wormed information she wanted out of all of these contacts, until she was ready to make her move. It seems she was born with a talent for sorcery, and from a very early age has been able to conceal her true thoughts, memories, and knowledge behind a screen of mental falsehoods. It's not known if she's developed her sorcery much beyond this, because some of the things she's since accomplished could have been done with magic items rather than spells.

Using Roryl Caunter as her dupe, she faked her own death in the early days of 1371 DR (bringing down undeserved Harper wrath on the Caunter family) and stole substantial wealth from both the Caunters and the Jalarghars, made it seem as if Harpers were responsible for the thefts, and vanished.

It seems she made use of gates (portals) known to the Harpers to move far across Faerun, to Telflamm, then Athkatla, and then briefly Luskan, Neverwinter, Myratma, and Waterdeep. Her present whereabouts are unknown.

In every city, Amaleene used her knowledge of local Harper agents and unfolding Harper activities to betray Harpers to their deaths and to seize wealth belonging to her victims. In Athkatla, she apparently seduced at least one city official, and by the time she reached Waterdeep, she seemed to be working with a mind flayer and a doppelganger with ease, skill, and (apparently) trust. The identities of these associates are unknown.

Amaleene Dragonbreast has some means of hiding from all magical or psionic attempts to locate, contact, or affect her, and she seems to enjoy tricking, harming, and robbing others, openly laughing and gloating during her thefts. On at least three occasions she's impersonated a wife (with knowledge, mimicry, and presumably some magical means of altering her body) well enough to deceive a husband, and she shows no signs of settling down in any one location. Beyond sheer enjoyment in what she's doing, her motives are unknown. She does harm to Harpers when doing so will allow her to accomplish something else, but passes them by or even aids them at other times. She's known to carry and use poisoned weapons and to poison drinks with ingested poisons, and is thought to have gathered a small collection of magic items.

She once convinced a Calishite merchant (whom she subsequently slew; a hidden servant observed both the demonstration and the murder) that she was more than a human by producing a stirge from a carry-coffer. Claiming it was a "pet," she bared herself and let it drink blood at will, saying she did this often to give it strength. Though this demonstration left her visibly weak and pale, she had strength enough left, after the stirge was sated, to both dance for the merchant and then to "make strenuous love" to him.

Amaleene remains a mystery, and has been seen operating alone as well as with the doppelganger and mind flayer; if she belongs to any fell organizations, no Harper yet knows of it.

So saith Ed.

His words left me with a shiver: we Knights spoke with Amaleene once, in Berdusk, before all of this -- and she seemed a kind, meek young thing devoted to nursing wounded Harpers in hiding.

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Hmmm . . . Ed, how about a novel?  
THO

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On May 9, 2004 THO said: Well met! Thy Lady Hooded to the aid of seekers after Realmslore, once more:

fourthmensch, Ed's still chin-deep in novel writing, but I can provide a few Realms slang terms from memory and from notes given by Ed to us players long ago:

"kell" means 'try,' but is only used when whatever is being tried is unfinished, nigh-impossible, tricky or dangerous, or there's some doubt as to whether whoever's trying it will ever accomplish it (and "kell" is used unchanged regardless of tense, and sometimes also in place of the word "done," as in: "You're not going to kell stealing THAT, are you?" and "Kell such feats often, have you?"). Polite speech sticks to 'try' and 'tried' and 'done,' leaving "kell" for cynical, disbelieving, or openly derisive speech ("Kings always SAY they'll clean all monsters out of the woods. Oh, and they KELL, too, for a tenday, each of them, sometimes sending more than one knight to do it, too.")

"stlarn" and "stlarning" are fairly polite equivalents for the f-word, of about the blasphemous strength of 'darn!' and see use where we might say "screwing up" (They can't kell one simple task without stlarning up!) or (for Brits) "bloody alarm clock!" (stlarning time-bells!)

a "codloose winker" is a lecher (derivation: a winking man with a loose or often-removed codpiece)

a "darkblade" is a mercenary ("hiresword") demonstrably lacking in principles or loyalty to a patron who's hired him

a "scorchkettle" is a woman who delivers impressively blistering words to someone in public (usually because she's quick-tempered)

"gulletfire" is bad beer or wine, whereas "throatslake" is any drinkable that takes care of thirst and doesn't cause illness in doing so, but isn't particularly pleasant to drink

a "spurnarmor" is either a woman with a spectacular figure, or a well-endowed man (as in: "If I had those, I'd be a spurnarmor too!" or: "Galad! What a spurnarmor!")

... which reminds me that "Galad!" is the current Heartlands replacement for "Zooks!" or "Zounds!" or any nonsense word used as an "I'm astonished" or "I'm impressed" expression . . . and Elminster probably brought "Gadzooks!" and "Zounds!" into the Realms from his our-real-world visits centuries back, so in the Realms they HAVEN'T developed from "God's wounds!"

"glim" means "beautiful in an eye-catching way" (flashy)

"lalandath" means agile, sleek, lithe, and is often said of dancers or women whose beauty is accentuated by their movements (so a well-built but sleekly-dancing tavern dancer might be described as: "WHAT a glimmer! A lalandath spurnarmor, glim enough to leave every man in the place rivvim, and my codpiece itching!")

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so, of course:

"rivvim" means "lust" or "lusty" (As in: "I'm fair rivvim when I looks upon her.")

"darburl" (pronounced DAR-burl) means angry (As in: "I'm right darburl, just now." or: "He makes me proper darburl, that one.")

"badaulder" (pronounced BAH-doll-durr, with a lilt in the word) is the western Heartlands expression for "bullshit!" or "hogwash!" (and its usage is creeping into Cormyr right now, headed for Sembia, the Dales, and the Moonsea)

"hularake!" (pronounced HALL-ah-rake, and said very quickly, as if it has but one syllable) is the all-faiths, acceptable in polite society equivalent of "God damn it!" (or perhaps "God damn it all, anyway!")

"thael" means glad, or pleasant, or heart-lifting (As in "I'm always thael to see her," or "That feast was right thael" or "I always get that moment of thael, when I look down from the ridge and see... home.")

So now you can curse me or ah, describe me in Realms terms.

Athenon: Ed will get to Calaut, I promise... and, arilyn742: Why, whatever do you mean?

Moon smile and sun greet, until next,  
THO

\*\*\*\*\*

May 12, 2004: Hail and well met, all! Thy Lady Hooded returns, bringing once more the words of Ed, this time to The Simbul:

Well, George states things correctly when he says that 3e rules specifics matter a whole lot less to me than Realmslore, and yes, I AM the guy who thought up the Godswar, though (back in issue 54 of The Dragon), it was as a way for a DM who's let things get out of hand to do a one-time drastic 'rules fix' in a campaign (remove a +6 sword or artifact, or reduce it to something flashy but less awesome-master-destruction, for example), NOT as a "let's shuffle the gods" plotline.

However, as someone who's done some fumbling 3e and 3.5e freelance design for Wizards, I do appreciate the work you've gone to, to put the powers of the Chosen into template form... and any fan of The Simbul is a friend of mine!

So, let's take a look at your template. Your assumption as to the intention behind many of their powers ("to keep them from dying from natural causes rather than simply duplicating a specific magic item") is quite correct, and silver fire should definitely be usable repeatedly and often (in emergencies only, as outpourings can be physically painful and it is a finite resource because unleashing it strains the host body, and if pushed, can drive the host beyond the limits of consciousness and muscular control). I imagine Skip Williams (the Sage), wh had to fix spellfire a time or two, will have fits at the thought of silver fire being usable like a flamethrower, but... well, what's in the novels stands as canon (yes, I'll hand The Hooded One my kuje31 answer about canon right after I finish this one).

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I'm happy to offer my comments, but I'm not a WotC employee and not a 3.5e expert by any stretch of the imagination (I prefer D&D as acting in an unfolding story during which the DM occasionally tosses dice or asks a player to, and no one necessarily knows why those dice are being rolled).

Now, something else MUST be said here: the laudable design philosophy of 3rd edition D&D is that EVERYTHING be clearly quantified in rules (i.e. all powers of gods and monsters must be set forth in rules-specific ways, so that DM and players both know EXACTLY what they do, and theoretically a character of sufficient power, who does the right research/develops the right spell/gains the right level/whatever to gain the power, could do so -- and the rules are right there to govern how that newly gained magic or ability or power functions, complete with limitations, etc).

However, there are some properties of the Chosen that MUST remain mysterious, not just because I as a Realms novelist or John Doe as a Realms game designer need the freedom to do something different in the future, but because Mystra hasn't revealed or bestowed all of the powers yet, and the "new" Mystra may have different ideas and styles of operating than the old one. So NO rules representation of the Chosen can be complete -- to say nothing of the fact that even Mystra and Azuth can't foresee how becoming a Chosen will affect unique personal properties already possessed by the individual (Halaster is a very different being from Dove, right?). You've covered this neatly with your "Unknown Powers" notation.

Right, caveats established. Onward... to a minor glitch, right away:

"Appearance: The Chosen of Mystra appear no different than other creatures of their type, however their hair (if any) takes on a silver-white hue." Not quite; only offspring of Mystra (that is, of a mortal host mother in which Mystra is blood-present) gain the silver hair; the fact that she "had" these daughters in order to make them Chosen is incidental to the silver tresses (although, yes, gaining Chosen was her only motive for bringing the seven women into being). That's why the Seven have it, and Elminster and Khelben and other Chosen don't.

To the silver fire combat/harmful discharge effects, I would add (I'm speaking casually here, not framing specific rules) that Chosen can unleash it with fingertip precision from, yes, their fingertips (or eyes) as a finger-width straight beam, and so cut laser-like through things (including magical barriers and effects, into which they can cut 'windows' in the same way as they could cut a lock out of a metal door, or neatly separate a pane of glass from its frame). In addition, if they stick their fingers into the blood of someone, or onto a trail of blood that leads unbroken to a creature, or bite or kiss the creature so as to directly (i.e. body to body touch, not via a weapon or item) reach the creature's bloodstream, they can unleash harmful or healing silver fire effects throughout the creature (remember The Simbul crawling all over the wounded Elminster?) by acting on its blood-flow.

Otherwise, this seems just fine to me -- and as for the Name and Song Attunement ability inclusion being contradictory to the printed rules: no worries. Specific NPCs often "break" the rules, and this means the rules need to be amended (or the breaking ignored), not that the NPCs should all be changed. I view it this way: if a designer wants to tell me that Noble NPC Noldor isn't a cavalier any longer, but is now a fighter with this or that prestige class, that's fine, because the rules systems are merely a way of expressing game mechanics, but if the change in rules systems now means Noldor should only know, say (I'm making numbers up, here) 6 languages, but we already know he knows 8 languages, guess what: the 8 languages is established Realmslore, so he does indeed know 8 languages. He doesn't magically, overnight, "forget" 2 of them. If the designer wants Noldor to only have 6 languages, he has to come up with an in-the-

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Realms reason for it (e.g. an illithid tentacle started to eat his brain, but got chopped off, leaving his mastery of two tongues "forever scrambled"). That's the way the original Realms agreement stands, despite some instances of Realmslore being changed over time and different products and different editions.

So, for what it's worth, I like this template -- and if I was running 3e or 3.5e in my home Realms campaign, I'd adopt it pronto. (As it is, I'm a storytelling DM who uses no game rules more often than not, as Krash alluded to, and whose players vote on which rules system we "officially" use... which is why we happen to still be using 2nd Edition.) Thank you for your work, and for sharing it with us. Now, George Krashos (whom I regard as an old friend, though I'm sure "old" is not a word he'll receive joyously :}) commented: "Personally, I'd get far more FR utility out of a write-up you did on the Simbul that told me what her five favourite ballads are, tipple of choice, what happened that last dozen or so times she cast 'legend lore' and whether she has and friendships/alliances with any dragons in the East." That's true, too. So I hereby promise that I will reveal a few more tidbits of lore about The Simbul over the months to come. I prefer the small, personal, odd stuff that DMs can use to add colour to a character (like favourite sayings) rather than dates ruled, kings overthrown, dragons wrestled into submission, and so on. The Hooded One used to call this my "Show me the colour of her underwear" preference, but for The Simbul (the character, not you :}) the answer to that is: she doesn't wear any. :}

So saith Ed.

I suppose I should chime in with the smart remark here that I'm not wearing any just now, either, but though that happens to be the truth, it's just too easy.

So fair faring until next, all.  
THO

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May 12, 2004: And, as promised, Ed's words to kuje31 re. canon (Athenon/Will, I promise I'll tell some Ed as DM stories, to go with the ones in the early single-digit pages of this thread, the moment life spares me the time to do more than snatch and toss Ed's words to waiting scribes... which may be five or six days from now):

Although many licensed Realms products have given some designers fits over the years (and yes, the elf queen who appeared in the Wealdath in the BG II game was one such matter), the Volo's Guide to BG II is indeed canon. I can't personally speak for the BG novels being canon.

What I can say is that, although gamers and fans hold many different personal positions on what is and what is not canon, the original Realms agreement is pretty clear on this: anything I write or say about the Realms IS official canon (hmm, sounds almost papal, doesn't it?), although future in-print products can "fix" things I write or say and then the revision becomes canon, AS LONG AS it's an in-the-Realms explanation. (To make up a hypothetical but entirely fictitious example, if a BATTLESYSTEM --remember that? -- product came out that changed the class and stats of an established Realms character, that alteration would NOT be a canon change, because it's a rules sytem detail that can be ascribed as being unique to BATTLESYSTEM: "Well, in your AD&D game King Thog is still a 7th level barbarian, but in BATTLESYSTEM terms, he's a YY" UNLESS the BATTLESYSTEM product stated that King Thog was transformed by a god into a YY.)

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So, yes, my sourcebook is canon, and I'd assume the novels and "the stats for the characters in those novels that are in Dragon" are canon, too. However, that last bit IS an assumption on my part.

But yes, like it or not, if I say it, it's canon. Which is why, of course, I say so little, and in such guarded terms. :}

So saith Ed, grinning cheesily as he types that last sentence, no doubt.

[ Like this: ] Canon debates always seem to me to be in the same category as arguing about those angels on the head of that pin with an atheist, but never mind. If it keeps us all talking to each other, and the elverquisst flowing...

THO

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May 14, 2004: Well met from The Hooded One. I was able to e-speak Ed for just a few minutes today (he's juggling family visits, trying to get the Waterdeep book finished, and the time-wasting but necessary side of writing (faxes, legal documents, permissions, e-consults, et al), and managed to get this answer for Sarelle:

Unfortunately, I'm not familiar with the later games at all. I've provided lore (and in some cases even fiction "frontpieces" for the game manual) for most of the Realms games, and even been consulted on plotlines of a few of them, but I have zilch time to play computer games, and tend to write on various vintage Macs; when I can view a Realms games at all, it's usually any early build with all "cheats" turned on so I can't be killed, so as to walk through and examine everything in the shortest possible time. So what gets most slighted in such situations? You guessed it: henchmen. :}

As a result, my experiences are so limited as to make my opinion worthless. Aerie, eh? I'll have to go look, if I ever get my life back. :}

So saith Ed.

I sympathize, also having no time for computer gaming. (Leisure time? What's that?)

THO

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May 14, 2004: Hello, all. Thy Lady Hooded with the latest words of Ed, who is way too busy just now to answer any of the in-depth Realmslore queries he knows are piling up, but wants you to know he very much wants to deal with all of them, ASAP:

Hello, scribes! First to Gareth: glad your mum loves my books, and thank you for introducing her to them. It's a very slow process, conquering the world one reader's mind at a time... seriously, if I can spread a little enjoyment, that's great!

Borch, I think fellow scribes have tracked down all the in-print Realmslore about your three queries, so I'll have to generate more. :}

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Ditto, Metis; I'll get going on tidbits about the Reach.

Dargoth, good point about computer games differing from Realms continuity. My take is always: if a game has several different possible outcomes depending on PC actions, then obviously it can't establish continuity because Realmslore can't assume PCs do "X and only X." Moreover, your point about things that just happen in a computer game and are never mentioned elsewhere is probably the way we have to "read" what is becoming canon and what isn't, and as I said earlier, I can't utter any useful and definitive judgement on whether the games are canon or aren't, only state my assumption. I CAN speak definitively about the Volo's Guide I wrote. I suppose this debate will always rage. Hmm, sorta like real-life politics. :}

George, thank you. A fluffy Simbul you'll have, and I, too, am really enjoying sharing with everyone at Candlekeep. It's like a relaxed party at a cottage, sprawled on chesterfields/sofas/lounges and chatting with friends who love the same things you do. I hope to keep it up for as long as I can (years, if the site and the interest and my heart hold out). And yes, it's lovely when you and Eric and others (Garen Thal leaps to mind) skillfully weave new Realmslore to help make the whole tapestry brighter, richer, and stronger. A particular satisfaction AND a life-work.

So, Purple Dragon Knight, you want to see Elminster powerless, do you? So do a LOT of folks in the Realms. Me, I'd like to see Storm chopping wood in the nude again alongside a duplicate of her, sweat and curves and all, who just happens to have the merrily bearded visage of Elminster himself. :}

Real hard Realms-style swearing? Okay, Faraer, I'll get to work on it. Tastefully, of course, as is my wont. :}

Taelohn, please don't misinterpret my mention of Halaster as meaning he's a Chosen. I meant to just pick two individual beings in the Realms who possess some mastery of magic in very different ways (Dove ISN'T a powerful mage), and consider that, if one added "being a Chosen" to their very different natures, powers, and characters, one would naturally end up with two very different "magical powers" results. Dargoth, I doubt a table is the way to go with the Chosen of Mystra, because I DO want everyone to be unique and different purely because it's more interesting and leaves more "fun roleplaying room" to things. I don't want the Chosen to all be just so many troops with identical special power-and nor do Mystra or Ao, because the whole point of Mystra's Chosen is to stop Mystra from controlling everyone by scattering her power, AND to prevent anyone else from controlling her through the same means (I also had to have an explanation for how Bane COULD control Mystra during the Time of Troubles). So if they're all different, working out some grand plan for controlling them all, or Mystra through them, is that much harder.

Proc, I'll get to work on the Waterdeep Watch stuff. Some snippets of info will be revealed in my Realms of Dragons short story, and in the Waterdeep novel, but you need a handy core of stuff to work with.

To both SiriusBlack and kuje31, glad you liked Elminster's Daughter! I'm happy with how it turned out, and was really comfortable with the story as it flowed in the telling. I look forward to the chance to tell more stories with the same characters.

Wooops! Must run, now, but rest assured that the Hooded Gentleness is feeding me ALL of the thread converse, and I'm puttering on all sorts of lore replies as a result.

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So saith Ed.

Hmm, "Hooded Gentleness," eh? Now THAT'S a stage name I could do something with. Just what, we'll talk about some other time and place.  
THO

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May 15, 2004: Hello, all. Thy Lady Hooded once more, with brief words of Ed (answering Dargoth from way back on April 17:

I'm not sure exactly what's going on at Dragonspear Castle right now. The answer to that depends on events in your own Realms campaign. I can say that the portal that wider Faerun heard so much about (see the Hordes of Dragonspear adventure) was destroyed, and most of the devils slain. However, some devils escaped, scattering and temporarily going into hiding all over Faerun. Most of these have been hunted down since, but others (particular some of the most powerful and subtle devils) continue to work mischief, usually by manipulating humans.

Nor was the destroyed portal the only one in the vicinity of the Castle --wherefore some other portals to fell planes ARE still open, and various evil and half-hidden power groups vie for control of them. Again, the specifics are up to individual DMs.

So saith Ed, giving one of his familiar "maximum play opportunities" answers.

Of which more very soon.  
THO

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May 15, 2004: Fair meeting once again, scribes! Thy Lady Hooded rides in with another reply from Ed, this time for the April 18th questions posed by Bakra, Lord of the Outlying Thread:

Hi, Bakra. Well, I can tell you that unless editing prunes these lore-mentions away, the forthcoming Serpent Kingdoms product will identify important events that befell during both the 'Year of the Sighing Serpent' (1289) and the 'Year of the Ormserpent' (1295), giving the usual cryptic hindsight reason behind the two year-names.

"Ormserpent" is a corruption of a "wormserpent," and this is an old name for a naga. I can add something NOT mentioned in Serpent Kingdoms: that there once was a gigantic, unique reptile called THE Ormserpent (briefly worshipped in its own cult) that legend tells us was able to disgorge, after great agonies, "spawns" of 3-6 living creatures of all manner of other serpentine races (a maximum of 2 creatures out of such a spew being the same sort of creature), and that it would perish if it ever vomited forth another ormserpent. One tale also claims that a clan of very-long-lived, immune-to-all-poisons women of sinister intelligence and purpose, who can shapechange into various snake forms (from small to monstrous), are the "Daughters of the Ormserpent," spewed out by it, one by one, on rare occasions.

This is old, old Realmslore from my personal scrolls, hitherto hidden even from the keenest scholars of Candlekeep, and it may or may not be more than mere legend. Whew. Ask and ye shall receive, Bakra! WELL, now... Daughters of the Ormserpent, eh? I'll have to investigate more fully, in our Realmsplay sessions, as to whether or not certain fell females might just be members

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of this clan. If, of course, it truly exists.  
THO

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On May 16, 2004 THO said: Just managed to snatch a few moments for matters Realmsian, so 'tis time for Thy Hooded Lady to answer a few of the queries put directly to HER (uh, me ) by fellow scribes.

First, from Shadowlord, back on April 18th: "If you could have your PCs visit an outer plane, what would it be?"

Brightwater, of course. Arvandor and the Gates of the Moon when I wanted 'quiet time,' but Brightwater would be my first choice. Obvious, I know, but sometimes I am just a BIT bold and forward.

Which leads me to Bakra's question about Hallowe'en Realmsplay. Yes, we've had a few rather creepy "dance with the dead" sessions. Longtime Realms fans may recall Nidus and his Wand of Endless Repetition. Well, we found a huge spell-field cast by that fell mage, over the great hall of a castle. Couples in finery, long since withered away to bones, were dancing (in formal, waltz-like, clasped-together movements) tirelessly as odd bones crumbled away or dropped off... and while we were in the hall, we had to keep making saving throws against the magic or repeat precisely our actions of the previous round. It progressed from macabre to truly scary.

We've also had Feast of the Moon storytelling sessions (in which we roleplayed villagers recounting hair-raising tales of the dead, and had some ghosts correct them and then 'wink out'), ghosts whispering to us in dark places, and the dead walking from family crypts, just to mention a few. Ed also described, in grisly detail, a shouting, kicking merchant being literally torn apart by crawling claws as we watched (through scrying magic).

Which leads me to a far more recent request from Athenon/Will, about sharing some of Ed's best moments as a DM. You're right, Will, things are rarely boring around our gaming table. It's not just because of Ed, because we all act out our characters with energy and enthusiasm, but Ed sets the tone.

Let me pluck just a few 'bright remembrances' to share:

Ed portraying the manic Halaster (pouncing on and eating imaginary flies and all) baiting the Knights in the depths of Undermountain, in a thoroughly terrifying performance that left us all jumpy for the rest of the evening.

Ed playing the part of an animated warrior's helm that couldn't speak (though it could make noises that conveyed its emotional state) and yet was trying its damndest to lure us through a dungeon into the traps it was spell-linked to. Swooping, purring, cajoling, dancing in the air, buzzing menacingly as it swooped at us -- we were in absolute stitches of laughter by the time it finally succeeded in getting one of us to plunge into a pit, went into a victory dance -- and flew straight into its own destruction by celebrating its way right into a metal-shredding spell field.

Ed playing all of the parts in a dramatic secret meeting of a noble conspiracy to overthrow the Obarskys, whilst we Knights listened tensely from the far side of a tapestry. Incredibly realistic dialogue, instead of the all-too-frequent "You already know this, Von Villain, but our audience

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doesn't, so let me explain it to you again for their benefit" banter. Ed's particularly good at "overheard dialogue," and once did a seduction scene that had me squirmingly hot, let me tell you -- although when we burst out of hiding with weapons drawn at the er, moment of climax, it became hilariously obvious that we'd entirely misjudged what we'd been listening to.

Ed impressing the heck out of us with a Mirt-style buffoon performance from a Cormyrean tax collector that fooled us completely -- only to have the tax official 'step out of his act' for a moment to enlist our aid in bringing to justice one of the nobles he'd been auditing, after he uncovered crown treason rather than mere gold-piece-pinching. Ed made it obvious that this act is what enabled the tax collector to ferret out so many truths about the nobles he was investigating, on a daily basis.

Ed playing the part of Queen Filfaeril of Cormyr, facing down a Red Wizard envoy who was bold enough to try to coerce permissions out of her at Court, with Azoun absent. Filfaeril was polite, gracious, and very eloquent in her refusals -- and when the mage sought to outthink her, she turned politely steely. When he dared to try to add a little magical persuasion and War Wizards came running, she dealt with the foolish Red Wizard with a regal bluntness, pronouncing cold doom on him in a manner that left us wincingly impressed around the gaming table. If you close your eyes to blot out the smiling bearded giant at the end of the table and just LISTEN, Ed's voices sound so real.

Ed doing a deliberately hilarious "two pompous wizards spell-dueling" scene at a MageFair in which he declaimed one mage's lines, then dashed across the room to turn and deliver his rivals' words, and then ran back to his first location to utter the response, and so on. We were rolling around laughing by the time he was (breathlessly) done.

Ed playing the part of an elder dragon, bargaining with us Knights for its own survival by offering portions of its hoard -- and doing it so well that I am forever scornful of dragons seen in movies and fantasy novels. Ed can make the "I'm older than dirt and sadly wise, but don't trifle with me, human" viewpoint seem VERY real, where most wise-old-dragons come across as one-dimensional villains or oh-so-jaded feybitches.

Ed portraying a farm wife, pleading with a Zhent for her life, knowing she's doomed but offering everything, from information about everyone in her village to her own body, to buy time for her children to run away (out the back of her farmhouse). He did it so well that two of us Knights burst out of our nicely-set-up ambush prematurely to slaughter her Zhent tormentor and defend her... knowing as we did so that the cost was alerting the main company of Zhents to our presence, and leaving us with a long, hard running fight to survive (because they outnumbered us so greatly).

I could list dozens of other moments, a lot of them more high-stakes dramatic, but enough. Real life beckons rather imperiously, I'm afraid.

Full goblets and fine fare until next,  
THO

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May 16, 2004: Hail, fellow scribes! Doth the wind blow fair for thee?

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Yes, 'tis I, The Hooded One, with VERY fresh words from Ed (as in, not smart-tongued, but only just these last few breaths uttered: I e-sent him postings from this thread and he replied almost instantly):

Aha! A very timely pair of related questions! I'm going to break off puttering on the outstanding Realmslore questions in this thread for a few minutes, and quickly answer this latest matter about Vangerdahast and Elminster.

simontrinity, I hope in future fiction to outline this in far greater detail, but let me summarize the relationship between Vangey and Old El.

Gerath Hoan, welcome to the thread, and I hope what follows answers your query about Vangey.

Briefly put, Vangerdahast has always been an ambitious, controlling sort of person, and has always been fiercely, unswervingly dedicated to the service of Cormyr (or to be a tad more precise, his vision of what the Forest Kingdom could and should be).

Early in his career, Vangey found himself desiring to achieve the greatest possible personal magical power to arm himself properly for plunging into the ferocious power struggles swirling around the Cormyrean Court at the time of his youth (and realizing his personal knowledge of magic and mastery of spells would have to be better than anyone the various Cormyrean noble families -- and/or their Sembian allies -- could hire). He decided to go to the best tutor he could think of: Elminster.

He became El's apprentice, and flourished in spellcraft, though he found Elminster's freewheeling, meddling, all-too-often-overly-kindhearted style grating (being himself more in love with control and hierarchy).

The problems arose after Vangey left Elminster's tutelage (amicably enough) and returned to Cormyr. Vangerdahast considered El his 'ace in the hole' to call upon whenever real crises threatened the stability of Cormyr and outstripped War Wizard capabilities, and did so -- but very much resented that Elminster's meddling and wise old advice came with such aid, every time.

One of the supporting scenes in ELMINSTER IN HELL ("Here Be Wizards" in Chapter 5) illustrates this ongoing friction (and the guilt creeping into Vangey recently, over his relations with Elminster).

Not knowing a polite way to go on demanding El's aid but at the same time telling him to 'butt out' of trying to twist events and attitudes in Cormyr (and dismissing the fact that El and the other Chosen had been meddling in Cormyr and everywhere else for years upon years), Vangey said it impolitely.

El took it well enough -- but went right on meddling, just choosing to now do it behind Vangey's back or without bothering to stop in and say hello to Vangey whenever he was active in Cormyr. Again, Vangerdahast chose to ignore that this is a large and well-established part of what Chosen of Mystra DO, and took it as a personal challenge to his authority. A failure to understand that "the apprentice had grown up," if you will. So Vangerdahast became increasingly frosty in his verbal and written communications with Elminster, and his comments about Elminster to other Chosen and to Harper go-betweens.

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And Old El went on serenely behaving the way he always had, occasionally teasing Vangey with smart return-fire remarks of his own and ignoring Vangerdahast's decrees and demands to War Wizards that El be arrested and rendered no aid. As most of El's acidic remarks were shrewd criticisms of Vangerdahast's failings (love of intrigue, desire to know EVERYthing going on in the realm and thus crush and ruin shy or paranoid persons by repeatedly violating their privacy, and absolute need to be at the centre of things and to ALWAYS be in control, even when that need hampered the necessary personal growth of Obarskyrs destined to rule or who might come to the throne if bad things happened to their close relations, and so on), they really nettled Vangey, and the deep stings made him even more furious.

Both the Harpers and the Chosen admired Vangerdahast's successes in dealing with rebellious Cormyrean nobles and Azoun IV's personal failings, and building Cormyr into a truly prosperous, law-abiding, strong realm, and covertly helped him whenever they could. In the words of Storm Silverhand: "If we had a dozen Cormyrs, Faerun would be a shining homeland for all." They also noticed that increased experience and the goadings of Elminster were tempering Vangerdahast into an increasingly dextrous intriguer, and into a man who increasingly saw and admitted his own failings, and was willing to work to mend them.

So they wanted him to stick around, in particular to oversee the Forest Kingdom after Azoun IV's inevitable death (given ambitious nobles and Sembians, Alusair's willful nature, and other factors), and started to manipulate him into finding old magics and developing others that have longevity side-effects. Vangey is no fool when it comes to magic, and the moment he noticed these longevity effects, he embraced them so as, yes, to be around to serve Cormyr for the greatest possible time. Whereupon his manipulators increased their work to lengthen his years even more, beyond what he'd noticed. To what extent and in which ways they did so I'd like to keep secret for now (possible future fiction, again), but suffice it to say that their efforts, coupled with some magics that seem to lengthen the lifespans of all Royal Magicians of Cormyr (quite possibly because Mystra looks favourably on anyone who maintains and commands a force of government-related wizards, so long as those mages behave in ways that don't involve widespread slaughter of other wizards), gave Vangey many more years than most folk can enjoy.

And Vangey has used his time well. As SiriusBlack pointed out, ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER shows us something of how Vangerdahast and Elminster get along "now" (current Realms time).

While I'm here, I might as well tackle Gerath Hoan's second question. Yes, the Hiloars are nobles, of a sort that's sometimes called "border nobles" around Court: successful families dwelling in border or debatable areas of Cormyr (along the Sembian border, Arabel, and Marsember) who have demonstrated some loyalty to the Crown. Vangey wants to keep them loyal and build on their success and local influence, so he ennobles them, involves them in minor services to the Crown (to test them with temptations), and butters them up (asks their opinions on matters, confers with them often so they feel important, and so on). He wants both to use their capabilities for the betterment of Cormyr, and firmly bind their loyalties to the Obarskyrs and head off intrigues and rebellions born of noble and rich merchant dissatisfaction with having to endure the laws and authority of the Crown.

House Hiloar (for some reason, they dislike being referred to as "the Hiloars," and so they're never so styled in Court converse) have long been successful overland shippers (caravan traders), specializing in linking the Moonsea lands and the northerly Dales with the southern port trade of Cormyr. This makes them local competitors with the Zhents, and prime targets for being corrupted by the Zhents and used as stooges (hence the scrutiny the War Wizards, Purple Dragons, and individual roaming Highknights subject them to). Recently, as profits have dwindled in the face of strife in the Dales and in Cormyr itself, House Hiloar has diversified by buying,

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breeding, and selling horses (draft beasts and warhorses), and in making divers covert property investments in Sembia. This latter move, in particular, sharpened the interest and scrutiny of the Crown (the War Wizards were worried that Sembian interests were controlling House Hiloar), but thus far no disloyalty has been uncovered, which of course raised House Hiloar's worth in Vangey's eyes, and started him on the road to really rewarding them to both keep and make use of their loyalty (Court posts and titles for younger Hiloar bloods, "help" at Court with red tape and tax and fee breaks for favoured merchants, and so on). The War Wizards are looking to find Hiloars with magical talent, so they can install friendly, helpful War Wizards (spies) as tutors. I don't want to say too much more about the Hiloar family because it'll cut down on your options as a DM, and because of possible future Realmslore publications.

So there you go. Have fun, and hey, I love answering the questions -- so now I've got to get right back to the oldest outstanding lore request (from Lashan, and almost a month old)! Ciao for now!

So saith Ed.

As it happens, I already knew almost all of what he's said here about Vangerdahast from our 'home' Realms campaign play, but this is the first time he's ever said so much in print, so: over here, scribes interested in Cormyr and in Vangerdahast! Essential Realmslore alert!

I feel I should be blowing a herald's horn.  
THO

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On May 16, 2004 THO said: Oooh, yes. The problem is: appropriate. Ahem.

My serious side ("Lady Herald of the Realms" might do) or my, ahem, frisky side ("Enticing Enchantress [Wanton Flirt] of the Realms")?

Hmmm. Perhaps if I purred in Alaundo's ear...

Or not. I'm sure I give him more than enough headaches already.  
THO

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On May 16, 2004 THO said: ::wince::

Someone off-line here at my end has just suggested I should be styled "Mouth of Old Ed" (a la "Mouth of Sauron"). However, knowing Ed as I do, that's a disturbingly colourful phrase.

Seriously, I'm happy with any title. And yes, SiriusBlack, I, too, am VERY interested in Cormyr's future cast. Ed's going to get some hard in-character questioning across the Realmsplay table, next session.

THO

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**Candlekeep**

May 17, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes. We Knights (the players, not our characters) had our own Realms motto: "Ed Never Sleeps." The reasons for that should by now be obvious to all of you, and he's proving it yet again by handing me MORE replies to post, to whit:

Hello again, all. Mixed platters, this time.

First, to kuje31: re. the Highfire Crown. Sigh, this is a "Can't say much due to NDAs" matter, but the short-term effect of its finding on the Realms, these days, would depend on how widely the finder advertised his or her possession of it. If word spread among mages, the usual grasping sorts (Red Wizards, Zhents, etc.) would try to arrive and forcibly seize it -- and so would a large number of elves, seeking to remove it from non-elven hands at all costs. If the finder was an elf, now... nope, straying into NDA territory again. :}

Glad you liked ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. "Bad Ed"? Of course. :} And I toned the revelations down some, as I recall.

Faraer, you're quite welcome -- and I'm looking forward to WRITING Volo's Guide To The Moonsea, so I can bring you Old Gharauth's House of Butter Wrestling in all its, er, glory. :}

To tide you over on the swearing, here are just a few key words, with various regional variants given (I'll leave the more colourful genitalia descriptors for the full piece):

(non-deity-specific) damn! = hrast, hrammar (hur-RAST, hur-RAM-uh) ["hrammar" is southern]

shit! = naeth, naed, orbal (NAY-thh, NAYdd, ORR-ball) ["orbal" is southern]

fuck! = tluin (tuh-LOOO-in)

fuck you/fuck off = sabruin (sah-BROO-in)

Blushing yet, anyone? Naw, thought not.

To Krash: George, The Simbul's all-time favourite tippie was mint and morel (yes, the mushrooms) wine, as made by a half-elf crone named Klarintra Lartrout, a friend of Elminster's who died some three centuries ago. Since then, she's been searching for a new favourite, and prefers very strong drinks (warning to all: don't expect to get this lady easily drunk) that are smooth and mild-tasting, not raw or fiery.

So saith Ed. So the posset I fed her last time was close to the mark, hmm? She did get very friendly, as I recall, complimenting my figure and fragrance for the first time ever, and trailing her fingertips along my jaw . . . Hmm and double-hmm.  
THO

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May 17, 2004: Bright day, fellow scribes! Thy Hooded Lady again, bearing another out-of-chronological-order reply from Ed:

Archmage Daraath, the rankings of gods are (or should be) a mystery to mere mortals. The problem with deities absorbing deities is that change always causes some worshippers fall away,

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so you can almost never do straight addition of worshippers to derive a new ranking. Moreover, most beings in the Realms worship a variety of deities, rather than confining themselves to one, so what the priests of the other deities have to say about the matter can also have an effect.

I agree with you: lusty teens would worship Sharess, but then again, lusty teens do less fervent worshipping than older people. They're more wide-eyed and exploring everything (including each other, with priests and worshipping be damned, so to speak, along with all other authority figures) than their elders. They also tend to (remember, most Faerunians don't confine themselves to one god) also worship Sune because those rituals can be party time, too! And some teens want to be daring and try the forbidden, others want to have a wild and swinging time, and others want to copy grownups as fast as they can (again, Sune might not be all that neglected, when compared to Sharess, and many teens might be just as hot for the worship of Shar or Mystra or Mielikki or whomever has the hunkiest/most beautiful clergy or teen worshippers; if you're hot for Nalatra the miller's daughter, and she can be found in high boots, black lace and not much else writhing on tombstones in some confused ritual to Shar, then you're either turned off/too scared to pursue her, or you're right there on the tombstone with her, aren't you?).

As for where Sharess came from, be warned: priests and worshippers alike seldom speak truth, but rather repeat what they have been told to say, which may or may not be true.

I probably won't do fiction involving the gods directly, beyond the brief sort of scenes seen in my last two Elminster novels -- and even those, I'd prefer to back away from. With deities prancing around, it's hard for mere mortals to shine as heroes.

As for your draconic queries, I regard all dragons as intelligent and strong-willed enough that except in cases of directly opposite alignment, all relationships between dragons should be determined on a case-by-case, individual basis. Otherwise, saying that Dragon Type A and Dragon Type B are friendly or hate each other is about as valid as saying "All stockbrokers are friends" or "All radish-sellers hate each other's guts." So instead, let's consider that Darvur the Radish-Seller hates his cousin Vondryn the Radish-Lord, who has a stall at the other end of Dock Ward, but is good friends with Arvul the Radish-King, whose stall is right the far end of North Ward.

Thus, the blue dragon Vaurethdraumantor may or may not hate the brass dragon Dzeldurtrar Sharpwings, though they probably have little in common and rub each other the wrong way. On the other hand, they may once have had a moonlit encounter in a ruin that has given both of them fond dreams and memories, ever since...

I do believe that all dragons CAN crossbreed (although a few individual dragons may be sterile/barren), and that the offspring will almost always favour one parent or the other very closely (perhaps with some minor shuffling of abilities), but that in rare cases a new sub-breed or a chimera-like strange draconic beast will result. I'm more interested in WHY they would want to breed (dragons mate seldom, so is it an all-consuming, driving lust or instinctive imperative when faced with imminent death or passage into a post-menopausal, non-breeding stage of life? Do dragons have such a thing? Or are they all cold-bloodedly rational enough to mate for long-term goals or mutual advantage, or to create something that they can both use as lures to enrich their hoards if they spread the word of rare crossbred-dragon eggs?).

As for internet fan fiction using or set in the Realms, I have nothing against the idea of such writing -- storytelling is a basic human activity, and we tend to want to write or tell stories about things that matter to us. However, I have no time to read such fiction, and like my colleague Elaine Cunningham have to be mindful of the legal dangers of offering to do so. Moreover, I

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recognize that Wizards of the Coast, Inc., as the current copyright holders of the Realms, may take a very strong corporate stance against the publication of fan fiction (to protect the Realms). I recall rumors of a bondage and discipline website using Drizzt images, and the rush to get them removed so that the Realms wouldn't be associated with S&M rather than D&D (and yes, angry mothers, there IS a difference :}). So I'm neither going to agree to read someone's Realms fanfic or help them to try to get it published, by Wizards or anyone else... but on a personal level, the fact that Realms fanfic is being created doesn't bother me at all.

On the other hand, satire is a defense in American law (not everywhere in the world, please note), and I've enjoyed some vicious short parodies, down the years, of Realms characters, NPC groups, adventures, and novels. Some TSR staffers deliberately sent me Realms parodies for my enjoyment, and I consider that a different matter.

I think a Dungeon Master who fictionalizes the deeds of his or her players, for their own collective consumption ONLY, is doing a noble thing.

I believe someone who wants to be a fantasy writer is better off using their own characters and own setting from the outset, because doing so forces them into doing the creative underpinnings and providing fully-fleshed-out characters and place descriptions, rather than relying on readers "knowing" an already-established place or character. Also, because such writing isn't a deliberate challenge to copyright, it can be freely shared and critiqued, and thus has a chance of leading on to something more.

Please note: I'm not a literary snob. (The ridiculous nature of someone who enjoys fantasy looking upon any writing with snobbery is another matter.) I don't sneer at Fantasy Writer X because their work isn't as good as Fantasy Writer Y, and people who viciously do so frankly bewilder me. As a longtime library staffer, I'm far more interested in finding out what the reader standing in front of me wants or likes, and giving it to them ("You prefer David Eddings to Patricia McKillip? Then you'll PROBABLY like..."). So I'm not going to comment on the quality of any fanfic I do come across, because Sturgeon's Law applies to EVERYTHING (yes, my work very much included). :} Whew. So saith Ed.

Who is probably as weary as I am, so 'tis time for us both to seek our beds (seperate beds miles apart, Wooly and Blueblade, so your hopes need not be dashed yet). Let thy blade be swift, sharp, and true until next we meet,  
THO

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May 17, 2004: Fair meeting, gentles. Thy Hooded Lady once more, bearing words of Ed:

Lashan, glad you're back. Yours is the eldest neglected Realmslore request, so here we go.

I'm afraid any more direct revelations about your namesake, Lashan Aumersair, must remain unanswered for now, because I don't want to get in the way of still-unfolding, still-secret Realms projects.

However, your story requests re. the House of Twilight in Tantras and the Net of Stars are my pleasure to deal with. So here's the first one:

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**Candlekeep**

The House of Twilight is an establishment that has reached its current sprawling size by linking a large central hall with several adjoining standaths.

(A "standath" is the Dragonreach and Moonsea name for a rectangular stone building that has cellars -- perhaps with a shop in the uppermost cellar level, entered by a 'duck down steps' route from street level -- a shop on the ground floor, and two or more upper floors given over to residential suites. Sometimes the floor directly above the street-level shop is also occupied by that shop, or by another business, or by offices. In other words, the vast majority of close-crowded, square-stone-block central city buildings are standaths. A "murdeath" is the same as a standath but with no cellars beneath, usually due to very hard bedrock at the surface, swampy ground, or everpresent flooding danger.)

In the case of the House of Twilight, one such link is a third-floor-up [counting the ground level as the first floor, just to settle the British and American differences on this matter] enclosed 'flying bridge,' but all of the other links are below-ground tunnels.

The House of Twilight fronts on the moot (T-junction) of Mountstar Street and the Stallionpost, in the Upwall district of the city.

Mountstar Street is a major east-west route crossing the southern half of the city. The House of Twilight stands in the last (easternmost) block of the eastern end of its run, on the south side of Mountstar, facing the end of the Stallionpost (a short, straight street that runs SW-NE to end in a moot with Wall Lane).

The easternmost run of Mountstar curves southeast towards the Gryphongard Tower of the city wall (meeting Wall Lane just north of that tower), from its split into Mountstar Street and Rengallon Street two blocks east of the Fountain of the Mermaid. [On the FRA map, locate "6" and go most of an inch towards the top of the page along the street the numeral 6 is drawn on, to the obvious "Y" intersection. The building in the cleft of the "Y" is The Morning Halls, the temple of Lathander, with its refectory and stables being the next building along the curve of Mountstar Street, and five buildings farther along is the moot with the Stallionpost. The large "squashed-V-shape" building across from that street is the House of Twilight.]

The House of Twilight is famous among nightclubs for its elegance. Everyone is clean, well-dressed, and quiet (there's a sound-deadening spell in effect that reduces shouts to murmurs: even whispers can be readily heard by someone the whisperer is touching, and normal converse carries about three feet, with shouting reaching maybe five feet). The House has a huge security staff attired in dark livery, who intercept drunkards, known troublemakers, ill-dressed visitors, and anyone openly carrying weapons, and all large and menacing groups. Such guests are hustled into siderooms for interviews as to their intent, secure storage of weapons (storage of non-dangerous [not explosive or living or corrosive or obviously enchanted] valuables in the same 'the House is responsible' manner is possible, for fees ranging from 1 cp to 1 gp/night; weapons storage is free), baths, shaves, perfuming, and hair care (3 cp to 5 gp total charges, depending on how much is done), and costume rental. Although the House does put on 'fancy dress' revels in which everyone dons padded monster costumes or at least masks, or all portray parody-likenesses of dwarves or elves or stags, most "costumes" are merely formal wear of great taste and distinction. The dressers, bathers, and barbers ("barber" is a term that covers hairstylists in the Moonsea) are all pleasant, well-trained, and good-looking -- and there are dust-covered merchants and salt-stained sailors in plenty who come to the House of Twilight just to get pampered and spruced up, and never enter the club itself.

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The lofty main hall of the club is always dark, lit only by dim "twinklestars" (pierced-filigree, star-shaped cages of blackened brass hanging from the ceiling-beams on pulley-chains, that each hold a single candle). The light can be increased or decreased by the number of candles lit, and altered in hue by using different-colored candles (the House has a huge variety, but most often uses uncolored candles, switching to purple for illusion-casting demonstrations, blue for mime-acting performances, and red for lust-revels). There's a raised, oval 'thrust' stage (with a "backcavern" theater joined to it), a dance floor in front of the stage, tables for drinkers filling an arc around the dance floor and stage, and three tiers of balconies, with chairs set along them (that are chained to floor-bosses to prevent them being hurled down into the expanse below).

Musical performances and oratory are, thanks to the hush enchantments, unknown at the House of Twilight. Instead, the stage is given over to mime-acting (and short performances of tales told in a series of tableaux), acrobatics [think Cirque du Soleil], and (during lust-revels) burlesque stripteases and sexual acrobatics.

The hush enchantments don't govern the 'retreats' of the club (that is, the parts of the House of Twilight located in the various sidehouses). They are rented out at high rates for trade and illicit-dealings meetings; moots of various private clubs, cabals, and gambling groups (including gatherings as odd and innocent as 'swap meets' of male merchants who collect and trade porcelain dolls and don't want their city acquaintances to ridicule them or their wives to explode at the sums they spend); and to the Twilight Ladies (prostitutes employed by the House, who sees that they're bathed and costumed, and protects them by rushing security staff to respond to alarms rung by the Ladies).

By special, secret arrangement, the House sometimes agrees to store stolen goods in hiding, or even drugged, wounded, or enspelled persons (including fugitives from justice and kidnap victims). At least one rebellious young Sembian heiress, Telchantla Erynmoon, recently "kidnapped" herself, holing up in a House room for months whilst she sent ransom demands from fictitious captors back to her family by ship.

The House of Twilight was started thirty-some summers ago by an ailing, retired adventurer-wizard, Tanathra Sundee, who may be dead by now, or may just be really wizened and confined to a hidden suite somewhere in the House. She's either alive and magically scrying what goes on, whispering occasional tips as to trouble or interesting events to the House staff, or she's haunting the place (and doing exactly the same thing).

The House is currently owned and run by eight to twelve (wider Tantras isn't sure on how many owners the club has, or precisely who all of them are) local citizens, among them the wine merchant Halmidur "Oldbottle" Dransun, the dressmaker Amranthe Tantelhand, the cabinetmaker Menyurl "Manychairs" Haeltree, and at least two of the Twilight Ladies, Shamurla "the She-Stallion" Dlaevul (her nickname derives from her tall, thin stature and her long, long mare's tail of blond hair, said by many to be a deliberate attempt to copy the locally-famous adventure-mage Tarnatassa) and Mureena Osskont. The House enjoys friendly relations with the High Council, and it's long been rumored that several wives of High Council members are among the club owners (gossip usually 'identifies' the imperious Iyeirindra Ormitar, fat and lazy Wyndlanna "the Worm" Kaetril, and Suspanna Vulthyndur).

Current rumors swirling around the House involve the brusque, bearded and very aggressive-in-trade noble merchant Belmar Horthantar regularly changing his shape by hired magical means into that of a beautiful woman, and spending nights at the House selling pleasure to men; Helvel Drunstable, longtime priest of the city's shrine to Lathander (who maintains the simple Morning Altar on Straeth Street because he has long publicly considered High Morninglord Alansyn

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Ambrilar a supercilious lover-of-luxuries who's lost touch with the real folk of Tantras and the true state of everyday life in Faerun, to chase "empty fantasies of foolishness" of somehow "drawing nearer to the Light" by winning Lathander's favour, in frivolous ways Drunstable believes Lathander scorns, such as bathing in rose-petals, conjuring up rose-pink smokes that one breathes out by the mouth, and so on) being seen often at the House meeting with mysterious outlanders; that two of the owners of the House have become locked in a deadly feud that's going to soon be settled either by a duel between the two, shut naked in the darkened, deserted House to hunt each other with daggers -- or by hiring spellcasters to temporarily imbue them with spell ability, and fighting a magical duel; bored, jaded Umbarra Stauntcandle, an aging widow and the last living member of the rich, noble Stauntcandle merchant family, has begun preparations for a 'treasure hunt' in the House that should end with the finder of a jewelled token bringing it to her and receiving her hand in marriage, regardless of their gender and marital status, so they can become Stauntcandles and the family endure; and that someone is enspelling rivals into trapped existences in the House by magically immobilizing them, whereupon they're stripped and painted to resemble stone, and set up on plinths as statues.

Oh, yes: and the House never really closes, though the main hall shuts down from dawn until after highsun every day for cleaning and 'dressing' (fresh candles on some tables, preparing the stage, seeing to the twinklestars, and so on). The House allows food to be brought in, but serves none -- and offers an awesome variety of drinkables, both exotic and mundane. A recent "rushsails" cellar delivery was to the House was for twelve bottles of elverquisst and six casks of Berduskan dark.

There. That ought to be enough to begin with. Oh, and Lashan, please: it's Ed. "Mr. Greenwood" is my father. :}

So saith Ed, who's uttered that line about his father a time or twenty thousand before (and, Eddie-Bear, shouldn't he really be "Professor Greenwood"? or does that courtesy not extend to Professors Emeritus?).

I can add just one tale of the House: we Knights visited it and danced there, one night, only to be attacked by a Zhent foe who was also a guest -- and spread confusion, once hostilities began, with a spell that severed the chains of many of the hot twinklestars, sending them crashing down onto the heads of revelers. The staff of the House revealed that their ranks include at least one mage or sorceress, and that they can call on the swiftly-arriving aid of BOTH the Grayclaws and local Harpers, who will work together to quell problems in the House, expel or defeat combatants, and magically bolster the Fireward enchantments of the House to prevent fires spreading. And during the fray, my character personally proved that given a sufficient running start, it's possible to leap from the stage up and onto the rail of the lowest encircling balcony -- and an obliging Zhentarim proved that one can plunge from the highest balcony right down to the floor of the main hall and survive provided one crashes through a handy table on the way, and lands on the thoughtfully-placed bodies of other Zhents.

THO

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May 17, 2004: Ah, Lashan, this is your lucky day. Thy Lady Hooded, bringing Ed's second reply, this time about the Net of Stars.

This one's going to be rather shorter, I'm afraid, because the Net is basically just a tavern. A very good one, but still just a drinking-place.

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**Candlekeep**

The Net of Stars is large and popular (and hence, crowded and noisy at all hours) tavern. It's known around the Reach for its friendly safety, its clean, cheerful, well-lit ambiance, and for the source of its illumination: huge glass three-quarter-globes (spheres with the uppermost quarter missing, so they're open at the top) that diffuse the light of oil lamps hung at their hearts, and that are gathered together overhead in a vast network of ceiling-nets -- obviously, the source of the establishment's name.

The Net of Stars occupies a corner location three blocks from the docks, on the northeast side of the moot of Marampur and Steth Streets, in the Oldcoin neighbourhood of the city. Steth Street is the short, curving lane that arcs northwest from the Fountain of the Mermaid, and is only a block long; Marampur Street is the longer north-south route Steth Street ends in.

Murak Sandorn, a former hiresword (warrior) of note who looks like a large, amiable bear with long, always-tangled honey-brown hair, is the owner and tavernmaster of the Net of Stars. He runs a large staff of young, eager men and women who know their drinks and how to serve them swiftly and deftly, grin when groped, and whistle for swift aid if something more serious occurs. Murak's known to have reached an agreement with the Grayclaws: the Net of Stars is 'safe ground' for both the Grayclaws and those they see as potential victims (they won't operate inside the place, except to conduct business discussions over drinks, but DO size up other drinkers, for pounce-thefts later). Murak's on-duty staff never numbers less than a dozen, and he prides himself on training them to be good-natured, sexy and flirtatious without being wanton or ever going farther (though arranging moots elsewhere with patrons for steamier matters is allowed), and alert to trouble or a possible thirsty throat. If a patron holds up one hand overhead cupped around empty air in a 'drink please' signal, a staffer should be at the table asking the patron's pleasure in three breaths or less.

Murak allows all manner of meetings and negotiations to take place in the Net, but patrons are forbidden to bring live animals inside, or any food that's still alive, is hot, or has sauce on it or with it. Patrons are also forbidden to exchange items, with two exceptions: coins and other currency, and paper documents (in other words, a payment can be made or a contract drafted or signed, but merchants can't directly buy or sell goods).

Murak does this to keep merchants from treating his tables like permanent business offices, not because he's an 'ogresnout' (nasty authority-hurler). He gives members of the Watch free drinks, and in return gets himself not only exemplary response from the Watch whenever brawls erupt, but at least a handful of off-duty Watch members in his taproom at all times. They understand that they're expected not to scrutinize or eavesdrop on fellow patrons in an obvious manner, and are treated like family.

As a result, the Net is the safest tavern for miles. It never closes, and serves inexpensive drinks, nuts, handwheels of cheese, small roundloaves of salty bread, and "everything in" (usually boar-scrap and barley, thickened with mashed yellow peas, always salty, and always served in tankards, with long spoons handed out when the tankard grows low) soups.

Murak and a lot of his staff live above the taproom, in a communal, everchanging family (Murak himself is best described as a "lazily tomcatting bachelor"), and has one 'sick room' suite up in the attic, but normally rents out no rooms, and permits no guests to stay overnight (he has been known to 'take in' a hunted guest as part of his family for a night).

The cellars of the Net of Stars are often flooded knee-deep by stinking harbor-water, and are haunted by the ghosts of drowned smugglers, but that doesn't deter Murak from hiding some of the wealth he won during his mercenary days in hidden cellar chambers, or chasing his prettier

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servicing-wench down one of the two secret stairs (crowded with cobwebs and smuggler-chains) that link attic and cellars.

The ghosts don't enter the secret stairs or the hidden rooms they lead to, but keep to the surrounding ring of chambers (which aren't directly connected to the hidden rooms). These surrounding chambers are usually choked with mold, rotting barrels, and a few inches of water, are reached down several stairs from the jakes (which empty into high-sided 'nightsoil' carts run down wheel-trough ramps to sit under the privies on chains, and hauled up and away by mules VERY early every morning, when replacements are brought) and from locked doors around the taproom.

Murak hollowed out space under the 'backbar' room to serve as a wine-cellar, and abandoned the cellars to the ghosts, who attack all intruders. There is one trapdoor into the cellars that Murak can open precipitously by pulling a lever behind the bar, dumping undesirables in the taproom twenty feet down into the damp darkness. Only very small persons can be sent down into the nightsoil carts through the privy-holes, and the ghosts don't bother anyone in the ramp area, thanks to the presence of a crypt thing.

The crypt thing, once the priestess Hurlara Snowstill, died fighting in the ramp to prevent smugglers from plundering a shrine to Tempus that once stood on the site of the Net of Stars, and was set here as a guardian. She prevents all living things, from rats to adventurers, from using the ramp as a way between the cellars and the street outside -- and more than one drunken sailor, urinating down the ramp, has been "hair-standing startled" at the sight of a red-eyed skeleton walking slowly and gracefully up the ramp towards him, clad only in the tattered ruins of a gown. The ghosts avoid her and the areas she guards, and Murak knows all about her and brings her new gowns (down the ramp, in the brief time between one nightsoil cart being removed and its replacement introduced) from time to time. A small flagstone in a passage near the privies can be lifted and set aside to allow things to be dropped down to her, and Murak sends her reading material in this way whenever he can. Hurlara carefully keeps and re-reads everything sent to her, and can sometimes be eerily heard entertaining herself by softly reading random words aloud from several sources, to stitch together a new (and inevitably rather stilted) tale.

So saith Ed.

I recall Murak, but now that I know all this, will use the Net as a swift way of tipping off the Watch and Grayclaws to the Knights' presence in Tantras without all the bother of accosting someone to make an announcement. That way both groups can start following us right away, and we can all save time.

THO

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May 18, 2004: Back again, fellow scribes, with some swift'n'simple replies from our Ed:

Krafus, when it comes to heavy-lifting Realmslore answers: yes, you're next, I promise!

Damian, in answer to your May 8th comment in this thread, I think we ARE seeing some elven propaganda regarding the "history" that tells us they lifted humankind on Toril out of barbarism and first gave them magic. I believe some few humans of sophisticated spellcasting powers survived an earlier 'great war' among human civilizations, and lured the elves into Faerun through the gates so the Fair Folk could by their very presence hold the land against rampaging

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monsters, overly-grasping dragons, and innumerable orcs long enough for these few sophisticated humans to return to lives of contemplation, study, and pursuing pet magical projects rather than endlessly defending themselves merely to survive.

The elves did find the great majority of humans as nomadic, brawling barbarians (albeit with a great adaptability for magic and everything else), but some Fair Folk MUST have known about the few human sorcerers and wizards... and their xenophobic lore since has "forgotten" this, despite the evidence of the gates, half-elves (hence human/elf interbreeding, and we can't all be fascinated by smelly savage barbarians, right?).

Athenon, your glimpses of Calaunt and Harrowdale should follow the reply Krafus is waiting for. Glad you liked the wilderland terrain parts of the Silver Marches: the kudos you offer me should actually belong to Rich Baker, who made an outline of what was to go into the book and carefully made sure that all of those features were covered (me, I could have filled the thing just with Silvermoon, and then done it all over again with Everlund, and then -- well, you see why they don't let me manage any sort of game department :}).

I certainly hope that Wizards will hurl forth similar products on the Dalelands, Cormyr, AND Sembia in the near future, but I can honestly say I don't know of any definite plans to do so. As the old adage goes, "Ask and buy, and ask again, and perhaps, just PERHAPS, in the fullness of time..."

On the unfolding tidbits about The Simbul, well, George, I can add this much: she DOES have a close friendship with a dragon who lairs somewhere northeast of Thay, and can in fact call on this wyrm for aid as a steed, pounce-rescuer, and even diversionary attack force. The name, breed, and locale of the dragon and its domain are details I've yet to unearth in my elder lore-notes. Elsewhere I've talked about the long, tender, half-bullying manner in which The Simbul brought Elminster back to sanity and mental strength after his excursion into the Nine Hells, but you can be sure that during their lovemaking, which usually involves mind-to-mind caresses as well as the physical contact, she laid down some very vivid mind-visions to remind him of the consequences of overly willful behaviour. The fact that this is very much the kettle calling the chamberpot black is beside the point; I think we'll see a lot less of the wayward bed-all-handly-wenches El henceforth (ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER revelations notwithstanding).

Borch, I haven't forgotten you either! When I finally get the Waterdeep novel and my public-appearances obligations out of the way, I'll start moving on the Realmslore a little faster. If you've ever wondered why oldtime D&D gamers had to wait forever for more Greyhawk lore from Gary Gygax, well, now you know why: like me, he was constantly busy with everything else!

Proc, a few Watch notes to start on: Watch officers customarily address male citizens as "goodsirs," except for persons they know to be Waterdhavian nobility (and every veteran Watch officer knows at least the heads and heirs of all Waterdhavian noble families on sight, plus the troublemakers), whom they call "gentlesirs." Mixed-gender noble groups of people are "gentles."

Non-noble women are "goodwives" unless young, whereupon they become "goodlasses." Young males are usually called "jacks" or "my jacks" (as in: "What befalls? Hold and deliver truth, my jacks!")

"Hold!" (= 'Freeze!') and "Down arms!" (= 'Drop your weapons!') and "Talk truth!" (= 'Answer me!') are frequent Watch commands.

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I'll get into addressing fellow officers and salutes properly later, but here's just one: a salute made by a Watch officer that indicates respect for someone's judgement, prowess at arms, or bravery is to draw oneself to attention, look at the person to be honoured, and while doing so, sharply rap the hilt of a sheathed weapon (usually belt dagger) with one closed fist. More anon, as I have time.

Foxhelm, a quick start on planar answers for you. Yes, there are living people on the planes, and in many cases in cities and towns located around portals, a few of these being as crossroads/lawless as Planescape's Sigil. As to who inhabits such places -- again, I'll get to this.

Metis, likewise with the Reach: I'll whip up some more lore as soon as I can (this truly IS a neglected area, because aside from shipwrecks and pirate-chasings, the Knights seldom went there).

Garen Thal, I look forward to talking Realmslore with you at GenCon at as great a length as we can manage. Owing to my increasingly failing wits (old age, the stress of being a stunningly beautiful supermodel by night and a fat bearded gamer by day, and so on), I've begun to forget details of Realmslore and have to consult my notes (holding the entire Realms in my head was easy when I was the sole creator, but much harder ever since), so if you quiz me on arcane details, expect to hear me admitting my forgetfulness... but hopefully there'll be enough left of my brain to yield up SOMETHing useful then.

That goes for all fans of the Realms: although I agree to participate in certain events and then have to do so, I otherwise attend GenCon to see old friends (often gamer colleagues) and to 'talk Realms' with fans, so don't be shy: tackle me (especially if you're female and look as good as The Hooded One).

Bookwyrn and The Sage, yes, the Realms boasts the usual insects (gnats, stinging midges, mosquitoes, wasps, bees, plus giant versions of all of these, as well as stag beetles, rhino beetles, ant lions, and so on. Cicadas, I don't think so, but I'll have to check my notes. Dragon twice rejected "everyday, not monster" insect article ideas in the past, but over the years my spell ink formulae, potion formulae, spell component notes, and similar Realmslore have mentioned a fair variety of insects. Yes, I'll have to delve into more detail. I can say that the existence of a lot of the aerial monster life found in the rulebooks means that a LOT more insects would get devoured in the Realms than in our present-day real world.

In similar vein, kuje31 and Bookwyrn: yes, germs exist in the Realms just as in our real world, though knowledge of them is rare and confused. As far as is known, there are no magic-resistant germs (beyond the fell experiment mentioned in CORMYR: A NOVEL).

Gerath Hoan, Arabel was swiftly reclaimed and what minor damage there was (a lot of looting, a few buildings burned) was quickly set right. The majority of citizens have returned, because the Crown very much wants to hold Arabel as a strong city: there's a long-standing fear that to let it stand weak or abandoned will mean the loss of most of Cormyr to the Zhents, the beasts of the Stonelands, and now, perhaps, the machinations of Shade.

Bookwyrn, I'm very pleased your mother liked Volo's North. I had to write most of those Volo's books far faster than I would have liked, and the art orders were killers that ate up too much time, too, but I'd willingly have undergone far worse punishment if I'd been allowed to cram a lot more lore into them. Some of them were VERY heavily edited (check the credits, and you'll see that one of them was "gang-edited" :}), with lots of bitchy Volo restaurant reviews hitting the cutting-room floor. If I'd been allowed to make the books long enough, or rather cover smaller areas in

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each one, they'd have been crammed with local colour and stories. They're still my favourite style of product, and I regularly ask Wizards folks for a chance to do new ones.

And I know just what you mean about enjoying descriptions of places you can no longer go. For years, one of my library bosses, a fat woman who lived alone, ordered every cookbook that was published for her branch -- and took them home to bed with her, and read them as "food porn," imagining what everything tasted like without ever daring to follow the recipes and consume the result.

Because none of us can ride dragons or hurl spells, and only imagine it, I have to do my darndest to make it "feel real." I spent years volunteering at a childrens' hospital for severely disabled kids, describing dragonback flying to some of them who could never walk -- and watching their eyes fill with wonder. It's that light in the eyes I'm always striving for, when I write.

And yeah, it IS a shame about those royalties. I coulda been a contendah!

Ed ran out of time here, and tells me he'll finish with the quickies (ahem) when he can. Possibly late tomorrow.

Until then,  
Blades high and bright, all!  
THO

\*\*\*\*\*

May 19, 2004: Hello, scribes. Ed's snowed under with Waterdeep and with wrestling with a new computer system just installed at the library ("My brain hurts!" he e-told me!), and snatched just time enough for this tidbit of Realmslore, re. how much the Watch get paid:

I'm sure Wizards folks will correct and update this for the 3.5 rules, but I've always applied this:

25 gp upon joining, plus free uniform, pair of boots, training, and (one) weapon. If dismissed without completing training, all must be returned except 12 gp.

Thereafter: free room and board at assigned Watch barracks (bunk, small beer, simple fare, bath access, weapon-oil; need not be accepted, or can be taken up only on a casual "feel like it tonight" basis), plus 1 gp per day (active duty or not), plus 4 sp per patrol (normally only 1 patrol per day per Watch person, the day normally being divided into three slightly-overlapping shifts/patrols). Officers receive the same 1 gp rate, but 5 sp, 7 sp, or 1 gp per patrol, depending on rank.

Free replacement uniform, boots, and additional weapon per year, others must be paid for out of salary (additional weapons and gear are often issued 'for free' out of armory lockups for patrol use, but must be returned or replaced).

Watch found guilty of crimes or misbehaviour are often fined by the Watch as well as punished under law. Distinguished service often earns handsome retirement bonuses from the Lords (sometimes even outlying land or in-city buildings!).

So saith Ed.

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Useful, this. Mr. Schend? Mr. Boyd? Mr. Baker? How does this pay scale 'square' with current D&D rules?  
THO

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May 20, 2004: Hello, all. Ed's whirlwind busy today (and was yesterday, too) with publicity-trip matters, family stuff, and pumping out more novel chapters, but he did hurl one very quick reply my way, to pass on to you all:

kuje31, pantheons aren't closed off at all. Any mortal of any race can worship any deity (of course, portfolio interests, alignment, and upbringing makes some matchups of faith and person highly unlikely, and most of the unusual ones will be the result of an individual searching for the "right" calling, or ascribing an important life event's outcome to the influence or direct action of a particular deity). That extends to divine casters, too ... though it should be noted that some priesthoods won't welcome unusual races.

So saith Ed.

Must rush myself, now. Will return tomorrow, hopefully with more Ed replies.  
THO

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May 22, 2004: Well met, gentles all. Ed hath returned from his venture into Toronto (which no doubt involved a lot of wild and crazy driving that he thankfully still takes in stride, after twenty years of two-hundred-miles daily commuting) having enjoyed his reading at the Merrill Collection immensely. As promised, his first reply via me shall be the long-awaited Krafus query about Raumathar.

Hi, Krafus. Sorry for the wait. Well, please remember we're dealing with sketchy ancient lore here, and therefore are speaking in generalities. The Raumathari began as a mounted, nomadic people (much as their age-old rivals the Nars did, and later returned to), and became skilled fighters, specializing in lance and sling-work from horseback, and later the use of throwing knives (BIG throwing knives, curved like the kukris of the real-world Gurkhas) and small horse-bows.

There were sorcerers among the Raumathari, and eventually some of these rose to become battle-leaders. The Raumathari, by the way, respected personal ability over gender or family, which was one of the reasons they grew to wealth, power, and sophistication so quickly: they paid collective attention to new ideas and successes, seldom subverting them due to jealousies, clan loyalties, or corrupt desires to remain in power.

The brightest Raumathari sorcerers saw that their spells were limited by their own inspiration and experimentations (and that opportunities to do the latter in anything close to safety were VERY limited) and set about trying to capture and even seduce wizards from other realms and peoples, so as to gain access to existing magical knowledge.

In a few (but enough) cases, these attempts were successful, and (again, the Raumathari respecting ability over origins; there was very little negative opinion of 'outlander' wizards) in a few generations the Raumathari had trained up respectable numbers of wizards from among their own people.

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Yes, one COULD make a "Raumathari battle-wizard" a prestige class, but I wouldn't, because I view them as varying so much in ability from individual to individual (see two paragraphs below). Raumathari battle-wizards should be dual-classed wizard/fighters, always beginning as fighters and then, once they demonstrated both interest and aptitude, slowly learning useful-in-battle spells from fellow fighters who'd already mastered some magic.

Those Raumathari wizards and sorcerers who had no taste for battle wouldn't be battle-wizards: they'd be tapestry-makers or woodcarvers or scribes or whatever, who were also wizards or sorcerers.

As for questions about organization, tactics, favoured magic items, and typical levels: forgive me, but this is an overly modern, real-world way of looking at things. To me, it seems like asking: "All of the men in the world: how are they organized, what are their tactics, and what items do they most often use?"

The Raumathari began as nomadic warriors and achieved early success as mercenaries. They valued individual achievement, and the sharing of useful skills and knowledge throughout all Raumathari... so there were no "typical levels" of anyone or anything, and (aside from mobility, striking from horseback and always moving in battle -- until they had cities to defend) their tactics varied greatly from group to group, following what had worked for that particular group, and experimenting with what they'd heard had worked for other groups. Always of great importance among the Raumathari were sorcerers (and later wizards, too) who could use magic to communicate across great distances, between Raumathari communities and armies and caravans.

So a Raumathari battle group would be a cavalry unit organized around, and protecting, those Raumathari who had communication and healing magic, and led by the most competent battle-veterans. Sorcerers and wizards among them would hurl spells from horseback, or halt while others held their horses, dismount, cast spells as swiftly as possible, and ride on again.

One of the reasons Raumathar ultimately fell was that the Raumathari developed very few magic items, so what they did have would be whatever they'd seized from others or gained in trade.

I suppose you could describe a lot of Raumathari tactics as "hit and run." They were particularly fond of striking unexpectedly from the rear, and then vanishing again, riding off to rush in later, again and again, rather than standing to fight and be hammered at by a prepared foe in prepared formations and terrain position.

I suppose a typical Raumathari battle-wizard would have four or five levels as some sort of warrior (if you have or use prestige classes for mounted archers, apply them) before gaining a level as a wizard, and thereafter progress as opportunities afforded (both for magical tutelage and for battle experience).

So if a battle-group was thirty or forty riders strong, about a dozen would be low-level novices (as some sort of warrior, with no spellcasting ability), three or so would be powerful fighter/wizard dual-classes, another two would be good riders who were either clerics or arcane spellcasters with long-range communication or translocation (teleport) magics, and the rest would be whatever mounted warrior class you think best fits, of levels 3 through 7, with a quarter to a third of them also having a few levels as a wizard or a sorcerer.

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I hope this helps. Eric or George or anyone else, feel free to jump in and augment or correct, if lore exists that contradicts this 'genesis of the Raumathari' view. I know that from its nomadic beginnings, Raumathar became a briefly-flourishing great realm, and its character could well have changed, until battle-wizards DID have codified tactics, ranks, organization, and typical levels or spells.

So saith Ed.

News to me, a player of a present-Realms-day Knight who spent most of her time plunging from frying pans into fires, or vice versa. :}

More from Ed very soon,  
THO

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May 22, 2004: Hail, fellow scribes. Thy Hooded Lady returns, with the latest words from Ed:

To kuje31, Proc, BobROE, John, and some other scribes who desired to remain anonymous,

It was a pleasure to meet all of you at the Merrill Collection reading on Thursday. I hope my narration didn't put too many of you to sleep.

You can probably tell that I was also seeing some old friends (including my best friend from my high school days, whose wife works at the Merrill) there, and fantasy and sf fans should keep in mind both Michelle West/Michelle Sagara, the lady who was manning the Elminster's Daughter selling table at the back, herself a deservedly bestselling fantasy author (look for THICK paperbacks with beautiful covers, from DAW), and the library itself, which is a superb collection of reference-only fantasy and sf classics (if you want to see a rare or hard to find work, it's THE place in North America to go).

I was deeply impressed by the folks who drove for hours (from New Hampshire, in one case! Ye gods!) to see me. I hope you weren't too disappointed. Well, at least there were lots of good eats.

kuje, you handed me a list of Realmslore questions, and here are my best stabs at some answers:

AvengedMutablegenus:

"1. What was your inspiration for some of the main NPCs? Were they based off of your friends?"

A: No, I am cursed with what some of my teachers preferred to call "an overly vivid imagination." In short, I just plain 'made up' the Realms NPCs. Yes, hundreds of them. Of course, in my imagination I drew on the mannerisms, speech patterns, behaviours, looks, and actions of thousands of real people I met growing up (in a VERY wealthy Canadian neighbourhood, so I got to see lots of eccentrics and new-money puffed up folks; and with three sets of grandparents through whom I met lots of hard-working farmers, some of them old and garrulous; and in a city that many have described as "the REAL United Nations," full of immigrants from all over the world, with their great collective variety of cuisine, customs, faiths, and philosophies). Yet I've NEVER taken a real person and put him or her directly into the Realms, with a new name and medieval garb. Never. And I never will.

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"2. How much of FR did RA Salvatore make? Did you give him freelance to make up things like new races monsters etc.?"

A: As far as I know, Bob created the Icewind Dale, Ten Towns, Icingdeath and the mountain that was that dragon's lair, Menzoberranzan and its inhabitants, Artemis Entreri, Cadderly and his monastery, a lot of the features of Vaasa and Damara, Mithril Hall, Pook and his palace, The Accursed Tower, and details of the Nars. I say "as far as I know" because TSR's book editors and game designers were the people who 'gave' Bob leeway to create things, not me; I don't control the published Realms, and never have. Bob asked my permission to use Alustriel and the Harpells and the Tower of Twilight and the Arcane and the Herald's Holdfast and so on, out of friendship and courtesy, and I've been thrilled at the colour, vigour, and popularity he's brought to the Realms over the years. I'm not sure if he's created any new races (the drow, svirfneblin, illithids, and hook horrors were all part of the game well before I saw the manuscript of The Crystal Shard), but I'm sure the scribes here can supply one if he did. Bob's chief achievements in the Realms, in my opinion, are bringing a cast of vivid, believable, and memorable characters to life, and creating the drow society of Menzoberranzan in such unforgettable and compelling detail.

"3. Where did the idea of the weave come from?"

A: The idea of the weave has been part of the Realms from the very beginning. It was my way of viewing and understanding "the interconnectedness of all things" in my world, the ways in which magic and all natural forces (kinetic energy, the weather cycle, tides, sunlight, etc.) were linked and interacted together. The name "Weave" was introduced (I believe) by Julia Martin of TSR and now Wizards, as the way folk of Faerun described these interwoven forces. Neither the concept nor the name are truly original; they have been part of real-world mythologies, world-philosophies, and religions for thousands of years.

Zanon: "Will the drow, Lolth and Kiaransalee still be there after the Silence of Lolth and the War of the Spider Queen?"

A: I honestly don't know the fate of the drow, Lolth, and Kiaransalee, although I have been privy to quite enough secret unfolding Realmslore to possess very strong suspicions. However, I wouldn't tell you those answers even if I knew them, for two reasons: legal (Non-Disclosure Agreements MEAN something, and I keep the agreements I make, even if there aren't legal penalties attached to not doing so) and because "spilling" certain sorts of Realmslore before they're supposed to be revealed ruins the fun for everyone. Of COURSE anyone who cares about the War of the Spider Queen plotline wants to know what you've asked about, but a lot of the fun of the Realms is watching stuff unfold before your eyes, waiting for the next step, speculating on what might happen, and so on.

Let's put it another way: pretend you are a young, ardent guy who's deeply in love with a girl. She's your first real love, and you hope she loves you, too. Circumstances separate you for a season, and (unbeknownst to her) you sell everything that's precious to you to buy a plane or train ticket to get across the country to be with her.

So you're sitting in your seat, halfway through the trip, and the fat bearded stranger (no, not me; perhaps it's Santa, or a god, or the Lost Sock Fairy) sitting next to you turns his head, greets you by name, and announces he can tell you, in exacting detail and with complete truth, what lies ahead for you, your entire life, with the girl you're pursuing. Everything: whether she really loves you, if your courtship is going to happen and every good and bad incident that's going to be part of it, if you're going to have a life together at all, whether or not either one of you is going to betray

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the other, or drop dead of cancer or being hit by a car in two weeks or one of you end up murdering the other...whatever. And his words will remain true, describing events that can't be changed NO MATTER WHAT YOU TRY TO DO, once you know all about them.

More than this: you won't be able to forget a single word this stranger tells you. And the price is: no matter what he reveals, you have to go ahead with the rest of the trip and trying to find and pursue the girl, even if you know, every moment, that it means you're rushing towards disaster, or heartbreak, or death.

If I'm the stranger, you're the young guy -- and either way, I've ruined your enjoyment of the War of the Spider Queen, haven't I? Even if you REALLY WANT TO KNOW, right now, telling you will damage things...and, in this day of the Net, and everyone reading this thread at the Candlekeep site, everyone else will have their experience of the saga ruined too.

Yes, secrets weigh heavily, and carrying a lot of them is a heavy burden. That's one of the reasons Elminster is so crazy.

WizoBigsis: "How canon is the concept of canon? To put it another way ... do the designers & writers believe in an "official" line that "trumps" other versions, and do they build this into their work?"

A: Hi! Long time no see! We must get together properly and hoist a flagon or two, some day soon.

I know that in Realms work, various designers and writers have different personal opinions on just what canon is, and how (or if) it should be followed, and that the companies involved (TSR, its various Realms sub-licenses, and TSR as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wizards of the Coast, etc.) have also held various positions over the years.

As the guy who started the ball game, and whose "authority" to decree details about the Realms was enshrined in the original Realms agreement, I believe there is such a thing as canon (to paraphrase that agreement, if I say something about the Realms, whatever I say is canon until a later TSR printed source contradicts or modifies what I say, this later source becoming canon). The most recent published official source is canon.

I also believe that the Realms must have an official line that everyone tries to adhere to, because the believability of this imaginary world that we now all share depends on 'the willing suspension of disbelief,' and this pretending is made harder with each contradiction and inconsistency that creeps into Realmslore.

As the Realms continues, and its detail and the number of creators working with and in it grows, the entire tapestry we're creating together gets more and more complex, and it becomes impossible for any one person to hold all of it in his or her head (trust me: I know!). The potential for screwups grows greater and greater, and striving for canon, even if we fail from time to time, becomes vitally important to avoid the messes that, say, the comics companies found themselves in twenty years ago, when they had to "invent" multiple dimensions to explain away the varying origins stories and differing details of their characters.

In my experience, some of the richest Realmslore has grown from the efforts of dedicated scribes (to mention just a few names among many: Schend, Boyd, and Krashos) to reconcile and explain away apparent contradictions with "in-the-Realms" explanations. This makes canon an even brighter shining crown to strive for. I would hope that every Realms editor, designer and writer

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tries to follow canon, and is properly informed of canon sources before a project begins, so that they have a hope of doing so.

Or it makes all of our work and imagining and enjoying a little cheaper, a little hollow. And I've now put almost thirty-seven years of work into this.

kuje31: "Do people in FR have birthstones for each month? Or the like?"

A: No to birthstones, although some people seem to have an affinity for certain types of gemstones (discovered quite by accident during their lives, not by prophecy or folklore or priestly decrees or examinations). Yes to "the like:" people in the Realms have stars that are brightest on the nights of their birth (as observed at the place of their birth, that is, so too bad if it's overcast; this isn't a matter of astrology or predictions or reliable sage-lore), and when seen shining brightly at some later time, are interpreted to mean a moment of good fortune or likely success or possible importance for that person.

So saith Ed.

Whew, kuje, you seem to have kept Ed plenty busy. He's getting right back to the "small, but growing again" mountain of Realmslore requests, he promises me. I'll leave him to it for now, and return to my own work, too. Fare thee well for now, fellow scribes.

THO

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May 22, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes. I bring the words of Ed for Athenon, about Calaunt (he'll get to Harrowdale later):

Calaunt (described in both FRA and briefly in the closing pages of THE CITY OF RAVENS BLUFF) is a grim stone city of high walls that surrounds the silty mouth of the River Vesper in the shape of a gigantic bowl: its grandest, tallest houses line the inside of the city walls, and the lowest, most ramshackle structures lean crazily from prop to improvised prop, nearest the river (ancient warehouses and one-storey shanties).

The stink of river-mud wrestles with the reek of the tanneries for olfactory supremacy, in a constant, throat-tightening battle made worse throughout the warmer months by thick dusk-to-dawn fogs.

The tanneries stand on the north bank of the River Vesper, near the two rows-of-carved-gargoyle-surmounted bridges that link the two halves of the city. Except during violent storms over the Reach (which often blow out of the northwest, but bring fresh, damp air to the entire city), the prevailing local breezes blow down the Vesper and then veer southwest, carrying the tannery smells to the harbor and the riverbank slums.

Most streets in Calaunt are cobbled, mosses and clinging vines are the most prevalent greenery (trees are almost unknown, except as indoor luxuries in the tall, narrow mansions of the richest merchants), and buildings tend to be shutter-windowed, unlovely fortress-like boxes. Older buildings sometimes sport small balconies, but these are often crumbling and unsafe, and used mainly as a way to hang washed smallclothes for drying. Damp is an everpresent problem in Calaunt, and keeping clean is often a problem, so those who can afford it bathe in herb-scented oils and then scrape their skins clean. Many of the poorest labourers have skin rashes and molds,

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and hair that's home to many lice -- or is hacked off short and kept well-oiled. Open-web hammocks are popular sleeping-places, especially in the crowded homes of the poor.

At night, the Shadowcloaks make the streets murderously unsafe for small parties or lone travellers -- and sometimes even bursts into private homes to stab and rape and steal. Many thieves make "good honest coin" by selling strong drink and tasty cheeses, sweet boiled candies (usually sugar-coated fruit segments) and "softmeats" (spiced pates made of crushed fowl liver) nightly to wealthy merchants and to members of the Teeth.

By day, the well-armed Teeth patrol outside the city walls against "greedy Tantrons" and marauding monsters (and check all incoming and outgoing merchants' wagons), conduct VERY thorough cargo inspections in the harbour (there's no smuggling in or out of Calaunt, locals say, that isn't approved by one of the Merchant Dukes), and keep the peace in the streets. Uniformed, heavily-armored soldiers are everywhere in Calaunt, seldom in groups of less than a dozen, and will challenge anyone who looks suspicious.

This oppression has led to Calauntans doing most things (such as going to work, or to shop, or to taverns or worship) in large groups of neighbours, often with hired "shields." More Calauntans work as members of the Teeth than anything else, but the next most numerous occupation (before dockloader and tanner) is as a shield, or armed guard. Shields make up the musters of the city Lances, in times of war, but on a daily basis hire out privately as bodyguards and building guards. Many shops have frowning, bristling-with-blades warriors standing in their doorways and back corners -- and many of these men are skilled with throwing lassoes and using slings to bring down fleeing targets.

Shields seeking hire can be found at all city inns, taverns, temple gates, large and important shops, and just inside all city gates.

They're rarest in the streets of the wealthy, who usually have their own hired bodyguards. No Shadowcloak can work as a shield or work with a shield (upon pain of death for both), and any shield who betrays a client will be harshly sentenced (depending on the facts of the matter, this can mean death, sold to a slaver and taken away on a ship, or a public stripping, flogging, and tossing in the river, to try to survive however they can sans shield-license, clothes, and weapons. Typical shield fees are four gp up front for an evening or half-day hire, plus 1 gp per wound taken or opponent defeated or felled. (This increases somewhat with the apparent ability of the client to pay, and the proclaimed skills and equipment of the shield.)

Shields must be licensed by the Dukes, and wear a steel gray "diagonal-crossed-gauntlets-making-fists, knuckles-uppermost" badge that denotes this fact (a badge related to the arms of Calaunt, which display the two crossed gauntlets on a brown field inside a circle of gold coins, which is encircled by an unbroken loop of steel chain).

The coins on the arms of Calaunt look the same as the coins recently minted by the Scepter: rough stamped-out circles of gold, silver, and copper that have the Scepter's sigil on one side, and a key on the other. The sigil is a vertical human right hand clenched in a fist around a horizontal scepter, knuckles uppermost and fingers towards the viewer, with a scepter being a plain metal bar ending in a four-pointed star at each end. The key is a long-barreled device etched on the diagonal, with a two-flange-end at the viewer's lower left, and a three-loop-leaf handles at the viewer's upper right. Behind it are three parallel wavy horizontal lines, representing waves (and Calauntan shipping).

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The typical Calauntan manner is a truculent, wary, self-first cynicism, with most folk working doggedly and determinedly to support themselves and to get their fun despite the dangers and the tyranny.

Calauntans love to dance, and love to bake in warmth around fires, often on cushions laid atop rocks heated by the fires. Most of them also love to drink and to engage in lovemaking (as fun and not with any feelings of love involved, so that a happy couple will go to a club and separate to seek pleasure with various partners, often telling each other their experiences afterwards, when they're home again and falling asleep in bed together). Music (beyond a low, undulating dance-beat, often led by hand-drums, a lone, low-voiced "wordless wailing" singer, and a low-pitched shawm or gloon) and other noisemaking isn't appreciated or valued in Calaunt, and talk against the Dukes or their magic is frowned upon, because "you never know when one o' them sharpears might be listening -- with a spell, see?"

It's common for dockworkers to work as long as necessary when ships arrive, but many other folk work "four days on and then two days off," leaving most of one day off for laundry, food-shopping, and other errands, and the rest of the time for pursuing pleasures and sleeping it all off. A typical shop will be owned and run by a family, and employ two to three other persons, so as to keep the shop open the usual hours (late morning to dusk) every day, and yet permit individuals to keep to this "time on, time off" cycle. The lowest-ranking employees, of course, must come in whenever needed, and so can't keep such a regular cycle, snatching both work and pleasure time when they can.

Calauntans who don't enjoy drinking or "lauthlar" (swinging) often gather in little private groups or clubs centered around a common interest (from playing particular gambling games or sculpting little curios to collecting tapestries; only dabbling in magic is outlawed among such interests, though much of this defiantly goes on). These groups usually meet at the home of one of their members.

The wealthiest Calauntans, of course, avidly follow fashions from elsewhere, often paying retainers to adventurers, minstrels, or merchants to bring them regular news from the wider world.

"Every Calauntan knows" that the Scepter is a figurehead controlled by the Merchant Dukes, and that "there's something odd" about the Barons of Calaunt. It's widely known that the Dukes use fell magic to spy on everyone, and permit no mage of any power to tarry or dwell in Calaunt (or any magic item brought inside the walls to remain outside of their possession for long). What Calauntans disagree heatedly over -- and engage in ongoing lively gossip and even wagering about -- is what the Dukes are REALLY up to, who they're allied with (from neighbouring rulers to dragons or beholders or even the drow of the Deep Realms), and what their future plans are.

Whatever truth there might be among all the speculations, it's generally understood that the mage Iritar the Dark is truly evil, and that most of his fellow Dukes are more fun-loving, increasingly-corrupt retired adventurers than anything else, who delight in wallowing in the pleasures and riches of having "made it," and like to think of themselves as folk of importance in the world -- folk whose reputations allow them to participate in the intrigues of the high and mighty.

As I told Lashan in an earlier post, I kept things mysterious so you can ally the Dukes with agents from Zhentil Keep or anywhere else you'd like to pick, from unscrupulous Sembian slavers to drug-runners and pirates serving masters in Westgate -- or with no one at all. What is certain is that they prevent new temples from being founded because they don't want priests challenging their authority and 'influence through silent threat,' that their aggressive defenses of the city have

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forced Tantras into a wary truce, and that they poisoned and murdered their way into power by downing the merchant lords of Calaunt until the survivors cowered and let them have their way.

Less certain is how they prevented the Red Wizards from establishing a trading enclave in the city -- unless the Thayans merely took stock of the situation, decided Calauntans weren't worth the trouble as a market for magic items (local wealth is paltry, overthrowing the Dukes would be necessary to allow untrammelled trade in magic items, and such an upheaval might well goad other Dragonreach cities into mustering armies against Calaunt) and fighting Iritar and his servitors and allies was just too much trouble. There are rumours that Iritar reached a private agreement with a lone Red Wizard (some even say he's having a secret love affair with a female Red Wizard) to win a special status for Calaunt -- although just what that status might be is yet another mystery.

After the sinister Iritar, Alascartha Vyperwood is the most interesting duke. Flame-haired and strong-spirited, but possessed of iron self-control and a glib tongue, she has apparently carried on affairs with all of her fellow Dukes at various times during their adventuring careers, and although they are all wary of her now, she remains the confidant of all but Iritar, and the firm business-partner of the halfling Pirithin Alagost, himself a tireless (if shady) mercantile entrepreneur. Alascartha dreams of being accepted into the ranks of nobles in Cormyr or perhaps even Waterdeep, but failing that would settle for the nobility of Sembia, and is known to have paid handsomely for knowledge of neareby portals leading to upland Sembia and to Marsember, and have paid even more for 'inside' information about Cormyr's noble families (little customs and points of etiquette, who hates whom and why, and so on). On rare occasions she sneaks out of Calaunt for a night to attend a revel somewhere in Cormyr, seeking to be accepted as a noble and just hang out with REAL nobles. This of course makes her ripe for participation in the various conspiracies, and the War Wizards have identified her and are now watching for her visits, though they've no intention of stopping her (they want someone to approach her to join a conspiracy, and thereby reveal to them more about that particular conspiracy).

The Dukes dwell in palatial, balcony-and-carving-festooned fortresses at the eastern end of the southern half of the city, near the Fortress of Five Vultures (the government buildings) and the adjacent Keep of the Scepter (abode of the figurehead ruler, and where important guests and envoys are housed). Most of the houses are actually "south, across the road" from those two state buildings, the road being Shardouk Street, which runs through the heart of the southern half of the city before curving north to cross the Vesper at the easternmost or upstream bridge, Klauntspires, and run along the inside of the city wall for most of the length of the north half of the city (the other bridge, Amundurspires, carries the street known as Malvesker's Run across the river; it also runs through the north half of the city, but exits the south half of the city through Ontrar's Gate; in both cases, the "spires" part of the bridge name refers to the fang-like upswept stone points of the bridge walls, carved into writhing masses of gargoyles that are rumored to be mainly carvings but also to include real gargoyles that go hunting [people on the streets] when Iritar calls them forth -- or when the night-fogs are thickest).

So saith Ed, and I'm happily adding this to my "essential Realmslore" file.

I'd also like to quickly add, to Sarelle: for mysterious reasons, both Mystra and Azuth from time to time magically "hide" certain beings from various of their Chosen, and Ed says he suspects this is what's happened in the case of Perendra -- for some as-yet-unrevealed reason, probably involving Perendra dealing with something without being able to call on Elminster for advice or help, her resurrection has been hidden from him, and her memories of their friendship have been suppressed.

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Hmmm, deeper and deeper, and (as Alice would say) curiouser and curiouser...  
THO

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May 23, 2004: Hail and down swords, gentles all, 'tis but Thy Lady Hooded, with more of the interrupted-a-few-days-back 'swift, sharp, and short' replies from Ed:

To Gareth Yaztromo: I'm afraid I've no idea if Wizards of The Coast ever considered working with Games Workshop to create a tabletop battle game or anything else. If by "Fighting Fantasy fan" you mean the early green-spine Livingstone pick-a-path books, I read and enjoyed them as dungeon-crawl fantasy fixes, but disliked their overly-numerous "hah! You chose door number one, and are irrevocably and forever SLAIN haha!" moments; I wanted more choice and chances (nothing beats a live DM).

Of course I sign books for fans, at conventions and bookstore signings and the like, but please never, NEVER mail me a book in hopes of getting it signed. Somewhere in the Post Offal lurks a Realms book-collecting fairy, humming happily as her collection grows... and grows...

Seriously, the things never reach me; they always vanish without trace.

To Sarelle: I'd prefer not to lose a single monster deity, because I think promoting the different ethics and beliefs they represent, so as to give intelligent critters reasons for what they do beyond hunger and greed, adds a lot of richness to the game.

I don't know anything about the real chances of fey and sea-race supplement books, but I have my suspicions: not good. I believe the "this is an inherently smaller market than a non-FR book on the same subject, and the subject itself is of sharply limited interest, when we could instead print X, Y, or Z" arguments will apply.

Someday I'd like to see the SOCIETIES of a lot of the "supporting cast" races published as hardcover rulebook tomes, and if I was doing the 'if I ruled Wotc' fantasy you refer to, I'd mate less-popular races to popular ones, so one book would be first half drow and second half gnomes, another would be mind flayers and sahuagin, a third would be the phaerimm and the sharn (!), a fourth would be beholders and bugbears, a fifth would be orcs and hobgoblins, a sixth would be beholders and -- well, you get the idea.

So saith Ed.

More soon.  
THO

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May 23, 2004: Well met again, all. Thy Hooded Lady pounding the keys once more to bring you the latest replies of Ed:

Borch, I've one disappointment for you, I'm afraid. Your second question (the fate of the former occupant of the Friendly Arm) must go unanswered for now, for not-screwing-up-possible-future-Realmslore reasons. However, I'll be tackling your other two questions soon. Must do Harrowdale for Athenon first.

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Gerath Hoan, about Manshoon: I of course prefer my original, but the gorget (which of course by its name should be a throat collar, and not any sort of mask) is okay as a distinctive look for ONE of the clones. I prefer to think the REAL Manshoon is in hiding somewhere, watching his "lesser selves" operating, and awaiting his chance to strike at Fzoul at the same time as one of his clones does. It's not just a matter of revenge, it's a matter of Fzoul's perversion of the Zhentarim into something less subtle and less effective than Manshoon intended it to be, more tied to the gods and less to subtly ruling and influencing Faerun through an ever-stronger brotherhood of mages (something Mystra would of course have supported, once Manshoon got past the "culling the magelings" stage).

I'll get back to you with some suggestions on what some of the Manshoons are 'up to' (particularly the one co-operating with Fzoul in the Zhentarim).

Melfius, you should see more about "the new Lhaeo" within a year, but I'm afraid I can't say more at this time. :}

So saith Ed.

I must go, but I'll be back soon (to sing one of Fagin's lines without the beard or the fingerless gloves),  
THO

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May 23, 2004: Yes, on the heels of that horncall behold Thy Hooded Lady once more, bearing the latest words of Ed:

Faraer, here's another set of naughty words (scribes offended by profanity, please avert eyes now). This time, behold the Realms euphemisms for those feminine features politely described as "breasts."

The list hereafter ranges from (listed first) the clinical to the polite through the gently racy and silly to the really raw (listed last), with notes on usage and pronunciation in brackets:

Alpetan (plural form: singular is "alb"), brighthelms, bells, saebur (this is a singular and plural form, as in "Hsst! Catch the saebur yonder!" or "Feast on THOSE saebur, hey?"), fruit, pillows, ramraths (derived from "ramrath," a reddish, round melon grown in the Tashalar), roalen (derived from "rollingheads," from an old and anonymous ballad that compared the bouncing movement of a running woman's breasts to the bouncings of severed warriors' heads being rolled down an embankment by orcs after a battle), puffballs, handheavies, bite-loaves, zarrzem, bitebolds, pluckers.

Of these, a woman speaking to other women might use "bells" when speaking politely of breasts, "pillows" when joking about them, and "bitebolds" when intending to be rude or vicious.

In addition to the listed endearments, ugly, wrinkled, misshapen breasts are sometimes inevitably referred to as "udders."

Nipples are clinically referred to as parlarren (singular: parl) and sometimes called thorns, daggerspikes, or (poetically or more politely, as in one woman to another, or a male noble trying

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to be daringly gallant when speaking to a female noble) springbuds. When trying to be coarse, speakers usually dub them "teats" or "suckworts."

So saith Ed.

I'll just check that my suckworts are in standing order (so to speak), and see you all another time.

:]

THO

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May 23, 2004: Hearken, scribes! For Ed returneth once more, or at least his words, borne on this e-platter by Thy ever-flirtatious Hooded One:

BobROE, you're welcome. It was fun, and yes, I used to volunteer, years ago, to do occasional readings of books (not mine, and mainly mysteries, westerns, and romances -- oh, yes, I did the breathy voices and all! -- onto tape for the CNIB). I prefer to slow down a tad and do more intimate readings (no, no Hooded One, not THAT sort of intimate: I meant for a smaller audience who can sit closer to me!). I've done childrens' storytellings in libraries for over thirty years, including at large festivals in Toronto like Word On The Street.

I've acted in plays, too, and done radio dramas (sometimes playing female characters, as The Hooded One can probably vividly recall).

Dargoth, there's no way I'm going to hunt up all my Realmslore (the house is stuffed FULL) and exhaustively add all the temples I know about. Serpent Kingdoms just might add a few, but I'll add a handful over the next few weeks, okay?

Krafus, a LOT has happened to Illistyl Elventree since the Time of Troubles, as well as to the rest of the Knights (as touched on much earlier in this thread, Pages 12 through 15, I believe). She's grown in mastery of magic, self-confidence, and independence, tearing free of just being Jhessail's apprentice and the tart-tongued lover of Torm, to become a pert, agile, and forceful afraid-of-none Knight of Myth Drannor in her own right. She's still adventuring with the Knights, based in Shadowdale, and I might tell quite a few more tales involving her, in the years ahead. :) (Mumbles something about a trilogy as he wanders off into the depths of his library...)

So saith Ed.

By way of an attempt to answer the questions about Ed's output that were asked at the Merrill Collection (which are always complicated by the delays between acceptance of a "final" piece of writing and its publication), my completely unofficial tally of what he's written so far in 2004 is: 14 columns, 6 short stories, and about two-thirds of a collaborative novel. By the end of the year, if he sticks to his schedule and doesn't get run over by a bus, he should have finished that novel and written the first drafts of three more, plus another 4 short stories, 40-odd columns, and a few articles (these include charity and other 'not to be published' short stories; he often writes personal fantasy stories for young [sometimes terminally ill] children). And SiriusBlack, I wasn't there to hear Ed's reply, but the honest answer to that would probably be that Ed and his wife try to get to bed by about half past midnight, read for a couple of hours, and then sleep until around 7 am, unless Ed's library work schedule or public appointments force him to rise earlier.

THO

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May 24, 2004: Well met again, gentle scribes! Thy Hooded One presents the latest words of Ed:

To Gerath Hoan, on the matter of Myrmeen Lhal: Myrmeen was a ranger of Mielikki, who (like most humans in the Realms) venerated both Tymora and Selune 'on the side' to aid her in her adventurings. Through an as-yet-untold and very interesting series of events (yes, ANOTHER novel I must get around to telling, someday), Mielikki "shared" her with Tymora, in order that Myrmeen might accomplish a task for the Lady of Luck (and no, I'm afraid I can't tell you more about this, yet). Myrmeen now worships Tymora first and foremost, and venerates Mielikki and Selune 'on the side,' as it were, and she is an exception: the Realms isn't full of "switch-hitting" rangers. :}

To both Gerath and Sirius Black: I always hoped that Scott would get the chance to pen a sequel to the Night Parade (to clear up the wild new field of Realmslore it opens up, if for no other reason :}), and so I've never touched on Krystin's subsequent career in print. I have a plan up my sleeve (yes, I have VERY big sleeves), but as usual, I daren't say more yet. Suffice it to say that none of these matters has been forgotten, though I'm beginning to wonder if I'll live long enough to get to all of them. :}

And while I'm at it: Faraer, Sharanralee is ANOTHER of the characters I haven't had the chance to properly tell tales of, yet; perhaps someday I can sneak a novel into print that throws her into a crumbling keep with Mirt and Durnan and Randal Morn and Silver Morn and the Rangers Three and everyone ELSE I haven't had the chance to deal with properly, yet, and then turn on the blender... :}

As for the comic Harpells: Victor Selby played Malchor Harpell in the Company of Crazyed Venturers, as a stern but wry wizard who had "an odd family back home in Longsaddle." Bob Salvatore asked my permission (in a storage room full of empty boxes, at a long-ago GenCon) to use Alustriel and the Harpells, et al, in STREAMS OF SILVER and onward, and whilst saying yes (including okaying amusing Harpells), I told him that this fitted hand-in-glove with Victor's sketchy unfolding history (revealed to that time only in two fleeting Company visits to Longsaddle, and in Malchor's grouching). So almost all of the details are Bob's (although some family members were named and given genders and approximate ages before he set to work), but the spirit matches the original Realms.

So saith Ed.

Who was grinning like the Cheshire Cat in his last e-mail to me, because he introduced a shy young local teenage lass who was having trouble reading at school to Bone, Girl Genius, Buck Godot, Strangers In Paradise, Lucifer, and Cerebus, and now she excitedly wants more (and is trying, with Ed's help, to figure out how to sneak Ironwood and XXXenophile home, past her mother's watchful eye).

Ah, to be young again.  
THO

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May 24, 2004: Brightly met again, gentles. 'Tis my pleasure, as The Hooded One of yore (and my, for that matter), to trot out a zinger of an answer for Ed (who's now gone back and plunged into Harrowdale, as promised):

fourthmensch, it's time I handed out the rules to at least one of the card games of Faerun. So here's Old Wizard:

This game is usually played with ROUND cards in the Realms, but can be played with a regular deck of modern playing cards or by using and renaming the cards of a tarot deck, with the following changes:

All cards are used, and for playing purposes, the cards are considered to be ranked in ascending order from 2 through Jack, Queen, and King, with Aces above the Kings, Jokers (four are needed), above the Aces, and a single unique card (the Old Wizard) trumping all.

Jacks are known as Knights, Queens are Queens, Kings are Kings, Aces are Apprentices, and the Jokers are Mages.

The "taking tricks" rules of euchre apply, with the game being played between two, three, or four players (very seldom in partners). For the three-player game, everyone plays alone and a dummy hand is dealt for every battle (trick) but never played.

Every player is dealt a hand of six cards, and cards aren't reshuffled until someone runs out of cards to play (at which point every player who still holds cards can elect to keep all, some, or none of them). At every reshuffle, the first card AFTER dealing is turned face-up to choose the new trump suit.

As for euchre, tricks are won by the highest card of the declared suit, with the Knight (Jack) of the other "same color" suit (red, diamonds and hearts; or black, spades and clubs: is using a tarot deck, pair Coins and Cups together, and Swords and Wands together) being ranked just below the Knight of the trump suit. (In euchre terms, if hearts is trump, the Jack of Hearts is "Right Bower" and the highest ranking card, but the Jack of Diamonds is "Left Bower" and ranks next, above the Ace of Hearts.)

In Old Wizard, these "bower" rules apply not only to the Knight, but also to the Apprentice (Ace) and Mage (Joker) of the same-color suit -- but NOT to the Queen and King of the same-color suit. These three privileged cards are called "the Sinister Shadows." The Old Wizard can, of course, win any trick -- but whenever played is immediately shuffled back into the deck.

In a battle, two cards are normally played by each player, with the winner of the last battle playing a single card first, followed by the player to his right, and so on; after all first cards have been played, the player who laid down the first card plays a second, and so on. When every player has played two cards into the battle, the total of their two cards is taken, and the highest total wins the battle (the exception is when Old Wizard is played, which wins and ends the battle immediately).

Every battle won is worth 1 point, a "game" is won by the first player (or pair) to reach 9 points, and a "crown" is won by being first to win 7 games. Betting on battles, games, and crowns is popular in tavern play, but not necessary.

To summarize the point totals for winning battles:

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with the exception of the Sinister Shadows, any non-trump card is worth its face value, thus:

2-10, Knight (jack) is 11, Q is 12, K is 13, A is 14, Mage (joker) is 15.

2 of trump is worth 16, 3 of trump is 17, 4 trump 18, 5 trump 19, 6 trump 20, 7 trump 21, 8 trump 22, 9 trump 23, 10 trump 24, Sinister Shadow Knight is 25, trump Knight is 26, trump Q is 27, trump K is 28, Sinister Shadow Apprentice is 29, trump A is 30, Sinister Shadow Mage is 31, trump Mage is 32, and Old Wizard takes all.

In fact, that's the catch-phrase that the game has given the wider Realms: "Old Wizard Takes All." I may use that as a novel title someday, if Wizards will let me.

So saith Ed.

Whew. We've played Old Wizard several times at Ed's cottage down the years, and my advice is: don't shy away from the math, because figuring out battles is quite simple: in almost all cases, all non-trump cards except the Sinister Shadows can pretty much be ignored. We usually used a straight cribbage board (you could substitute a Magic life-counter or something of the sort) to keep track of points, and rows of dice to denote games won.

Not horribly exciting, but then, we weren't playing for coins or drinks or each other's bodies. Most of the time.

THO

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May 24, 2004: Fellow scribes, I was e-tossing the latest postings here to Ed this morn, and it seems he was at his keyboard already (sending Waterdeep chapters?), so I got back a pair of instant replies:

Kuje, please tell Monsoon that in the days when I rounded out my pantheon and then wrote that article, darn near every writer for DRAGON was trying to make everything fit the existing rules (which Gary Gygax, Jim Ward, and other staffers were expanding almost monthly in DRAGON articles of their own). There were no 'competing worlds' then, and everyone was trying to add little embellishments to the ever-growing castle of rules, not "fix" or challenge any part of it. Gary had used Tyr of the real-world deities, and my article was intended to show one DM's underlying assumptions about the gods, and how that would inevitably shape the pantheon. As part of it, and drawing on the Deities & Demigods rulebook, I wanted to present other examples of incorporating real-world deities, such as Mielikki. To underscore the "multiple worlds linked by gates" concept that gives the Forgotten Realms its name (that we here in the real world used to travel back and forth between Earth and the Realms and other places, and that dragons and the like also made such trips, hence our legends of them, but that we have now "forgotten" the ways to get back and forth), I wanted deities from our world venerated in the Realms. Afraid of lawsuits if real people tried to do things from the game and got hurt, TSR downplayed the entire "close ties with the real world" aspect of the Realms, though the multiple worlds crept back in later, in both Planescape and Spelljammer: I postulated that the gates were forgotten because various power groups ended up controlling them (killing beings who used them without permission), and that a logical place for adventuring play for high-level, long-lasting campaigns to go would be to join in these battles for control of gates (3e: "portals") and get involved in planar politics. The smattering of real-world deities was part of this.

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The importation of Oriental and Egyptian pantheons into the Realms occurred later, and was done by TSR designers trying to make the Realms a welcome setting for all sorts of play (Wanna be a gladiator? A samurai? A pirate? A jungle explorer?) because the Realms was then intended to be THE host world for 2nd Edition AD&D.

Lashan, there are lots of sub-groups in Calaunt (respectable numbers of halflings, too). They exist by keeping their heads down (low public profile) and by portraying themselves as useful, trustworthy, hard-working skilled labourers. They also tend to form ghettos, the dwarves actually linking many of their dwellings by tunnels, and the half-elves just trying to purchase or rent dwellings near to each other (at about the midpoint of the south bank of the city), so they are seldom visible on the streets in large groups.

The dwarves specialize in refortifying and refurbishing buildings (and in providing clever locks and traps), and the elves specialize in making salves, medicines, intoxicants, and in dancing and selling their favours in the behind-doors pleasure industry. Halflings specialize in all climbing-related work, from washing windows and fixing roof-tiles to packing and unpacking specific items in stacked-crate warehouses. Yes, these are generalizations I'm making, and almost racist as a result, but that's the point: this is the way these groups try to present themselves to the rest of the city, however different the lives and skills of particular individuals of these groups may happen to be. Paint yourself as useful, subservient, and quiet, and you're tolerated for your skills. The halflings are seen as potential thieves, and so take care to make pacts with the city's thieves to head off suspicion. The half-elves are seen by the Dukes as potential troublemakers (they can dispense drugs, poisons, and foster intimate relationships, all leading them to be able to sway the loyalties of individuals), so they've taken great care to work with the Dukes, some of them operating as the "secret agents" of various Dukes. The dwarves likewise give the Dukes the best traps and locks, and file full details (with charts and plans) of ALL traps and locks they install, all over the city, to the Dukes...again, positioning themselves as useful agents.

And so life goes on (for now), in the restless powder-keg that is Calaunt.

So there you are, and I'm headed back to Waterdeep (with glimpses of Harrowdale during my breaks). Oh, two things more: fourthmensh, if Old Wizard plays too slowly, it's okay to use the Moonsea Variant: take out and discard from play all the 2 through 8 cards of all suits. Faraer, Mirt and Durnan will be seen together in short-length Realms fiction soon.

So saith Ed.

A bright morning to you all.  
THO

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May 25, 2004: Well met, gentle scribes all! Athenon, thy lucky day has rolled around again (at last), for Ed doth unfold divers details of Harrowdale to thee, thus:

Righty-ho. The most essential resources for Harrowdale are Rich Baker's FRS1 The Dalelands, and Volo's Guide to the Dales (now both available as downloads, I believe), with the FRCS providing the most recent overview. (I'm not going to repeat any lore from those sources.)

Harrowdale is well-travelled farming country. Although there are rolling-hill sheep ranches and orchards at both the northerly and southern ends of the dale, its heart has always been a

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northwest-southeast gentle-sided river valley. The river "sank" below ground centuries ago for reasons unknown (probably something to do with Underdark mining), leaving behind a series of ponds and tiny wandering creeks that have been diverted into many drainage ditches and small, private pond-reservoirs. Drought is unknown, because water from the Elvenwoods still moves steadily down to the Dragonreach through Harrowdale, but irrigation has almost obliterated the local marshes.

The valley has been tilled and harvested for centuries, and is crisscrossed by meandering cart-lanes, two of them (known collectively as "the Harrow Ride") running the length of the valley on either side of the former riverbed (linked together by cross-lanes in many places). At the Reach end of these lanes is Harrowdale-town, and at the upstream, wooded end of them, several hundred feet higher, is Velartree (at the mouth of the Halfaxe Trail). Two crossroads settlements, so small that they're missing from most maps, stand on the Ride between Velartree and Harrowdale-town. Each offers little more than a market-paddock, an inn-and-tavern, a mill or smithy, a few private residences, rooming-houses for seasonal farm labourers, and a discreet house of pleasure. Dead Oak is the upstream hamlet, and Lanfroe the downstream one. Velartree itself is similar in size and amenities.

The Council of Seven Burghers has hired and trained four constables to keep order (and report back events, including who visits or passes through and what goods they're carrying) in the two road-hamlets, recruited a dozen more Grey Riders who work out of a base in Velartree, and recently established a ten-man Watch in Velarsburg (the second-largest settlement in Harrowdale, and the mercantile center of its northern hills).

They've also extended to the Grey Riders the right to make arrests, keep persons in captivity and transport them bound to Harrowdale-town for Council justice, and fight to protect Harrans ("Harrans" are citizens of Harrowdale; the term "Harrovans" is also sometimes used, "Velarr" means the same thing in some older written sources, and Sembians and Cormyreans sometimes say "Harrowdalesmen," though a Harran would raise a disgusted eyebrow upon hearing that naming). All Harrans have always had the right to burn or bury corpses to prevent the spread of disease (though this has undoubtedly led to coverups of many murders, down the years).

Like all busy 'crossroads' trading places, Harrowdale is tolerant of outlanders, folk of many races, and new goods and ideas. The innate conservatism of its farmers was overwhelmed generations ago, probably at about the time farmer after farmer was approached to be a paid way-storage place and goods and information drop by merchants working the routes between Sembia and the Moonsea, in return for pay that made the difference for the farm family surviving the hard, deep-wet-snow winters, or not. It was this practise that led to the Harran custom of stone-lined, mud-cement-sealed storage cellars (much larger than the 'root cellar' food storage needs of even the largest farm family) dug into hillsides near farmhouses.

The land of Harrowdale isn't particularly rocky, and centuries of building needs have made stones too scarce for use in farm fences. Stump fences and zigzag-rail fences were both common in bygone years, but the passing seasons have transformed most of these into thicket hedges, particularly since Harrans discovered many berry-bushes and vines grow well in Harrowdale's soil and climate. Wildlife and generations of Harran children have both found these hedges to offer ample cover and 'secret hideouts,' and it's not uncommon for a farmer needing to hide something in a hurry to look to his hedges for the place to do so.

Roof-thatches (most Harrowdale cottages are mud-cement-sealed, whitewashed stone buildings with thatched roofs covered with a thin layer of earth and growing gardens) offer another

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traditional place of concealment, but it's a rare farm cottage that's large enough to have 'enclosed' inward roof-slopes that could conceal a person or corpse "up above" during daylight hours.

To keep yields of berries and herb-leaves high, trees in Harrowdale hedges are kept pruned, but many Harrans maintain small, orderly woodlots. These began as a means of appeasing elves clearly made furious by the Halfaxe Trail incursions, and are now seen as useful mushroom-growing patches, shade spots for livestock, and ready sources of private lumber.

Harrowdale offers the visitor pleasant vistas of cultivated fields, small clusters of farm buildings, and greenery, and can be truly beautiful at sunset and near highsun on bright, cloudless days.

For years outlanders have followed the lead of other Dalesfolk in thinking of Harrans as dull-witted, placid farmers, contentedly ignorant of events, realms, customs, and folk in the wider Realms -- in short, "country bumpkins." Aside from the contented "we'll get through this, as we've got through all other troubles before it" Harran outlook (which is very true), this has always been a slanderous misrepresentation. Proximity to the boiling intrigues of Scardale and exposure to both the views and wisdom of the neighbouring elves and the stream of new ideas and dress and ways from travelling merchants, have always made Harrans far more than simple farmers. Their dull-witted reputation comes from a wise reticence about talking too loosely in front of strangers.

The Velarwood remains a dangerous place (see the FRCS), and rather than try to tame it as folk elsewhere might have done, Harrans have left it largely alone (patrolling around it with the Grey Riders to prevent any spread of woodland monsters). Local woodcutters have concentrated instead on coppicing and organized planting and nurturing practises, sited between Velarsburg and the Elvenwoods, with the cooperation of local elves. This large region of young new woods is sometimes called "the Green" (as in: "up Green way," or "he's deep in the Green right now"). Felling trees from either the "fore-edge" of the wild forest of Cormanthor, or of the Velarwood, is now forbidden.

Recent events in Scardale have made disease strongly feared in Harrowdale, and travellers are now encouraged (and given facilities at paddocks and at inns) to bathe often and vigorously. A typical paddock or inn has a horsepond that all arriving beasts must be led through (and inn stablemasters also wash the legs and hooves of all beasts stabled overnight, regardless of claims that they've been "ponded"), and a sand-bed or mud-bed for people to 'dry scrub' in, right beside a pond they can then wash in. (How much this merely transfers taints and conditions from one traveller to the next is a matter little understood or debated, but local temples do betimes cast purifying spells on such waters, as well as maintaining clean baths for clergy and for guests of their own.)

The Kathtan (captain) of the Watch in Harrowdale-town, the elf fighter-mage Naumys Ellarian Dawnhorn, seems to be mellowing somewhat (or as Elminster put it, "learning to live with adventurers"), but still has little use for outlanders who swagger, throw their brawn around whilst trusting in their blades and spells to keep them from being sharply curbed, and fail to confine pranks and horseplay to inside the walls of the Fall of Stars. It's whispered that some of this gentler attitude has come from the kathtan's several recent romances with handsome visiting adventurers, but no gossips seem to agree on the names and likenesses of Dawnhorn's lovers.

Harrowdale doesn't yet have its much-debated sea-tower to discourage pirates, but does now boast two new low, fast Watch "cutters" (boats with many "seagouts" mounted on their decks; seagouts are large double-crossbows, too small to properly be termed ballistae, that can be fired with the pull of a single cord from behind an armored shield) that can be swiftly sent forth if need be. Many Harran farmers regard these as "wasteful toys," as they haven't yet seen much use, but

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they're regarded up and down the dale as far more favourable evils than building "an empire-fools' tower" would have been.

In darker recent news, bandits have become an everpresent plague on the caravan-road between Harrowdale and Scardale, and rumors are arising that certain Sembian interests are sponsoring these road-bandits, under orders to let only "friendly" wagons through (those who've paid some sort of safe-passage fee in Scardale or Sembia). Lurking among these brigands, recent reports suggest, is something more sinister: four or more ragewinds (see the 3e MONSTER MANUAL II). Where these rare undead are coming from, or --or, if you prefer other tales, who summoned them -- are matters of much whispered speculation.

Moreover, Harrowdale-town is full of the usual gloomy rumors of Scardale's intrigues slyly coming north, brought by undercover agents intent on subverting Harrans. Elminster cautions that such everpresent gossip thrives enthusiastically, and has done every since Lashan's invasion.

Harrowdale was once called Velarsdale after its founder, was briefly dubbed "Harrowdale," reverted to Velarsdale, and later (when ruled by the ruthless lord Halvan the Dark, who began the Halfaxe Trail) became Halvan's Dale. After Halvan's fall, "Halvan's Dale" swiftly became "Harrowdale" again, a name derived from the multiple-tined plows invented locally, and has remained Harrowdale ever since. Invaded many times over its history, Harrowdale has kept its borders and many of its 'oldblood' farmfolk families (such as Brondas, Dyzur, Mumfyrd, and Routhgaer) from its founding, and proudly claims to be the oldest of the Dales.

Just how old that makes it is a matter for sages to argue over, but the most interesting time in its history, for treasure-seekers at least, befell in the sixty or so years preceding Halvan (whom most sages agree flourished in the 1180s DR), when adventurer after hiresword after adventurer came north from Sembia, seized Velarsdale from whomever was lord of it at the time, and proclaimed themselves 'Lord.'

These Lords of Harrowdale held themselves to be the equals of any king, and styled their offspring "princes" and "princesses" (of them all, the handsome and skilled hunter Lord Prince Arlan is almost the only one still remembered, thanks to the ballad "Arlan Beheld An Elf-Lass Fair"). Very few of these children ever got to warm a throne, because their fathers usually ruled for only a handful of seasons. In swift succession, the dale was held by the Lords Thaundass Rahr, Orimmon (who first dubbed the dale "Harrowdale"), Feltaern Urnsarr, Imbar Thaelwood, Elzar Darth, and Harlstakh "Har-Stag" Kethtor. Kethtor was butchered on his throne by a strong, well-respected warcaptain out of Sembia, Elmaer Oraun--and the Lord Oraun then reigned for almost twenty seasons, becoming popular and widely respected, before fell magic and poison marked the coming of Halvan. During that time, Oraun built cordial relations with his neighbours (though there were more than a few rumors of both rivals and unwelcome envoys disappearing while visiting him), made peace with the elves, and in the last few years of his reign, restored the name "Velarsdale" to his tiny realm.

It's rumored that Halvan had 'dark aid' in his bid to take the throne, and some say that when Oraun was defeated at the battle of Marak's Stile, elven magic snatched him away from certain death -- and the jaws of Halvan's war-dogs savaged only his bodyguards.

It is certain that both Oraun's son Erammon, and his swordmaster, Thaeron, vanished that same day, leaving Oraun's armsmen leaderless and the gates of Harrowdale-town undefended against Halvan's riders.

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Certain bold traders swear they saw Oraun and Thaeron in Elventree, some fifty summers later, escorting a "great elf lady" around the shops -- and neither of them looked a day older than they had at the coming of Halvan!

Many Harrans believe this tale because of something that befell in the heart of the hard winter of 1351 DR, when a dying Harper staggered through the snows to a farm in northern Harrowdale, delivered an unknown message to a farmhold there, and perished. On that night, fey blue mage-fire was seen raging above the hilltop farm -- and in the morning, the three brothers who'd come out of Sembia a dozen years earlier to claim that steading, upon the death of their father, walked and talked the same as they always had, but looked quite different. The three-hundred-year-old "Wandering Wizard" Arauntan of Selgaunt, who saw them on his travels, swore to his dying day that the youngest brother, Torstan Morgath, looked very like the happy-go-lucky Lord Erammon, son of the Lord Oraun; the oldest Morgath brother, Durthar, was the swordmaster Thaeron, or his very brother-image -- and the 'tween brother, Ulbaern Morgath, was the very likeness of the Lord Oraun himself.

Erammon or Torstan vanished from the farm a season later, and has not been seen in Harrowdale since. Durthar Morgath rallied the men of northern Harrowdale to fight Lashan during the invasion of 1356 DR, revealing himself as "Thaeron, Rightful Swordmaster of Harrowdale," and perished in battle... and two summers later, Ulbaern or Oraun was found dead of heart-stop in the Morgath farmhouse, his fields untended. A ghostly image was hovering over his sprawled body, and the farmers who found him, level-headed men all, swore it had the likeness of a very tall, very thin elf lady, armored and cloaked, with a drawn sword in her hand. She was gazing down at the dead man in sadness when they first beheld her, but turned to regard the gaping farmers, saluted them solemnly with upraised blade, and said: "So passes one who was great. Find what he left behind here, and make this land he loved greater still."

Then she vanished, passing the dumbstruck farmers like a chill wind. They spread word of what they'd seen almost as swiftly, but though greedy men have since thrown down every stone and board of the Morgath steading, and dug up its yard and pasture and very middens, no trace of treasure has ever been found, and the meaning of the phantom's words -- or indeed, who she was -- remains a mystery.

So saith Ed.

More essential Realmslore for the files. :) Ed tells me that George Krashos and Eric Boyd, in particular, should be interested in this for "lore-fixing" reasons.

And with love I now leave thee,  
THO

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May 26, 2004: Well met, fellow scribes. Ed will soon depart on the North Bay leg of his publicity tour and fall e-silent for a few days, but he wants to quickly reply to some things before he goes. If he only answers part of your questions here, don't think he's forgotten about the rest -- he's just zipping through replies he can do in a hurry:

Athenon, you're very welcome. I love delving into Realmslore, and it's great to know it's appreciated. So, thanks for your thanks! :)

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And now I know who (George!) has been sleeping in my otyugh-riddled midden!

Myst, I'm not sure how much I should reveal about characters in the Waterdeep book without consulting Lady Elaine, but (whispering this, just between you and me) I wouldn't count on seeing much of either Khelben or Danilo. I can say that both Mirt and Piergeiron make brief, supporting-character appearances. Check some of the older pages on this thread for the teasers I've already dropped about WHAT (rather than who) you will see.

And I agree with SiriusBlack: although knowing the history of Cormyr to date will make the scenes with Vangerdahast, Alusair, Filfaeril, Caladnei, and Alaphondar richer for you, I wrote ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER so that it can be read and enjoyed by a complete newcomer to the Realms. Elsewhere, I answered Crust as to what happened to Elminster between ELMINSTER IN HELL and ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER, but you don't even have to read EI in Hell first. Really.

What I would do if I were you is: charge right into EI's Daughter (because there won't be a direct sequel to it for at least three years, whilst I'm busy with the Knights trilogy). Enjoy it, I hope, and then at your leisure read the Cormyr books and Elminster books -- and then go back and read ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER again. I'd also recommend reading my short stories in REALMS OF MYSTERY and REALMS OF SHADOW before that second read-through of ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. I'm not trying to bankrupt you, here; sometimes libraries are brilliant and tasteful enough to actually stock Realms books. :}

Dargoth, when working on the FRCS my job was to write and send in gobs and gobs of background Realmslore. "Hard" rules stuff was rightly left to the on-staff designers at Wizards, who understood 3e far better than I did, and could express rules-specific stuff clearly and concisely. Your idea of sorcerers using the Shadow Weave and wizards using the Weave is an intriguing one, but of course wouldn't have "fit" with the PLAYER'S HANDBOOK spell rosters and 3e design philosophy (limiting what players could do with their wizard or sorcerer characters). In any event, such ideas weren't in my thoughts or design discussions at the time. I was more worried about trying to cover huge topics in only a few paragraphs (look at some of the sections in the FRCS, and think of them in this way: being asked to write the entire history of Australia, missing nothing of crucial importance, in no more than 350 words, deadline 3 days away...that's what my mind was full of! :})

As for the other designers, I have no idea, but I think the Shadow Weave was just one more thing they were worrying about not having space to cover properly. I think the FRCS is a brilliant distillation, but I'd have been much happier if we'd covered the same topics in three books that size, instead of one, and been able to squeeze in just a little bit more on every topic. But then, I'm the lover and champion of the Realms, not a businessman. Very much NOT a businessman. :}

So saith Ed, running out of time for the moment (again).

Ah, what a life he must lead, dashing from here to there. "There" is of course often the library, where he sometimes finds himself helping old ladies re-thread their knitting needles or find their car keys, and can relax in the momentary knowledge that some people get to live their lives at a far slower pace. Then, of course, he's off back home to pound out another chapter.  
THO

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May 27, 2004: Well met, gentle scribes all! I come bearing a surprise e-mail from Ed, that appeared in my inbox when I thought he was scalp-deep in packing his chariot for the long trail-run to North Bay:

Snatched a few minutes for more Realmslore fun, so here goes, folks.

Time for Krash and Blueblade to get the first of their promised little glimpses of the Simbul, to whit: two things she likes and two things she hates. First, she LOVES standing naked in the rain, preferably warm rains, and preferably somewhere up high, whilst lightning strikes are crashing around her (she can avoid all harm from lightning by 'drinking' it for her natural chain lightning ability, diverting excess energies to recharging magic items she's in contact with, if she desires to, or letting it flow into the Weave). If she wants to retain clothing, for some reason, she'll often stand barefoot in a storm in a black tattered gown (her favourite garb, it seems). Secondly, she loves backrubs -- probably because she can so seldom trust anyone enough to be intimate enough for long enough to receive such simple pleasures. This is why she's been seen in the wilds, from time to time, to snatch off her clothes and rub her back against rough rocks or jagged ends of branches. She can shapechange into bird form and take ant baths and dust baths, of course, or scour herself with streambed sand, but as she confided to Elminster once, "'Tis just not the SAME."

She once allowed a young, ambitious Red Wizard seduce her, and then let him escape alive, just because he did as she asked: he picked up a stables curry-comb, and did her back with it, from buttocks to back of neck, until it was red-raw.

To Proc and BobROE, more about the Watch. Salutes, specifically: to any superior rank within the Watch, a Watchman salutes by tapping his temple smartly with an upraised, vertical forefinger.

The reply (salute to an inferior) is identical only if the superior officer desires to convey profound respect or gratitude. Otherwise, the superior officer bends his left arm (at the elbow) up and across in front of him, turning that hand edgewise-on with fingers and thumb together (in the pose we real-world moderns might call "a karate chop"), and strikes it gently, down from above, with the outside of his right hand, similarly bent but formed into a fist. (The fist 'bounces' off the fingers of the other hand, after striking just once.)

You can see why this never made it into print in the official sourcebooks: it's a very simple gesture, but VERY hard to describe quickly and easily. So the upshot has been that we haven't described much in the way of Watch officers saluting, and that in turn leads to the inescapable conclusion that Watch officers seldom salute, in any circumstances. That sort of Napoleonic, British Sandhurst, and American West Point military "discipline" just isn't the Waterdeep style.

Now, this is very different from members of the City Guard, or militia or hired mercenaries formally fighting for the city (for example, against an orc horde or the recent Threat from the Sea). They DO salute, typically by raising an upright, vertical sword towards the person being saluted, or even touching the fist gripping the swordblade to their own forehead (or fore-helm), then moving it outwards a few inches towards the person being saluted (who is almost always an officer of superior rank).

fourthmensch, time for another card game, this one MUCH simpler and typically played around campfires or between soldiers, just to pass the time. It's called either "Strikedragon" or "Battles" (the former, older name arose around the Lake of Steam and the Vilhon, where the game first gained popularity, and "Battles" was probably a Dragonreach and Lake of Dragons variant, but

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both names can now be found in use all over Faerun; neither one can now properly be called a 'regional' term). Elminster calls it "time-wasting for two to four persons who lack the wits to spend their time doing something more useful."

Take a normal card deck, plus one joker, or a tarot deck (modified to match a normal deck plus a joker) , and deal ten cards to each player, discarding the remainder face-down.

Card ranks, from lowest to highest, are 2 up through 10, then Jack, Queen, King, Ace, and Joker. In this game, the 2 through 10 cards are known as "the wyrmlings," the Jacks as Young Drakes, the Queens as Mother Dragons, the Kings as Full Dragons, the Aces as Elder Wyrms, and the Joker as High Dragon. There are no trump suits: for every 'trick' ("battle"), each player plays a single card simultaneously, face down (the player examines his own cards and knows what he's playing, but must play it with its value concealed). Then all three cards are turned over, and the highest wins that battle. If two, three, or even four players play cards of equal value, ALL who played "the highest card" are deemed winners of that battle. The cards are then shoved aside, and the next battle played, until all the cards held by the players are gone.

Some players bet on each battle, and some bet on who can win the most battles in a game (a game, of course, being ten battles). Others don't bet at all, but play mechanically whilst trading gossip or concentrating on something else.

Bookwurm, a few brief insect notes: well, centipedes of all sizes are common in Calimshan and Chult, and the westernmost Vilhon is the favoured above of a nasty thing called a "stingfly," which resembles a thumb-sized housefly with a scorpion-tail, barbed stinger and all. It likes the ears, underchin, and neck of humans, striking to draw blood with its tail and then sucking at the gore with large, spongy mouthpiece-just for an instant, before springing away. The bites DON'T itch, and stingflies don't strike at eyeballs or fly into mouths or nostrils, but they DO strike at genitalia and breasts, and the feel of a stingfly bite is like being firmly jabbed with a pin. Sleeping through stingfly bites is impossible for many folk, who when they must slumber in the open often roll in mud to stop stingflies from trying to bite. If one had to travel or labour all day amid clouds of stingflies, the blood loss would probably equal 1-2 hp damage, plus a chance of bloodborne disease as your DM determines.

Dargoth, the list probably doesn't quite hit about 5 percent of all the temples, but includes almost all of the large, important ones.

Arivia, you don't know what you're volunteering for! My basement is about 5 feet high, and crisscrossed by old, VERY hard-on-the-skull lead pipes and dirty old cobwebs (at least the dead spiders covered in the glow-in-the-dark mold are gone), with bad lighting. It's not too far removed from exploring caves, which I used to do a lot, so finding Realmslore in it involves long hours of real backbreaking drudgery: the only proper way is to carry each box upstairs onto tables erected in a properly-lit room, and then sorting. And sorting. And sorting. Faint, tiny pencil notes, mixed with all the callow fiction and school crap of my youth. Steven Schend (who visited me) and my players are the only people alive who have seen the true horror of my farmhouse basement (the whole house is held up on old cedar treetrunks! the floor is all uneven, concrete poured by hand over dirt, probably after dead things, possibly people, got buried under it... and so on).

Melfius, as far as I know, there are no plans right now to do another Arcane Age product for the Realms. That being said, I'm not privy to all the secret plans for future products -- but I'd not bet on any Arcane Age ones.

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Dargoth, there were once (long, long ago) far more dinosaurs in the Realms than there are now -- before the dragons ate almost all of them. More later.

kuje31, psionic items should be much rarer than magic items in the Realms. More later.

So saith Ed, who must run (as, unfortunately, must I).

THO

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June 2, 2004: Well met again, fellow gentle scribes! Yes, 'tis Thy Scantly Hooded Lady, with a surprise e-mail from Ed, sent to me during his brief return to his lair betwixt North Bay and Chicago:

To Gerath Hoan, re. Manshoon: The Manshoon who's part of the Zhentarim remains a soft-spoken, almost purring man who dislikes being dirty or appearing ridiculous, prefers close-fitting and fairly plain-of-hue garments to all others, and is constantly alert and careful of his words. He rarely betrays his true feelings or future plans or intentions, and delights in surprising people with deeds they've not suspected he was going to perform.

This Manshoon has convinced Fzoul that he's a changed man, by the simple expedient of allowing Fzoul to magically probe his mind and see the truth -- because this particular clone of Manshoon IS a changed man. Relieved not to be heading the Zhentarim (and constantly having to watch others for treachery and deal with the constant stream of "they've screwed up again" headaches that running the Network has come to entail) any longer, this Manshoon has returned to his other love: magic.

Rather than enjoying the power of manipulating people, he's turned to perfecting new spells and variants of existing magics, tinkering particularly with ways of linking spells to each other, so if Spell A is cast and then particular conditions are fulfilled (such as the caster of Spell A being wounded after casting Spell A, or new foes arriving and attacking that caster after Spell A is cast), Spell B will then be unleashed without anyone having to actually perform its casting).

The 'new' Manshoon keeps to spell-guarded chambers in a handful of Zhent strongholds, always informing Fzoul of his movements and whereabouts, and communicates only with Fzoul and Fzoul's chosen go-betweens, and with agents Fzoul lends him to employ on magic- and intelligence-gathering and -casting expeditions (agents who are of course loyal spies of Fzoul, and who are changed regularly to keep Manshoon from corrupting them). Manshoon no longer deals directly with non-Zhents or travels the Realms; instead, his soft-spoken, sophisticated agents (mainly clerics of Bane who possess some personal sorcerous abilities) speak and act for him.

His most powerful current agents are the coldly sadistic Aumlar Thaelren (LE male human Clr11 of Bane, Sor5), known as "Glittergloat" behind his back amongst Zhentarim for the way his eyes brighten as he openly enjoys the pain and suffering of others; Yethtra Malander (LE female human Clr9 of Bane, Sor4), a 6-and-a-half-foot tall, very slender but cat-sleek and curvaceous woman with back-of-knee-length straight black hair sometimes worn in a mare's tail and sometimes piled up around a tiara in that hairdo known in the Realms as a 'crown,' who's rumored to be Manshoon's lover and to bear tattoos he's personally spell-seared into her skin (and believed by some Zhents to be a weapon Manshoon is forging against Fzoul, but by others to be Fzoul's unshakably-loyal-to-the-Chosen-of-Bane way of controlling Manshoon); and

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Onselan Durkree (LE male human Clr7 of Bane, Sor2), a purring, very handsome young man who enjoys dressing up as either gender and manipulating people into betraying their secrets to him and doing his bidding.

This Manshoon knows of dozens of portals he can readily use to escape Fzoul's spells and scrutiny, but has not yet shown any signs of doing so -- or of betraying Fzoul in any way.

He does seem amused by Fzoul's struggles to deal with incompetence, corruption, and treachery within the Zhentarim, and to be enjoying the show. What he's waiting for, or whom he might be in league with, remain mysteries to Fzoul and other Zhentarim as well as to the wider Realms.

On a recent occasion when he was attacked by several ambitious Zhent mages, several liches and half-illithid sorcerers appeared in this Manshoon's chambers to hurl spells on his behalf, vanquishing all of his attackers save one... whom he spared to "spread wise words" to all Zhents not to waste their lives trying to best or bother him.

So saith Ed.

Ah, yes, Manshoon. He once stopped a Zhent soldier from slashing my down-and-wounded character with the gentle command, "No. Never damage useful goods."

Of course, that promptly gave said Zhent some ideas about how my defenseless body could be useful, but his hesitation about starting to ah, enjoy his train of thought until Manshoon had departed gave me time to muster strength enough to reward him properly. With the knife sheathed at the back of my neck, under my hair, attached to my black-ribbon choker. Eyeballs pop when pierced, did you know?

THO

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June 2, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes. Just when you thought it was safe to pick up a good book and settle down to await Ed's return (or at least that's what I was doing), a surprise missive from the Bearded Creator himself:

A little more about The Simbul. First, following up on my previous revelations of The Simbul post, ambitious Red Wizards should be warned that she's become hyper-alert for their ilk trying to get past her defenses by offering backrubs, so don't even contemplate it.

Second, Elminster's introduced her to dry Martinis, and she likes them even more than pina colodas and margaritas. No skewers through the olives please: just drop at least three of them into the glass -- and none of these tiny flared glasses, either: a pint beer tankard will do just fine. (Red Wizards, if you've started thinking that getting the Witch-Queen of Aglarond drunk is your route to conquest, think again. Kegs of strong spirit have been poured down her throat in unsuccessful attempts to do just that.)

Third, the lady in question has a tiny birthmark or burn-scar on the back of her right thigh, JUST under the curve of her derriere. It's about two inches long, follows the curve of her behind, is about a quarter of an inch across, is silver (but matte finish, like her skin, not glinting or metallic) in hue, and wiggles slightly, like a tiny snake or worm. When she unleashes silver fire, it sometimes glows silver (but not always).

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Fourth, The Simbul feels very little pain through her feet, and has been known to walk on daggerpoints or fire-coals without changing her normal swaying stride (note: her feet aren't numb, so she'll notice and feel anything she walks on).

Fifth, the Queen of Aglarond likes cloaks, and can with a cantrip conjure up her own "flutterbreeze" to make any garments she wears swirl or stream out from her in precisely-controlled ways, just as she desires them to. She often strolls around her palace clad only in a cloak wrapped around her like an untidy sari, and can choose to use her cantrip to hold it up in situations when, on another woman, it would fall away to the floor. Red Wizards contemplating embarrassing her by trying to cancel this magic are advised that she won't be discomfited in the slightest by being laid bare. An angry old merchant of Aglarond once tore her a royal robe right off her, shouting that she wasn't fit to wear it, and she calmly faced him down in just her skin. In the end, HE was embarrassed by what he'd done (and no, she didn't harm him in the slightest, then or later).

Sixth, The Simbul used to scorn most ballads and tales as "wastes of time," but in recent years (possibly due to Elminster's influence), she's acquired a taste (that she likes to keep very quiet) for passionate love-tales, the more florid and flowery the better (not porn, but the heatedly overdescribed "she pined in her gown of chartreuse lace whilst his smouldering eyes devoured her from beyond the rosebush of her ancestors" stuff. Certain Harpers have taken to penning such dreck and insinuating messages and viewpoints into it in hopes of subtly swaying the Queen of Aglarond's own views -- but she usually identifies such strivings with a snort, and either seeks out the writer to fling his own work at him, or enjoys it for the passionate prose, and thanks the scribe with a mocking note requesting more.

So saith Ed. Well, well. You live and learn. I MUST finish that would-be Harlequin I once started. Not for publication, but to trade it to Ed for one of those mocking notes from The Simbul. Now THAT would be Realmslore to treasure.

Ed will be motoring on down to BEA in Chicago to join his friends the Book Publishing folks from Wizards, so this is probably his last message for a couple of days. By all means talk among yourselves: I'd love to read some of the scribes posting their reactions to Ed's revelations in this thread. And (putting on my professional book editor's hat for a moment) catch your reviews of **ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER**. I consider it one of the three best-written Ed Realms novels (**ELMINSTER IN HELL** and **STORMLIGHT** being the others). Ed has yet another secret project up his sleeve, BTW, but 'tis way too soon to reveal more...  
THO

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June 8, 2004: Hello, fellow scribes. Ed hath returned, and the Great E-Silence is at an end. Herewith, he tackles your queries, beginning not with the eldest but with a few that can be answered swiftly:

Sarta, ritual observances of various faiths and non-religious local customs are held on BOTH Midsummer's Eve AND Midsummer Night, with just as many celebrations occupying the daylight hours of Midsummer Day between. So as Elminster put it (when speaking of spell studies): "Consult thy lore sources with diligence, and re-read every passage at least twice. Assume NOTHING, and thy life will be the longer."

Gerath Hoan, the average Faerunian lives long enough to worship (or serve through their actions) one deity above all others (though in many cases just which deity "tops their points list" may not

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be clear to a dying mortal or anyone who knows them). If a mortal dies with a mission or task for a particular deity unfinished, and it's a matter they felt strongly about in life, they may well be "sent back" (reborn as another mortal) to try to complete that task by the deity they were trying to serve. Otherwise, they DO end up serving the deity most appropriate to their alignment and character in the afterlife. Only those who repudiate the gods (or who as a result of their actions are renounced by their gods), despoil altars and frustrate clerical aims (of any deity, not just "foe" deities), or never pray or engage in any form of deliberate worship will qualify as either faithless or false.

Only a few deities (Cyric might be one) are insane enough not to recognize and accept the polytheistic "appease this deity and that as life situations and strivings demand" model, and demand that their faithful worship them and only them. For everyone else, it's a matter of embracing (or drifting into) primary worship of one deity above -- even if only slightly above -- all others.

So saith Ed. Who's right hard back at work on official paying Realms projects, but will try to snatch time for more replies as he goes.

Light hearts and bright sunsets, all!  
THO

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June 10, 2004: Greetings, all. Thy scantily Hooded One gently returns, with a brief offering of Realmslore from Ed, this time for Capn Charlie:

Dice games: some, when I have time. The cuisines, too.

Let's give you a glimpse of Turmish fare: olives and olive oil, roasted almonds, spiced greens [with both the spices and the greens derived locally, the former being mainly ground blackroot, which is like pepper, and mursinom, which has a rich, beef-gravy-like taste; and the latter being mainly broadpetal, a leaf-lettuce-like plant that grows wild in great abundance; and salaspers [fiddleheads of various ferns that develop continuously from early spring to first frost, not all reaching edibility in a brief spring unison], butter-fried small fowl and fish.

Most local meals consist of small, brown nutbread loaves served on a platter with cheeses (local cheeses are soft, crumbly white cheeses veined with chives and other herbs, and go by such names as "calmarr" and "ornsoelaun" -- but inns and wealthy homes pride themselves on serving small slivers of imported-from-afar cheeses, too); onion and chive soups; and a meat or fish dish surrounded by a ring of seasoned greens. Simple meals tend to consist of bread, a stew, and boar sausage or slabfry (bacon), with figs and nuts as dessert. A farm wife dressing such a meal up would add garlic butter to accompany the bread, radishes, and a soup. In coastal areas, eel pie and fishhead soup are often found on cottage tables -- and almost every house has its stand of chives and its asparagus bed (steamed or boiled and served drenched in butter, with the woodier stalks finding their ways into stews, asparagus is known locally as "greenspears" or "orsauda").

Beer and blackberry wine are the usual cheap, local daily quaffs (augmented by mintwater in the high hills, where clear spring water can readily be obtained), and desserts are usually sugar-preserved berries [sometimes doused in cream].

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Grander main fare tends to be stewed venison and staghead platters (yes, the severed head of a stag, boiled clean and then stuffed with "sarvaer," a jelly-like stew of diced, spiced and slow-cooked stag innards [all organs, from brains to tripes]. The skull is then covered with very thin slices of stagmeat, large cherries are placed in the eyesockets, and the whole assemblage is then heated in an oven before being served forth.

The folk of Turmish have a taste for the wines of the Vilhon, and love to devour great bowls of frothy, sugared whipped cream (studded with berries when available).

So saith Ed.

Me, I'm going straight to the kitchen to devour a whole lot of SOMething after reading this.

Hmm; I guess my curves are going to become parabolas. Again.  
THO

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June 11, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes. Ed (who tells me he hasn't forgotten the older requests, and is probably at work on Ulgoth's Beard as you first read this post) returns with another note for Capn Charlie:

Coinage is a topic of perennial interest (Faraer's been waiting patiently for this -- and George Krashos provided coinage of Impiltur earlier here at Candlekeep), and (when done properly) a BIG topic, too. So let me provide just two coins here, that are widely used in Chessenta, the Vilhon, Border Kingdoms, and Tashalar (primarily for trade convenience, among traveling merchants).

These are the authokh [pronounced "OTH-awk"] and the belbolt (usually known merely as the "bolt"), and they began as the coins of a single city of Chessenta (which one is now forgotten).

An authokh is a square coin stamped out of delmed silver ("delming" is an alloying process that stops silver from tarnishing by combining it with copper and certain white metals in precise proportions that have the side effects of turning the silver a translucent green, and making its surface incapable of taking a high shine, no matter how polished), with a small central hole to allow it to be strung onto a pay-thong or wire loop. On one face, it bears an engraved ring of twelve leaves encircling the hole, and on the other a ring of twelve radiating daggers. Although originally worth 12 gp in Chessenta, authokhs today are universally valued at 5 gp.

Belbolts are thick, heavy gold coins of curious shape: a circle with two shallow, matching cut-outs in its edges, so the result looks like two axe-heads fused back-to-back with curved blades outermost. Bolts are worth 20 gp.

Authokhs and belbolts are accepted in Amn, Scornubel, and Westgate, but not in Cormyr, Sembia, the Dales, the Dragonreach, the Moonsea, the Sword Coast lands, or Tethyr. In Calimshan and Waterdeep, an authokh is considered simply a silver piece and a belbolt is classed as "a heavy" (a gold piece worth 2 gp rather than just one).

So saith Ed, tireless spinner of Realmslore.

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Fare thee well until next, gentles,  
THO

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On June 13, 2004 THO said: Ah, this is one I can answer all by myself, being as one of my characters once spent an er, acrobatic night making love to one: a Purple Dragon Highknight is the Cormyrean version of a King's Messenger/James Bond-style agent. They're detailed as a 3.0 Edition Prestige Class in Ed's Dragon Annual article on Cormyr (referenced earlier in this thread), and several of them appear in Ed's Realms fiction, notably Glarasteer Rhauligan (whose most recent role was in ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER). As for my tryst, I could tell you just which Highknight I sported with, but then I'd have to k--

I presume you know the rest.  
THO

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June 14, 2004: Well met, fellow scribes of Realmslore. Thy Lady Hooded returneth once more, to pass on the latest words of Ed. A question of mine own for Purple Dragon Knight, though: so, PDK, just what WOULD you do to meet the Picard?

And a word of explanation re, my character's dalliance with the Highknight: it wasn't mere personal pleasure, but an attempt to winkle certain information out of the man, and I had the er, pleasure of performing with both Torm and Illistyl eavesdropping on the entire affair.

But enough of such fancyplay. On to the words of Ed:

Dargoth, I'm afraid my latest brainwashing attempt re. a book on Bane has failed. Sorry.

lobotraxx, the matter of Shandril's unborn girl-child must remain mysterious for now. Which is as good a way as any of saying (and as far as I dare go, for now) that you haven't heard the last of this.

Capn Charlie, Faraer is correct in contending that many rights that might have led to various Realms "goodies" have been sold off over the years. Yet it's true that the Realms has missed out on merchandising possibilities that other lines have had, sometimes for reasons of internal politics, sometimes because the core D&D line was being emphasized, and sometimes for reasons I just can't puzzle out, no matter how hard I scratch my head. I STILL think Jim Lowder's long-ago idea of Harper pins that Realms fans could buy and wear was a great one, and I've no idea why it was shot down (I think the logo I designed would look beautiful in silver, or chromed base metal, for that matter).

There have been baseball caps, because I've got one, but I think they were for internal company use only, and I got one as a "make Ed happy goodie." Now, if there was ever a Realms garter belt, I'd HAVE to add it to my Elminster costume...

To The Black Hand of Bane, you're quite right about Shar being interested in far more than the Shadow Weave. Like all deities, she's trying to increase her followers, and the allure of the forbidden and illicit meetings by night and being part of important little secret societies are her tried-and-true tools to winning the maximum numbers of followers. Only the most grasping and

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ambitious insist on magical rewards beyond what Shar can grant through her clergy, and before them she dangles the lure of the Shadow Weave.

Shar CAN grant her followers corrupted versions of the same powers Mystra gives, but darkfire and the like are mere shadows of Mystra's boons, not equivalents. So, there's no "dark" version of spellfire or the silver fire, despite the claims of Shar or her clergy to the contrary, just inferior unleasings. I know Realms fans love to argue about the natures and powers of the gods, and I promise that in time to come more will be revealed that will surprise many -- but there's no way I can or will say more, right now. Just remember: if I say it, it's canon until contradicted in print by a later WotC official Realms publication. Call now, for trained operators are standing by. :}

I promise everyone that I'll dig right in to the more substantial Realmslore requests by July, once the Waterdeep book is through the first wall and my ALA trip is over and I'm safely back home (and packing for GenCon :} ).

So saith Ed, who is truly one of the most hard-working people I know. I know he does sleep occasionally, because I've heard him snoring during gaming weekends. Don't miss his short story in the CHILDREN OF THE RUNE Malhavoc anthology (set in the Diamond Throne world setting), or his forthcoming "Stormsong" novella (hey, another entire NEW fantasy world of his, to go alongside the Realms and Aglirta and Castlemorn) in REALMS OF WONDER 1: SUMMONED TO DESTINY from FitzHenry & Whiteside, probably to be published in August. To say nothing of SERPENT KINGDOMS, of course, and a dozen or so other little projects.

The luckiest (and most patient!) Realms fans I know of, this year, are the three people with the top bids in the charity auction at Pentacon: one of them has received, and the other two will receive, Ed fantasy stories written just for them, starring their own characters (they get the copyrights, and own the tales outright, forever).

But enough drum-beating and trumpet-blowing for now. The man the secretary of the Crime Writers Association of Canada calls "My Big Huggly Bunny" rocks!  
THO

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On June 14, 2004 THO said: Lashan - and everyone else, too! Ed thanks you for waiting patiently. He's feeling bad that he hasn't been able to contribute daily Realmslore replies here for the last few weeks, and that he won't be able to for the rest of June, either, but says he'll post through me whenever he can. Apropos of that, he concurs with the Dave Gross posting on PRIDE OF THE LION, and still regrets that he just couldn't squeeze one more novel into the mix, that time. He also wants you all to know he's having great fun with the first Knights of Myth Drannor novel, "on the side," as it were.

His left side, I'm guessing  
THO

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June 16, 2004: The matter of Cormyr's armies, in the aftermath of DEATH OF THE DRAGON, is a topic I've discussed with Ed extensively, thanks to the Realms-list being quite active in the past with posters trying to flesh out the organization and strength of the Purple Dragons.

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Wizards has Ed's notes on this topic, so they're NDA-covered, but his primary comment was that too many fans "do wrong" when detailing the armies of Cormyr by trying to bolt modern U.S. military command structures and organization onto a fantasy "medieval-to-Renaissance" -era army, in a kingdom where magic rules (the War Wizards) and the nobility dominates... and then somehow expecting it all to work.

An earlier poster here asked about the strength of the army right now, post DotD, and Ed's reply follows:

Well, whatever you need it to be in your own campaign. (No, this reply isn't a "cop-out." :) ) There have been aggressive recruitment drives with good pay offers, efforts that are continuing, and remember that the War Wizards can screen out traitors joining the rank-and-file Purple Dragons.

As a result, I'd say that the equipped and ready-for-the-fray total military strength of the Purple Dragons right now would be somewhere around 12,000. However, cavalry would be far fewer than in the past, and many of the Blades are at present low level and having poor training and discipline. However, the combination of fewer idiot nobles as officers, veteran survivor Purple Dragons as many of their officer replacements, and War Wizard scrying vigilance should make the Purple Dragons BETTER disciplined in the long run than they've ever been before.

Moreover, Alusair's early flings with many young nobles have forged a bunch of nobles who are friends with each other AND worship the ground she treads, so the nobles who do become officers (and eventually heads of noble houses, inside or outside her uniformed service) will be far more loyal to her and used to her command style and willing to trust in it (rather than seeking glory or thinking that they know better on the battlefield) will be far greater.

So saith Ed, who is gleefully writing about a certain humorously disastrous revel in Waterdeep right now. Perhaps I should put on my scantiest gown and go.  
THO

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On June 18, 2004 THO said: Ah, another one I can handle by myself.

Kuje31, Ed's probably frantically typing away at his keyboard right now (something about Elaith and lots of puffing old nobles and a battle, he hinted when last we e-spoke), but from repeated demonstrations of this in the original Realms campaign I can say with great certainty that most folk in Everlund and Silverymoon know very well that this or that son of Alustriel is named thus-and-so, as customarily does such-and-such, and the current gossip races across the city whenever anyo of them gets embroiled in anything interesting.

What most people can't keep straight is birth order, beyond "he's one of the older ones" or "he's one of her later ones, aye?" though courtiers and wizards and sages have no trouble in this regard at all. It doesn't help that they tend to look alike, act alike, and are good friends with each other, of course.  
THO

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June 18, 2004: Well met again, gentle scribes. Thy Hooded Lady with the briefest of replies from Ed, to SiriusBlack, asking but Elaith and the nobles: Neither. :}

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To which I add: But keep fishing: 'tis fun.

As for minis: no, we've never used them in play, because they slow the roleplaying down so much and we're all busy people who like to pack our sessions full of unfolding happenings. We do use map and marker-minis for large setpiece land battles (Zhent army attacks on Shadowdale, for example), and we once tried minis as a TSR playtest (drow caravan ambush, in cavern with lots of stalactites and stalagmites), but wow, what a time-wasting frustration! (For us, I hasten to add.)

Ta ta for now! (No, that DOESN'T mean I'm waving my ta-tas at you, Blueblade. Put that codpiece back on and settle down.)

THO

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On June 19, 2004 THO said: Well, SiriusBlack, Ed tells me that readers of the novel will get to see all too much blood being shed, as usual, but wants you to know that Elaith is an important SUPPORTING character, not a main character. This book isn't "Elaith Enjoys Evermeet" (though I'd give a LOT to read or watch such a product, ahem ), but rather... something else.

Whew. All this teasing is exhausting. It'd be easier if Ed would let me read the rough draft, but of course that can't be.

Unless I stow away in Ed's suitcase (hmm, THAT would give his wife a surprise, to be sure! ) and get driven down to Orlando (hmm: to say nothing of the astonishment the nice U.S. Customs men would exhibit, come to think of it ) so I could ah, persuade Peter Archer to LET me read the book (tongue in ear, sidle into lap, purr a little). No, that wouldn't work either; he has a wife, too.

Magic, that's what I need. Real magic, that works in this world of ours. Then I could keep Ed just writing and writing and writing... and we'd all get a new Realms novel out of him about every three months.

Hey, now that I COULD suggest to Wizards. Anyone care to add their voice to mine in such a noble endeavour?

THO

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On June 20, 2004 THO said: Ah, well met again, fellow scribes. 'Tis truly a pleasure to share Candlekeep with such lords of Realmslore. Gerath Hoan, please consider every word of Garen Thal's post in reply to you re. Arabel to be er, gospel, if I dare apply that word to matters Faerunian.

As for the Realm of Wailing Fog, fourthmensch, that's a place Ed has remained mysterious about because we Knights have been on its verges and not gone in farther, and (heh heh) he's lying in wait for us...

What I CAN tell you about it is this: desolate fens, everpresent mist, lots of crimson deaths and the occasional wizshade, eerie echoing calls, long-ruined towers, and a heavy feeling of WATCHFULNES hanging over everything. I'd not be surprised to encounter all sorts of the more unusual types of undead.

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Makes me shiver, just remembering it. Must go and warm myself beside a man... or two.  
THO

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On June 21, 2004 THO said: Faraer, Ed provided Eric with a lot of lore for that book, but didn't participate in the writing of it other than to review and offer corrections.

As I recall, he wasn't happy with the product because it was in the "Great White Space" era of TSR products, and Ed thought that with a smaller font, smaller margins, less use of over-large and poor artwork, and so on, easily twice as much lore could have been squeezed into the same space, WITH an index. He was hoping for heraldry and skeletal entries of all the noble families, at the very least.

However, neither Eric Haddock nor his editor were to blame for the standards set by TSR senior management. Ed has always believed in value for money, because he's a "greedy for more lore" gamer first and foremost. Ed would be happy with 6-point type, NO margins, full use of inside and outside covers for lore (worried about wear? Photocopy the outside of your covers the moment you get it home!), and all the legal bumpf crammed onto half a page that also has some useful game lore shoehorned onto it.

After all, in Ed's opinion, opening a Realms product should feel like opening an ancient grimoire.  
THO

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July 6, 2004: Hail and well met again, all! Ed and his wife have returned to the leafy tranquility of their Canadian home, weary from the long drive back from Orlando (where Ed was one of TOR's guest authors at the ALA Annual Conference). The Bearded Father of All Realmslore apologizes for his dozen-day-or-so silence and returns to answering vital Realmslore queries.

The lucky scribe this time is Borch, who's been waiting patiently for more on Ulgoth's Beard (and two other places we'll get to in later messages) since the elventh of May. Ed sent a long enough reply that I'm going to split it up into several posts. So, scribes, I give you now the words of Ed:

Borch, thanks for your patience. I'll try to reward it properly.

Ulgoth's Beard is still very much as it was described by Volo in his Sword Coast guide, and according to Elminster, he got it "right." It's not a very exciting or large place, and still lacks wealth, an inn, and a proper tavern. "The Beard," as it's known locally, is now connected to Baldur's Gate by a web of wandering and deeply rutted cart-tracks (made by farmers of the Beard taking their wares to the city for sale just outside the gates every morning -- which costs them nothing -- or in the market, once a tenday, which costs them a per-wagon entry fee of 2 cp at the gates). This has occurred since Volo's visit to the place; he wrote the truth of the time about the pack-mules.

Around fourteen active fishermen dwell in the Beard, and two of these have a young son each who sometimes go out in the boats. All but one of the boatmen have wives or unwed sisters who keep house for them. Three also have mothers dwelling with them, making the muster of "the salts" of the Beard 32 folk in all.

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The fisherfolk usually fish two to a boat, and there are eleven seaworthy boats in the Beard right now (plus the bleached remnants of four others that the salts fiercely protect against firewood scavenging, so as to have some source of swift-emergency-replacement boards and thwarts). On most days, seven or eight vessels fare forth, setting wicker pots for crayfish and "stabcage" traps for eels in the muddy swamp-shallows along the edges of the Chionthar-mouth, and then setting drift-nets farther out. In the fiercest winter months, fishing is either impossible or yields nothing, so the salts of the Beard have to catch and 'salt by' enough during the rest of the year to keep from starving.

Although the salts traditionally go hunting deer in the woods when the snows are deep, the dangers of forest predators and the growth of Baldur's Gate (which has led to steady woodcutting and a receding northwards of the forests, making hunting forays longer and longer) have made these traditions increasingly unreliable as sources of sufficient food.

All of the salts dwell in dirt-floored, windowless stone cottages with roofs of growing turf (planted with herbs and edibles). Most such dwellings have an entry room that doubles as a dining and living room (and in winter, as a kitchen), and opens into two or three inner rooms that are given over to use as bedchambers and storage (including pantries). The hearth is central, and stones are heated in cold weather to be placed in beds and cold corners, and so warm the dwelling as much as possible. Fisherfolk refer to these humble cottages as their "dens." In summer, they gather peat and wood (some of which they "slowburn" in clay-choked fires, into charcoal) for use in winter cooking, gather berries from thickets in the "breaks" along the cliffs, and smoke and salt fish. Most homes in the Beard have outside chimney-ovens for all summer cooking, and racks on which the fisherfolk lay out their nets for drying and mending, and (under fine bird-nets) filleted fish for curing. Children growing up in the Beard become shrewd shots with slung and flung stones at an early age, bringing down birds who try to swoop in and seize fish. Such fowl, no matter how horrible they taste (and most gulls and sea-skry [cormorants] DO taste bad) are boiled in stewpots with small local vegetables (leeks and "thrae", which are akin to what we call capers, and "durfists," which pretty much resemble our Brussels sprouts) and much seasoning, to make one of the staples of local fare (fish and coarsegrain nutbread being the others): the thick, oily stew known as "gudgeon."

The Beard is also home to Lharruk the Smith, who with his three strong sons Leth, Mordun, and Roril and his tiny half-elven wife Maerleth (whose fierce temper and keenly-sharp tongue are known far and wide) run the Beard's tiny, untidy smithy. Lharruk sharpens blades, fashions fishhooks and rope-rings and keel-cradles, and keeps the tackle-blocks of the great boat-cradles working, as well as maintaining the ploughs, wagons, and shears of the farmers, and the axes and scythes used by all. Lharruk spent some years as a mercenary (mainly a "seaguard," or warrior carried aboard merchant ships to fight off pirate boarding parties and port thieves) up and down the Sword Coast, and later briefly joined an informal adventuring band, wherein he met Maerleth. Neither of them profited much in their adventures, but gained some powerful foes -- which brought them to the Beard and now keeps them close-mouthed about their shared past. Lharruk can handle a sword -- and make one, too.

Lharruk is an amiable, slab-faced man with corded muscles and a beard that grows only along the edges of his jaw (and is usually scorched short). He growls and hums a lot as he works, seems to spend all his waking hours patiently toiling, and speaks but little. His sons are easy-going, more talkative and handsome versions of Lharruk who dream of the wider world and talk excitedly over all the gossip that "comes out of the Gate" (drifts up via the farmers and passing peddlers from Baldur's Gate).

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The sons get much of their good looks from their mother, who stands about four feet high and has glossy brown hair that would trail on the ground behind her if she didn't keep it bound up in a long silver sleeve (tube) that juts out behind her head like a tail; from it, the bared "longer half" of her hair returns to spill down her back through a series of rings on the lower surface of the sleeve. Maerleth has fine features, large blue-green eyes, fierce brows, stunning good looks, and a temper that builds slowly, but unleashes like lightning when it breaks -- with biting words to match. She's an expert etcher of metal, worker in glass (which she can stain and melt into windows that depict scenes), and seamstress -- and, say some elders of the Beard, an alluring barefoot dancer who can hurl daggers with deadly accuracy. She has a voracious appetite for books of all sorts, from dusty histories and diaries to tomes of magic and torrid "brightbosom" romances, and peddlers always bring her such things in (high) hopes of getting good knives and sickles from Lharruk's forge in payment for them.

Lharruk brought Maerleth to the Beard over twenty summers ago, appearing mysteriously the day after his ancient, ailing predecessor, the local-born smith Amauntur, died of rattlung-fever. (Some in the Beard say that they saw a "door of fire" appear on the headlands, and a "cloaked wizard" stride out of it, staff in hand, to point the way for Lharruk and his wife to Amauntur's forge.) Of the folk of the Beard, only Maerleth knows that Lharruk's given name is Ilve, just as only he knows her family name is Summertide, and that she originally hailed from Secomber. (Elminster refuses to say if he was the mage who brought the couple to Ulgoth's Beard, but he did once mention that "The Summertides keep a low profile for very good reasons.")

The cliffs north of the Beard are the haunts of shrieking seabirds (primarily gulls and sea-skry, but also sandpipers and the grouse-like, edible "mrawkers," who eat so many insects that flies and stinging things are almost unknown in the Beard), and are riddled with tiny one-room caverns caused by water seeping into cracks in the rock, freezing and expanding in winter to widen such cracks, and so on, until cracks become large enough for rocks to tumble down into them and wedge to form roofs of sorts. Gull-hunting foxes dwell in such places -- and so does "Old Mort."

Old Mort is a shambling, wheezing, foul-mouthed but generally jovial old hermit who rarely bathes (and smells accordingly), and who got caught in a long-ago spell that twisted one side of his face into a nightmare of extra (sightless and milk-white) eyes, ears, and nostrils. Colourful local tales about how this happened, or what sort of strange monster Mort really is, abound --but few folk of the Beard know the truth: that he was once a wealthy and powerful merchant of Amn, and knows where a lot of coin is hidden in that country (and the details of even more debts and pacts). His proper name is Endelver Mortraryn, he fled here after the last of his kin (hungry to claim the family wealth) spread word that he was a horrible shapeshifting monster and not the real Endelver Mortraryn at all, and he's quite content (having snuck back into Amn years later to successfully strangle both the cousin who cheated him, and the business rival who hired a wizard to transform him and several of his colleagues) to live out his days in the cliffs, eating eggs and birds that he catches with his bare hands, pouncing and wringing their necks deftly. Or rather, he lives out his nights, hunting birds as they sleep, and usually snores through most days, wedged safely down some dangerous cliffside cavern.

Old Mort has quite a bit of coin hidden around the cliffs (that he brought with him out of Amn), and makes a good living from the folk of the Beard (trading for warm cloaks whenever his rot through, plus bread and the occasional meal of cooked lamb or fish) with the potent moonshine he makes.

Called "moonfire" by folk of the Beard because Mort insists that its crucial ingredient is captured moonlight, this sparkling clear liquid is fire-like on the throat and tastes rather mint-like. It's made from boiled cliffrock mosses and the mashed and distilled leaves of certain nettle-like plants, and Old Mort makes it in three different stills hidden in various cliff caves, and sells it in old bottles,

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jugs, and pans brought to him by the children of the Beard (for which he trades them little whittled wooden figures of warriors and monsters they can play with). To folk of the Beard, Mort trades it for what he needs, but to visiting strangers he sells it, insisting on a price of at least 1 sp per bottle or jug. [Mort's moonfire shouldn't be confused with the phosphorescent, vanilla-sweet green-white elven wine of the same name.]

Locals sometimes use moonfire to "liven up" especially bad-tasting gudgeon, some think it an aphrodisiac (it's really closer to an anesthetic), and some have tried to mix it with ammarale [see below] with disastrous results.

Old Mort never seems to feel the cold, and the spell that so twisted his flesh also made it numb, so he handles thorns, sharp edges, barbs, and very hot or cold items with the same casual deftness. He likes to chat with anyone who seeks him out, and the folk of the Beard have long since lost all fear of him, because he's patient with children and likes to tell them truths about the world, and although he loves to look at bared female beauty, the loss of fleshly sensation long since robbed him of all pleasure in sexual matters, so he never molests anyone. The magic that twisted him also caused him to heal rapidly (he regenerates 1 hp every half a day, even if exerting himself), and he long since learned to find his way around every stone and pebble of the cliffs, seashore below, and headlands in utter darkness and the thickest fogs. As the locals say, "Old Mort can find the lost and never get lost himself."

So saith Ed.

I'll post the second part right after this one. Enjoy, all.  
THO

July 6, 2004: Herewith, more on Ulgoth's Beard from Ed:

The rest of the forty-odd folk of the Beard are farmers, all of them keeping sheep and small plots of herbs and vegetables (the latter plowed by mule-plough and worked by hand). The most "let's do things around here my way" farmer is probably Malluth Darake; the wealthiest (though such things are relative; he'd not be reckoned the equal of a successful backstreet shopkeeper in the Gate) is Haeraklo Harndruth; and the most colourful is the handsome one-time womanizer Roldrick Nattyre, once notorious for trying his luck "with every gown in the village" (until four of them got him into a bed and poured a cauldron of boiling water over his privates), and now even more notorious for brewing "ammarale" ("Hammer Ale"), a dreadful beer that he sells for a copper piece a tankard, mainly to foolish folk of the Gate and passing travelers (though some older women of the village use it in fish stews).

Ammarale mixed with moonfire is a highly flammable solvent that makes short work of most tars, pitch, paints, dyes, hair, and any edibles being digested by a human or an elf (typically giving them immediate and violent "runs" until purged, a few hours later). Halflings, gnomes, dwarves, orcs and all goblinkin, and creatures having bloodlines of these races are immune to the effects of this mixture, which was dubbed "gutsnakes" by a now-dead old woman of the Beard.

Most of the farmers of the Beard are unremarkable folk who believe in the gods (especially Chauntea, Talos, Umberlee, and Auril, though they all trust in Tymora), work hard and long, and entertain themselves with the gossip that comes out of the Gate. Over half of them are skilled in making wagonwheels, and all of them are expert shearers. They belong to four main families (Darake, Harndruth, Nattyre, and Sluth), and the remnants of five others (Boele, Jannath, Orntar, Palan, and Tethtor).

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Coming to Ulgoth's Beard, a visitor will see weedy swamps of islets and floating scum right under the cliffs, guarded on the seaward side by reefs of tumbled rocks that are always wet with sea-spray (and often cloaked in thick fogs, too). The cliffs tower hundreds of feet above the waves, but although they're always slippery and treacherous due to the everpresent damp (and in winter, ice), they are climbable, offering many seabird-occupied ledges, rock chutes, and even bowls of earth marked by tufts of greenery.

Atop the cliffs, the precipice is topped with a headland of wind-scoured rock, which then descends slightly into rolling, windy pastureland. What trees there are tend to be stunted, ground-hugging grotesques, and these conditions persist for some miles north and east, with real woods beginning only along the treacherous cliff edges beyond a distinctively-pointed knob of rock known as Sargoth's Spear (who "Sargoth" was is long forgotten).

The Spear stands over two miles north of the Beard, and has for years been used as a moonlit moot for various conspirators, lovers, and shady merchants of Baldur's Gate.

Ulgoth's Beard itself lies in a natural bowl in the rock, some sixty feet deep and a quarter of a mile across, just behind the cliff headland. The farmers' small barns (used for storing some hay and wagons from which the wheels have been removed, to discourage theft) dot their fields east and north of the Beard itself, but their wool-sheds (where their wagon wheels are stored, too) huddle in the bowl with the houses. Ulgothan farmers eat mutton, make tallow candles, and sell raw wool in Baldur's Gate (making only enough woollens for their own use). Farmers in the Beard are likely to have larger, grander homes than the salts, sometimes with an upper floor and stone floors throughout, but they are all crowded into the bowl with the humbler "dens" of the fisherfolk -- and neither sort of Ulgothan looks down on the other (as a group: there are plenty of petty feuds between families and individuals, as exist everywhere).

By day, shepherds in the fields around the Beard keep watch over land, sea, and sky, and swiftly send word to their colleagues and folk in the Beard itself by means of whistles and gestures. By night, at least two elders of the village will always be on watch, bundled up in cloaks and lying awake on the warmest roofs of the village -- and, of course, Old Mort will be lurking about, swift to warn the folk of the Beard of approaching danger. He usually trails behind strangers of all sorts who travel near the cliffs by night, and will rouse the best-armed folk of the Beard if he sees need. There will always be an extra watcher awake (and watching the relevant barn door) when a peddler is known to be sleeping the night away in someone's barn -- and the same applies whenever anyone is sheltering in Andarasz's keep (which folk of the Beard call the "Northtower" or "the Old Keep").

So saith Ed. Ah, I love how he paints reality into even such a little place as this. I can FEEL him starting to spin stories about it, too. Part 3 to follow immediately.

THO

July 6, 2004: And as promised, the third part of Ed's answer:

The keep of the long-ago pirate lord Andarasz is now little more than an arc of tumbledown stone wall, thirty feet high or so to the north and absent on the bowl or south side, surrounding a square stone tower consisting of a spiral stone stair linking a single square room per level, and rising five levels above the ground (the fifth level being choked with the fallen stones of a collapsed six level, and the other floors being damp, bird-dung-littered rooms of about forty feet square -- slightly larger in the lower levels, and slightly smaller as one ascends).

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Traces of a stone stair descending down the bowl into the Beard can be seen, but these are crumblingly unsafe, and haunted by the apparition of a silently fleeing gowned woman who appears only on certain moonlit nights. Contact with her chilling form is said to bring on a night of strange visions, but do no other harm (some dispute this harmlessness).

The ground floor of the tower contains a ten-foot-wide well (now dry, choked with stone, and a probably fatal sixty-foot fall to anyone tumbling down it), and a trapdoor leading down broad stone steps some seventy feet into "dungeons" (actually linked granary-caverns, two of them natural and the other four painstakingly quarried out years ago). These caverns have been searched repeatedly, are said to be haunted, sometimes serve as brief refuges for small creatures who enter them through crevices around the trapdoor and in the stones framing it, and are used by folk of the Beard for storing firewood, water, and some emergency provisions (barrels of salted fish). In very severe weather or "when dragons attack" (in the last two centuries, there have been three wyvern foraging raids on the Beard, remembered as 'dragon attacks,' and one instance of perytons trying to lair along the cliffs), the folk of the Beard will flee to the Old Keep caverns for shelter.

Burials in the Beard are usually by boat, with the shrouded body being rolled over the side well out to sea. Marriages usually take place on the headlands, or (if a farming family is involved) in a tent erected on the family's pastureland; the entire village gathers for a feast.

Folk do their daily worship in their own homes, although Chauntea is often venerated in the fields (sometimes by shedding blood over plantings, sometimes by copulation in freshly-plowed fields), and Talos is venerated during storms on the headlands.

Folk of the Beard don't dislike the resident wizard Shandalar, but they don't speak of him or socialize with him: he's a private man, an outlander, "and a wizard, at that!" They know nothing of the true nature of his floating house (to them, it just "appeared there, one day" thirty-some summers ago) or of his origins, but tolerate him because his rare dealings with his neighbours are always cordial, he never tries to coerce anyone into anything, or cast any magic on locals except to aid them or defend himself, and keeps to himself. In hard winters or when blights strike, sicknesses afflict the lambs, or the fish are scarce, Shandalar causes plentiful food to appear (usually Old Mort starts bringing it excitedly down from the Old Keep, after Shandalar magically farspoke him to go there).

Locals know that "strange monsters" roam Shandalar's mushroom-growing caverns, and that these miles of passages ("that stretch almost to the Gate, and for thrice that distance north and east") were both melted out of rock and dug out of soil by spells (and that magic also keeps them from collapsing). They've seen his "walking mushrooms" [a tribe of myconids; see the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL II] on very rare occasions, and have heard that "far more fearsome things" lurk down there. They also know that wagonloads of mushrooms come out of the caverns, because sometimes (when large "buys" are taking place, usually due to ships docking in the Gate that want to fill their holds with 'shrooms) Shandalar hires them (and their wagons and carts) to help with the transport, and know that Shandalar makes good coin off these edibles. Yet as he's told them that he shares the wealth "with those below" (the myconids), implied that he protects the folk of the Beard from those same strange subterranean creatures, and aids the folk of the Beard without meddling overmuch in their affairs, none of the locals begrudge him his "odd ways" or wealth.

The folk of the Beard also say that since the wagon-tracks have linked them to the Gate, increasing numbers of coaches, carts, and even large wagons have begun to come up from the Gate to the wizard. Few of those visitors have been friendly to curious onlookers (some even

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loosing crossbow bolts at watchers), and the folk of the Beard have generally settled on the view that they don't want to know who these visitors are, or anything about their business.

Elminster, of course, does. He's prepared to say that these visitors come to Shandalar to pay VERY handsomely to rent temporary storage space in some of his caverns. The wizard, in return, keeps his mouth shut about what he's storing for them -- though Elminster has done enough prying to know that what he takes in (not permitting any client to actually enter his caverns) includes contraband goods, weapons, stolen magic, and many items and even kidnapped people clients want well hidden. Shandalar examines everything he stores very carefully to prevent magical discharges, invasions, prowlings from monsters or automatons that break loose, releases of spores, gases, and diseases, deaths of stored life and the consequences of decomposition, and has been known to destroy or "lose" certain stored things.

Elminster and Khelben have kept a close watch on Shandalar for some time, but have thus far concluded that the mage is primarily interested in researching and crafting new spells and takes great care to remain aloof from politics and power struggles in Baldur's Gate and elsewhere. They are satisfied he seeks no power, and is no danger to those who don't directly menace him. More than that, Elminster refused to divulge about Shandalar the wizard -- and would say nothing at all about the mage's daughters.

Ulgoths regard Baldur's Gate as a constant source of entertainment and the seat of most that's large and exciting in the world, and pay close attention to news and gossip from it. They also regard news of Sword Coast shipping (especially piracy) as of vital importance, seeing themselves as caught between "the Gate and the endless waves," but strangely, Cloak Wood (and everything else south of the Chionthar) is not part of their world, and is very seldom spoken of or thought of.

So saith Ed, who's saved the best for last.

Accordingly, stay tuned for the fourth and last part of his revelations about Ulgoth's Beard.  
THO

July 6, 2004: I now return you to the words of Ed:

"Ah," Elminster added knowingly, "but ye'll be after adventure, and the things that lure and sparkle with it."

There are, of course, the inevitable (and false) legends of Ulgoth's treasure being hidden somewhere in, under, or near the Beard -- and of course, Shandalar's mushroom-growing caverns are where most treasure-seekers go looking. If they go without fierce intent or armament, they won't penetrate far: the entry house to the caverns covers a broad stone ramp descending into a cavern guarded by animated objects [see the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL; these are small rolling metal spheres containing bells, under orders to pursue intruders as mobile alarms, bounding to strike only at creatures engaged in arcane spellcasting, to disrupt such castings], greater stone golems [described in the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL] and iron cobras [detailed in the 3.5e FIEND FOLIO]. The golems and cobras are under orders to prevent the passage of all intruders, expelling such creatures with everything they entered with, and destroying them if necessary).

Intruders who come well-armed and with organized hostile intent, and win past the entry cavern and its inner rolling stone doors and massive iron gates (each of the three ways on into the rest of

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the caverns is blocked by both barriers; aside from them and the guardians, the caverns hold little else but glowing globe light sources, 'sorting table' stone slabs, and wagons) will soon come into conflict with the myconids and with dread guards [detailed in the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL II]. There are also rumors of stranger guardians, such as unique sorts of golems and nimblewrights [also detailed in the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL II].

Unfortunately for the treasure-seekers, Shandalar's caverns don't have any known connection to the greater Underdark (yet), and aside from seemingly-endless mushrooms and the interesting stored items kept in two 'side-wings' of caverns, one large and obvious and the other small and well-hidden, they contain no treasure.

However, Elminster says there ARE three treasures of note in or near Ulgoth's Beard.

Somewhere in a cavern that's just underwater, along the base of the cliffs beneath the Beard, lies a large pirate treasure of coins and trade-bars. The chests holding it will soon rot away or be broken by the force of the inrushing waters during the fiercest storms (the only ones that penetrate the breakwaters that guard the swamps), and perhaps the restless waves will spit forth a coin or two as clues to just where these riches lie. Some of the pirates were shut into the cavern to drown when the treasure was placed there, so aquatic undead are likely to now guard the riches.

Under one of the homes in the Beard, probably buried deeper than a grave would be, is a bronze serpent [detailed in the 3.5e MONSTER MANUAL II] that will activate when first touched by a living being, obeying its activator as its "creator." This tale is well-known among scribes, sages, and wizards across the Realms, but many versions of the tale place it in many different locales. This is the real one.

Searchers are warned that there are REAL graves, very ancient ones, beneath several of the homes in the Beard -- and that these many well prove to contain active undead if broken open.

And, last but not least, somewhere near Ulgoth's Beard is a hidden extra-dimensional room: an ancient "safehold" created by an elf mage as a private hiding-cache or temporary refuge. Laeral found it, long ago, and reports that it holds a "powerful" (+4 or +5) Tome of Clear Thought [described in the 3.5e DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE] and a coffer containing six Immovable Rods [also described in the 3.5e DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE]. She also said enigmatically that the safehold had "a strange guardian" but refused to say more.

Borch, I just won't have time to provide this much depth of detail for everywhere in the Realms (including Lathtar's Lantern and the Cloak Wood, which I'll turn to next), and I'm afraid Ulgoth's Beard isn't a wildly exciting place for adventurers. Yet I hope I've given you enough that you can use it for a setting for game play, for PC adventurers who want to fare into or out of Baldur's Gate.

I hope this is of help, and furnishes some enjoyment.  
Ed

So saith the Master.

Well, he's certainly back in the saddle again (and riding, among other things, a top-secret project that's got me very excited). The first draft of the Waterdeep book is done, and the first Knights book underway. And then there's -- but no, I can't even tell SiriusBlack about THAT. Especially not Sirius.

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Ah, I'm bad.

Yours (no pushing, now!)  
THO

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On July 7, 2004 THO said: A few words more, fellow scribes...

SiriusBlack, Ed wasn't at Origins at all. TOR Books, the publishers of his Aglirta fantasy novels, invited him down to the American Library Association Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida to do panels with fellow TOR authors (and scientists, and award-winning sf writers) Vernor Vinge and Geoffrey Landis. Ed was supposed to interview Sir Arthur C. Clarke via videophone, but ended up "winging it" onstage for more than 2 hours as techs tried (and failed) to get a satellite link through to Sri Lanka. However, as those who've enjoyed Ed doing panels at GenCon and Worldcon and countless other cons for decades know, the man wings panels very calmly. Ed and his wife drove down to Florida from Ontario in Canada and back, and so were "right out of touch" during Origins. Ed still hasn't heard anything officially, but said his e-inbox was full of congratulations from fellow writers and game designers when he got home, so he believes it happened. (He also wants to know if he ever has to climb onto a pedestal and pose in a toga and laurel-wreath, or if he gets his own crypt or something "cool" like that.)

Vanguard, what exactly do you need Ed's help with? Worldbuilding is mainly lots of drudgery and not forgetting ANYTHING and working out the implications of the smallest details before you put anything into print. I doubt any new setting has any chance of becoming an "official D&D" world for at least eight years or so, now that Eberron's been launched (a setting which, by the way, neither Ed nor I have seen yet in final published form, thanks to the paucity of hobby stores near either of us).

Wooly dear, the Yielding Tide wasn't Ed's creation, and I'm afraid he can't add much to existing lore about it or the events it recounts. (Yet.)

Yes, Sarta, as you surmised, I had work of my own to attend to. Whilst gamers were at Origins and Ed was with the librarians at ALA, I was attending the Association of American Publishers annual conflagration and hearing lots about the business side of the book biz. Sorry, all -- I'd love to live in Candlekeep, believe me, but (sigh) find myself stuck in the real world. Yet somehow, I could feel Wooly's yearnings while I was there, amusing myself by attending panels in a very grand and prim dark gown and no underwear...

Beowulf, the folk of Sunset Vale don't consider themselves part of Cormyr, and would have been astonished indeed if an army had come riding hard out of the Forest Kingdom to their aid during the rise of Darkhold or at any other time. The Cormyrean "claims" on their westward verges are of the "don't anyone try to expand into here, or found a kingdom here, or there'll be war, d'ye hear?" variety, not "we bother to police these backlands much." Garen Thal has answered this query and your question about the possibility of rebellion admirably, and I can add little useful to his well-chosen words.

Baalster, you're very welcome, and your Whitehorn, White Peaks, and Ride tribes lore requests are duly noted, though I'm afraid the wait is going to be long for an answer (I'm thinking Christmas, knowing Ed's workload and the queue already built up here!). However, I'll tackle your other four questions in a post immediately following this one.

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Gerath, I'll add your request (and Lashan's echo of Baalster's Ride request, too) to Ed's ever-expanding queue.

Ah, 'tis a hard life. As Azoun IV once said, so many mouths to attend to, and so little, little time...  
THO

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On July 7, 2004 THO said: Well met again, gentles, and forthwith to Baalester's queries. Eric Boyd has already admirably provided answers to most of these, so I'll just backstop him as follows:

1. There's a very good reason why the Zhentarim don't take the shortest route to the Border Forest: the ogres ["beast-men"] pushed out of the area to the north by Zhent mining expeditions and patrols, bolstered by bands of orcs and hobgoblins who weren't part of the Zhentilar mercenaries, but came to the valley of the Tesh and to ruined Daggerdale hoping for pickings, roam in this area and make short work of all Zhent bands that don't include numerous and capable mages and priests.

This is rough country (of which more later) that favours guerilla defenders and hampers large, organized ground forces -- and it's crawling with Harpers, folk fled from Zhentil Keep and The Citadel of the Raven who have no love for the Zhentarim, and other "malcontents" who will harry and frustrate Zhents whenever possible. So the Zhents, who are after all pragmatic businessfolk (most of the wizards and warriors) as well as world-conquering maniacs (the senior priests, and some of the beholders), do the practical thing and keep to safer, more open country where they can move goods faster and take fewer losses.

2. The northern Border Forest is extremely rough country: wooded knife-edged ridges between ravines, with many small caverns and plentiful roaming monsters (in other words, a colder version of the Stonelands north of Cormyr). Hellish country to try to hew a trade-route through, even if it isn't inhabited by hostile creatures (and as we know from Lanseril Snowmantle of the Knights, the inhabitants of the Border Forest are VERY hostile to the Zhents and to woodcutters in general).

Eric Boyd is correct in mentioning that hybsil tribes are a widespread and worsening problem in the southern Border Forest. In the northern forest, the plant monsters and prowling predators are fierce enough that even the hybsils don't go there -- and we Knights, I must confess, made things worse by moving a few deepspawn there, to provide plentiful food for all and endless foes for Zhent intruders. We even encountered a Worm That Walks in our last visit there, and I can't imagine anyone less powerful than the senior Zhents surviving there for long (and by their own thinking, they have MUCH better things to do).

To the north of the Border Forest, the land continues to be "broken" and hard to traverse, with rocky badlands running right up into the frozen, wind-sculpted jagged ice of the permanently-frozen regions. Iyraclea (detailed in the EPIC LEVEL HANDBOOK) is taking an interest in this area (because human mining forays have forced the ogres to retreat into the ice-caves and thus "intrude" on her territory. As Eric says, the flind-led gnolls roam here in seemingly-endless bands, and hate the Zhents far more than they fear them. Mount Ghaethluntar is THE main flind realm that I know of, and they view the Zhents as a threat best fought in the groll lands (in the same way that the Soviet Union, in our real world, sought to surround itself with "satellite states" so disputes with the 'outside world' could be fought therein, and not on 'home soil').

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So, no, it wouldn't be easier for the Zhentarim to just go around Border Forest. :}

3. As far as Ed or I know, there isn't yet any detailed Realmslore on the Underdark city of Glanderultok, so have fun! (Eric Boyd is THE expert here, and if he came up blank, blankness is what we all have to work with.)

4. The largest mountain west of the Citadel of the Raven is Mount Ombaddor, I believe. It's named for the long-dead orc chieftan who ruled the caverns that honeycomb it, and tried to dominate other orc tribes (in which he was successful, though of course his 'ragged realm' vanished with his death). Mount Ombaddor has carved battlements and lookouts on some of its outside slopes, which the Zhents occupied for use as stables and bases for the flying mounts. Some of those fortifications were equipped with long-range 'cage of rocks' catapults, which the Zhents refurbished and manned (more to prevent the mountain being occupied by someone else and held against them than for any other reason). Orcs still dwell in some of the interior caverns, but there are tales that something far worse has "come up" into those caves from below (the Underdark), and hunted down and devoured many orcs. We Knights haven't investigated, and frankly have other fish to fry.

My notes also tell me that Mount Launt and Mount Horgrymborr are the two side-peaks that flank Ombaddor. About them I know nothing, other than that they looked pretty forbidding from the vantage-point of my saddle. So there you have it. Thy Hooded Lady must now away, for it seems I've some real-world work to attend to yet, today...

Banners bright and high, until next!  
THO

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On July 8, 2004 THO said: A pleasure, Borch. Lathtari's Lantern coming up in a few days, Ed says, with something on Cloak Wood to follow, of course.

Beowulf: George Krashos has, as usual, hit it dead on. Dargoth, most property confiscations are later handed out to other nobles, retiring courtiers, and citizens the Crown desires to reward as, well, rewards. It should also be remembered that the War Wizards (through spellcastings) and Purple Dragons (through repairing roads, checking fences, and providing security patrols) provide public benefits that make them both well-loved in law-abiding quarters, and that landowners are, in the main, quite willing to pay for.  
THO

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On July 10, 2004 THO said: Ed is away and busy with family (and GenCon; you'll all know why soon ) matters this weekend, but I know he'll love this question, Karth. As to whether or not you'll get detailed 3.5e spells out of him, probably not (NDAs rear their ugly heads here). Just off the top of my head (must run, as I TOO have things to attend to this weekend, unfortunately), from my experiences playing in the original Realms campaign, I can say this much: It's quite possible to "mind-ream" gently, if the reamer knows what he or she is doing. Damage usually occurs when the mind to be read is fighting the invasive mind, and the reamer "bears down" to get at memories and knowledge that's being deliberately concealed. Mind-reaming is VERY hard against a mind that's alert, hostile, and experienced at wielding magic, and harder against stronger personalities. It's easier against a sleeping (or rather, dreaming, because a skilled reamer can 'steer the

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dreams' so the mind being read does the work of revealing) or willing and relaxed mind. Certain spells can block it, backlash against the reamer, or misdirect what is "seen."

Sylune's ability to detect emotions, lies, and the like have been enhanced since her death, but her abilities to initiate and launch magic (as opposed to working with magic cast by others) sharply limited. She can "drift" into a sleeping, dreaming mind of a being who's physically VERY close, and even 'ride' a reaming attempt by someone else into a mind, but she can no longer undertake mind-reams (or lots of other magics, for that matter) by herself. She's still learning her limitations, and I regret that Ed hasn't had the in-print opportunities to detail them as fully as he'd like to (Winterfox implied in another thread here in Novels that Sylune's status as a spectral harpist hasn't really meant much of a change, which is wrong - but also fair comment, given how little has been put into print, thus far.)

What Ed hasn't wanted to do is lay out an explicit process for mind-reaming - because as a roleplaying-first DM, he has said (to we Knights) that it's the perfect "research it for yourself, for years, ho ho" field.

But I'll shut up now, e-toss this Ed's way, and see what HE says.  
THO

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July 14, 2004: Well met again, all. I bring the words of Ed to new scribe Ordin Solandar:

I'm afraid an old NDA and a current writing project prevent me from detailing a storm sword in 3.5e rules format, which in a way is okay because almost all of them are now destroyed or kept well hidden.

The earliest storm swords were battle blades devised in the early days of Cormanthyr. Never numerous because their nature made them dangerous and this soon became obvious to everyone, these proto-storm swords (+5 long swords that glowed when erupting and whenever their bearer wills) were so named because they could unleash many lightning bolts of awesome power (one bolt per round, of 12d6 damage, bolt can fork if desired, 7d12 bolts per day). If the wielder of an early storm sword cast any spell that caused hp damage 'into' the blade, the spell was absorbed by the sword (no spell effect manifested), but the destructive power (damage dice) of the spell could be added (by mere act of will of the wielder) wholly to any one bolt unleashed by the sword. A proto-storm sword can only hold one such spell; casting a second one into a sword already storing a spell causes a spontaneous chain lightning to instantly erupt from the blade. (If persons other than the wielder of the blade try to cast a spell into or at a storm sword, the spell is deflected in a random distance and direction, perhaps menacing unintended targets.)

The perilous side-effect of all proto-storm swords is that mere proximity to wards, mantles, and any being, item, or area upon which three or more spells have been cast and remain in existence (even if inactive), causes a storm sword to spontaneously try to drain the nearby magic.

A bearer who knows what this property is (any bearer can feel it awakening or in operation) and makes direct physical contact with the proto-storm sword can mentally wrestle the blade into leaving the enchantments alone, but this curbing takes the bearer's entire attention and concentration, allowing the bearer to perform only simple tasks (such as movement, evasion of obstacles or approaching persons or objects, moving or drawing or sheathing the blade, and engaging in simple verbal communication or making gestures) as the curbing is going on.

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Certain proto-storm swords damaged VERY precious elven family enchantments to the horror of their wielders and everyone else, so they were soon replaced by the blades I detailed in DRAGON Annual #2. The earlier weapons were ordered destroyed, and several were -- but in any time and with any race, there are those who value power and the illicit. So several proto-storm swords were hidden away, and presumably survive today. Please note that these would be unknown outside the elves, and referred to by elves as "the old stormblades," NOT "proto-storm swords."

Where the NDA comes in most heavily is in preventing me from saying much about who among the elves of Cormanthyr was allowed to wield storm swords of either vintage, family pride, and all of that. I'm afraid the hints given in EI in Myth Drannor will have to suffice.

So saith Ed, who now returns to his lore-work for Borch.

He and I may both drop out of contact for the next handful of days, but I'll post when I can.  
Your not-so-obedient Hooded One

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July 15, 2004: Hello, all.

George, Ed and I were just discussing Marsember. Neither he nor your obedient servant have yet seen the relevant DUNGEON issue (\*cough\* something about living in the stocks \*cough\*), but Ed tells me that this, reproduced below, is more or less what he sent to the editors. He suspects there's no way they could have crammed all this (the street names in particular) into print, given their time and space constraints, and ended up with a legible map, so he asks you to report right back to us all with what didn't make it, and he'll try to "locate" the features for everyone, by the "See the tiny building three down from X?" method. :}

So I give you the words of Ed:

MARSEMBAN FEATURES (including those mentioned in the novel ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER/Ed Greenwood, 2004):

NOTES: Of the maps published before the current DUNGEON map (which I haven't seen yet), the one I drew for VOLO'S GUIDE TO CORMYR (p42, key p43) should be considered definitive. The first 22 keyed features given here match the numbers used thereon. The western half of Marsember is honeycombed with narrow barge-canal, usually 30 feet wide and seldom shown on any map. It's therefore rare for a building in this part of the city to have any sort of a "yard." Volo's belief that Marsember's streets were nameless was wrong, but few names are heard in everyday usage.

1. The King's Tower (abode of the King's Lord of Marsember, the Herald, and the garrison)
2. Morningmist Hall (temple of Lathander)
3. Starwater Keep (naval drydock and fortress)
4. The Roaring Griffon (inn and tavern; formerly the Drowning Fish festhall)
5. The Cloven Shield (inn and tavern)
6. The Old Oak (inn and tavern)
7. The Barrelstone Inn
8. The Drowning Flagon (inn)
9. The Net of Pearls (curio shop)

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10. Swordspires (city villa of the Thundersword noble family)
11. Iyrinthorn (city villa of the Illance noble family)
12. Stormwinds Towers (fortified mansion of Szwentil Illeon, founder of the Six Coffers Market Priakos)
13. Sharmran Isle (local nickname "Fishgut Rock")
14. Antanmaran's Isle (local nickname "The Prow")
15. The Drowned Sailors Society (club)
16. The Masked Merfolk (nightclub)
17. The Wight On A Weredragon (dining-house [restaurant])
18. The Platter of Plenty (dining-house [restaurant])
19. The Tankard of Eels (tavern)
20. Luckfist Hall (shrine to Tymora)
21. Faircoins Moneychanger (shrine to Waukeen)
22. Deepgreen House (shrine to Umberlee)
23. Indur's Warehouses, overlying the Maranthar Undercellars (subterranean warehouse chambers, 120 feet below; constructed by the extinct wealthy Marsemban shipping family of Maranthar: contains hidden portal linking with a dead-end alley in the Trades Ward of Waterdeep)
24. Bracegauntlet Gard (fortified mansion of the Bracegauntlet noble family)
25. Dagohnlar House (tallhouse of the Dagohnlar noble family)
26. Mistwind Towers (mansion of the Mistwind noble family)
27. Monthorhall (mansion of the Monthor noble family)
28. Ravensgar House (mansion of the Ravensgar noble family)
29. Wavegallant Spires (mansion of the Wavegallant noble family)
30. Haelithortowers, walled estate (home of Lady Joysil Ambrur)
31. Thundaerlyn Hall (meeting-hall and rental market- and revel-moot)
32. Felgontar's Firehelm (large, popular, respectable dining-house [restaurant])
33. The Leaping Eel (rowdy sailors' tavern)
34. The Amorous Anchor (festhall and smuggling den; connected via secret passages to many shop and warehouse cellars)
35. The Harbortower
36. Blackpillars (fortified tallhouse of Delthrin the Deadmaster, reclusive necromancer)
37. Stormhold (home of Filfaeril Stormbillow, sorceress and seller of magic items and potions)
38. home of Vindala Chalanther (illusionist, tutor and spellhurler-for-hire)

- A. Assander Street
- B. Calathanter Street
- C. Chancever Street
- D. Daunsul Street
- E. Fendrol's Way
- F. Gelguld Lane
- G. Hammarhantus Lane
- H. Tarnsar Lane
- I. Thelvarspike Lane
- J. The Lightless Lamp (meeting-place; broken street-lamp on Thelvarspike)

So saith Ed.

He'll be VERY busy for the next three days, but will try to answer "Where's that?" requests ASAP.

Love to all lovers of the Realms,  
THO

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On July 15, 2004 THO said: Indeed, Blueblade, 'tis my honor to confirm this. If the word is out, then let it be cried from the parapets and the battlements: Ed of the Greenwood is indeed the Author Guest of Honor at GenCon this year.

I believe that makes it his fourteenth time as SOME sort of Guest of Honor at GenCon, but my count may be a bit off.

THO

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July 17, 2004: Fellow scribes, I've pulled some strings locally and got my hands on a copy of DUNGEON 113. I haven't yet examined the adventure, though at first glance it seems both playable and interesting (for example, the lore on page 36 of the DUNGEON issue, facing the map, is all "dead on" correct and feels right to me, as someone all too familiar with the city of Marsember).

The map of Marsember printed in the magazine is visually the best yet drawn, and quite accurate as to layout of streets and buildings when compared to my original Realms campaign map (Ed drew the originals for the FR Adventures hardcover maps, of course, and we 'original players' had photocopies even before TSR did).

However, it seems someone didn't read Ed's map closely, or couldn't read the copy of it they received, or just didn't bother following his lore very closely. Why, oh why make changes to Realmslore? Don't those changing it realize that (at least in Ed's head) everything is linked? Grrr. Consistency consistency consistency (goes off muttering, in usual daily editor's grouching mode: \* I \* manage to keep things straight when I do MY editing -- what's wrong with these folks? Grumble grumble mutter . . . ) Perhaps I speak too harshly: Ed's earlier comments about the inclusion of streets making the map unreadable, plus my own knowledge of magazine publication deadlines, suggest he might have faxed the DUNGEON staff a map, and the result might well have been very hard to read.

Yet because it's important that any published map of Marsember displays features that match up in locations with the published text of Ed's recent novel ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER, I've done a little revision work using the DUNGEON map's key numbering and what Ed revealed to us, the players of inquisitive PCs, of his original campaign notes. All who'd like a truly accurate (though still incomplete) map of Marsember are invited to read on.

1. The King's Tower (abode of the King's Lord of Marsember, the Herald, and the garrison)
2. Ravensgar House (mansion of the Ravensgar noble family)
3. The Tankard of Eels (tavern)

Note: rather than the tiny building marked as "3," the tavern is actually the large "U" or "C" - shaped building to the northwest. [The building marked as "3" is actually the home (upstairs) and shop (street level) of Amthur Ondamus, importer of exotic quaffs and philtres (= medicinal concoctions).]

4. The Leaping Eel (rowdy sailors' tavern)

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Note: rather than the building marked as "4," the tavern is actually in the building marked "5" on the map. [The building marked as "4" is actually the home (upstairs) and shop (street level) of Arnthus Malree, Netmaker and Netmender.]

5. The Roaring Griffon (inn and tavern; formerly the Drowning Fish festhall)

Note: rather than the building marked as "5," the Griffon is actually in the large building JUST inside the western gate of Marsember (occupying the angle immediately east of the central guardtower between the two gate-arches). [The building marked as "5" is actually The Leaping Eel tavern (see #4, above).]

6. Wavegallant Spires (mansion of the Wavegallant noble family)

7. Stormwinds Towers (fortified mansion of Szwentil Illeon, founder of the Six Coffers Market Priakos)

Note: "Towers," NOT 'Tower' as the DUNGEON map has it.

8. Deepgreen House (shrine to Umberlee)

9. The Wight On A Weredragon (dining-house [restaurant])

Note: the map tag seems to float in the middle of a large stretch of harbor, which would make for rather damp dining. There should be an arrow connecting the numeral "9" with a particular building to the northwest. To find it, go northwest from the numeral across water to the two parallel docks or wharves jutting out from an island, and from those docks move west to a largish L-shaped building at about the centre of the SE side of the street that curves most of the length of the island (Hammarhantus Lane, but we'll get to street names later). That L-shaped building is The Wight On A Weredragon.

10. The Amorous Anchor (festhall and smuggling den; connected via secret passages to many shop and warehouse cellars)

11. Felgontar's Firehelm (large, popular, respectable dining-house [restaurant])

12. Morningmist Hall (temple of Lathander)

13. Chalanther House [home of Vindala Chalanther (illusionist, tutor and spellhurler-for-hire)].

Note: rather than the building marked as "13," Vindala actually dwells in the isolated building immediately south of (the pointed southern end of) The King's Tower (#1), fronting on a street just west of a bridge and sharing a waterfront with the walls of the Tower. This happens to be important to me, because my primary character once flung a rock through her window as a warning, from a boat in the harbor -- a feat that would have been godlike in power and accuracy, if I'd done it and managed to awaken Vindala in the building marked as her home on the DUNGEON map. Oh, I'm sure some will say she decided to move house for some reason, but knowing the lady as I do, I doubt she'd have ended up in #13, which is a busy (and filthy) smithy belonging to one Uorn Hallowhand, Armorer, Chainmaker, and Weaponsmith, surrounded by decaying warehouses used as storage for scrap metals, bones, rags, and other 'gleanings' that lowcoin Marsembans bring for reuse. The name of Vindala's home has been added, but is entirely in keeping with Marsember naming conventions for abodes of folk of her social station.

14. Stormhold (home of Filfaeril Stormbillow, sorceress and seller of magic items and potions)

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Note: rather than the building marked as "14," Filfaeril actually inhabits the odd 'bent-shaped' building immediately south of the wall-tower that's "first tower west" of the numeral "14" marked on the DUNGEON map.

[The building marked as "14" on the map is Dagohnlar House (tallhouse of the Dagohnlar noble family), a location that features prominently in the action of ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. Again, narrow canals aren't shown on any published Marsember map, but it's a pity that this mistake has crept in mere months after the publication of that novel -- and NO, the Dagohnlars have NOT moved house to a far less fashionable address. :}]

15. Faircoins Moneychanger (moneylending, moneychanging, and contract-witnessing business, and shrine to Waukeen)
16. Haelithtorntowers, walled estate (home of Lady Joysil Ambrur)
17. Swordspires (city villa of the Thundersword noble family)
18. The Net of Pearls (curio shop)

Note: rather than the building marked as "18" on the DUNGEON map, the "Pearls" (as locals call it) is actually in the building immediately to the north of it, in the square building covered by the white fletching of the drawn arrow. [The building marked as "18" is actually the rundown former city villa of the long-exiled Merendil noble family, a crumbling four-storey structure that has for years has served as a rooming-house.]

19. The Old Oak (inn and tavern)
20. Luckfist Hall (shrine to Tymora)
21. The Masked Merfolk (nightclub)

Note: rather than the building marked as "21," the Merfolk is actually in the building that stands in the southwest corner of the intersection of the street Luckfist Hall (#20, above) is on the east side of, with Calathanter Street (the east-west street that runs more or less parallel to the city wall here, "first south of the wall" and enters the walled naval base a block east of here). In other words, go due northwest from the building marked "21" over an intervening building and diagonally across a street, and you'll reach the front door of the Merfolk. [The building marked "21" on the DUNGEON map is actually one of the largest "manydoors" houses (= apartment houses with longstay tenants, rather than a shortstay rooming-house) in Marsember, built on a reputedly-haunted site used by a succession of several former mansions.]

22. Iyrinthorn (city villa of the Illance noble family)
23. The Cloven Shield (inn and tavern)
24. The Platter of Plenty (dining-house [restaurant])
25. Thundaerlyn Hall (meeting-hall and rental market- and revel-moot)
26. Indur's Warehouses, overlying the Maranthar Undercellars (subterranean warehouse chambers, 120 feet below; constructed by the extinct wealthy Marsember shipping family of Maranthar: contains hidden portal linking with a dead-end alley in the Trades Ward of Waterdeep).

Note: The arrow on the DUNGEON map points to a single building, but Indur's is actually a complex of the four easternmost buildings on this isle (the one indicated on the published map being the westernmost of the northshore pair).

27. The Drowning Flagon (inn)
28. Everet Villa (Delthrin's catacombs)

Note: this is of course a new feature added in the DUNGEON adventure. The catacombs, as Produced at CANDLEKEEP.COM from original text by Ed Greenwood, via The Hooded One.

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mapped in the adventure, thankfully don't interfere with the adjacent and extensive Maranthar Undercellars described in Ed's novel, which lie partially beneath it.

- 29. Mistwind Towers (mansion of the Mistwind noble family)
- 30. The Drowned Sailors Society (club)
- 31. Monthorhall (mansion of the Monthor noble family)
- 32. The Barrelstone Inn

Note: rather than the building marked as "32" on the DUNGEON map, the "Barrel" (as locals call it) is actually the large U- or C-shaped building on the north shore of the same isle, but one bridge to the west. In other words, the building standing just southeast of the bridge crossed by the arrow for "25" that's printed on the map. [The building indicated as "32" is actually the home (upstairs) and shop/bakery (street level) of 'Mother' Tanthra Bellbow and her three daughters (Amaera, Doroeva, and Phantra), popular throughout Marsember for her cheese buns and hardloaves of nut bread.]

- 33. Bracegauntlet Gard (fortified mansion of the Bracegauntlet noble family)
- 34. Naval Drydock. This map tag has been added to the key, but drawn from Ed's earlier maps, and is correct in identification and location. It's merely been separated from #35.
- 35. Starwater Keep (naval fortress)
- 36. The Harbortower

Missing from the published map are street names, island names (BTW, the Marsember term for these islands or islets is "Isle"), and one building: Blackpillars (the fortified tallhouse of Delthrin the Deadmaster, reclusive necromancer). While I can appreciate that the design demands of the published adventure might have necessitated Delthrin moving house, the tallhouse he used to live in should still be marked.

A 'tallhouse,' by the way, resembles a New York or Chicago tenement in outward aspect (it might be called a 'row house' elsewhere), being tall (four to six floors counting from the street upwards; thanks to the sea, very few places in Marsember have dry cellars, or extensive cellars at all), narrow, and usually touching the neighboring structures. However, tallhouses in Faerun are VERY rarely built with adjacent buildings, nor do they resemble them closely enough to ever properly be called a "terrace," such as the buildings put up by Wren in London.

To find the location of Delthrin's former tallhouse, look at the "straight stretch" of city wall on the published DUNGEON map: that is, the run of city wall beginning at the tower next to the arrow for "2" and running east to the arrows for "14, 13, 15," and so on. If the tower beside the 2-arrow is counted as the first tower, look between the second and third towers. The third building east of the second tower is larger than its neighboring buildings, and occupies the northern angle of a streetmoot. It is (or was) Delthrin's tallhouse, which he rebuilt into a keep by purchasing two adjacent tallhouses and filling much of them with dressed and fitted stone from within, making them in effect VERY thick sidewalls to his own home (the exceptions being a few pass-through rooms to "firing-port" windows that he covered with hinged lattices of iron bars).

This post is running long already, so I'll leave the other features for a second post, to follow.

Your servant in Realmslore,  
I am pleased to call myself:  
The Hooded One

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July 18, 2004: Hello again, scribes. Still missing from our Marsemban map are island names and street names. Ed provided the DUNGEON folks with only enough of either for DMs and players to easily locate most city features by referencing isle and street names, but I can (extensively) use his notes to go just a bit further. In other words, I'm quoting Ed many, many times in what you read hereafter.

Turning to the islands first, it's perhaps easiest to move across the map from west to east, and from seaward to landward. The bridges referred to hereafter are single arches of stone, with stone 'manypillars' side-rails, cobbled surfaces wide enough for a full-sized wagon and a rider to comfortably pass each other, small drainholes here and there, and a high enough clearance from the water for barges to pass underneath (tall persons standing on barges had better duck in most cases!).

1. The westernmost island (south of The King's Tower and much larger than the island that's due east of The King's Tower) is Harmuth Isle (local nickname "The Old Ship"). Among the buildings on Harmuth is Wavegallant Spires (mansion of the Wavegallant noble family), map feature #6 on the DUNGEON map.
2. North of Harmuth and due east of The King's Tower is Antanmaran's Isle (local nickname "The Prow"). It's connected to mainland Marsember by a bridge, and other bridges link it to Harmuth and to Nornsar Isle. The stretch of water between Harmuth and Antanmaran's Isles and western mainland Marsember (dominated by The King's Tower) is known as "The Long Run," and reaches the West Basin or New Harbor part of the city docks.
3. Due east of Harmuth and connected to it by a bridge is West Darnmist ("Isle" is NEVER added to this name by Marsembans, only by ignorant outlanders). Bridges link it to neighboring East Darnmist and to Baerouth's Isle, which lies to the north.
4. Due north of West Darnmist and linked to it by a bridge is Baerouth's Isle (pronounced "Bayur-OOth's"). Other bridges link this isle to Orm Isle, directly to the east, and Nornsar Isle (local nickname "The Nornsar"), which lies north of Baerouth's, between it and the mainland. Deepgreen House, map feature #8 on the DUNGEON map, stands on Baerouth's Isle.
5. Nornsar Isle lies north of Baerouth's Isle, east of Antanmaran's Isle, south of mainland Marsember, and west of Gauntan Isle (and is linked to all of these places by bridges). As explained in my earlier post, The Wight On A Weredragon dining-house (map feature #9 on the DUNGEON map) stands on Nornsar Isle. Due north of the Nornsar are the East Basin or Old Harbor wharves of Marsember (on the published DUNGEON map, the numeral "11" has been placed in the mouth of the Old Harbor).
6. East Darnmist lies immediately east of West Darnmist, south of Orm Isle, and west of Stormrock Isle. Two bridges link it to West Darnmist, and lone bridges link it to the other two islands. Stormwinds Towers (map feature #7 on the DUNGEON map) stands on the westernmost point of East Darnmist, overlooking the narrow passage between East and West Darnmist, a cut known to locals as "Floating Fish Run" because during calm waters it often fills with floating refuse (during storms, it turns into a roaring, churning stretch of roiling waters). As with West Darnmist, the word "Isle" is never used when Marsembans speak of this island.

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7. Orm Isle lies north of East Darnmist, west of Baerouth's Isle, and east of Stormrock Isle, and is linked to them all by bridges. Swordspires, map feature #17 on the DUNGEON map, stands on Orm Isle.

8. Gauntan Isle is north of Orm Isle, but no bridge links them (the body of water between them, enclosed by the islands all around, is known to Marsembans as Bargemoot, because it's the part of the harbor most likely to be choked with barges moored to each other, and other boats trying to get past). Gauntan lies south of the mainland, west of Nornsar Isle, and east of Sharmran Isle, and is linked to all three locales by bridges. Morningmist Hall (map feature #12 on the DUNGEON map) stands on Gauntan Isle.

9. Stormrock Isle (more often spoken of by locals as "The Stormrock" or just "the Rock," as in: "We're going out to the Rock this even") lies northeast of East Darnmist, south and east of Orm Isle, south of Dawnturtle Isle, and southwest of Aertoprann's Isle, and is linked to all of them by bridges (to Dawnturtle only, by two bridges). The longest private wharf in Marsember juts northwest from Stormrock; it was built centuries ago by a shipwright and smuggler named Osril Lurth, and after his murder passed through a bewildering variety of owners. Nowadays, it's owned by Juskul 'Fishhook' Dree, a sinister sophisticate of a fleet owner rumored to be involved in all manner of shady businesses and illicit practises -- and undeniably the host of some of Marsember's wildest and most decadent revels. Among the buildings on the Stormrock are Iyrinthorn (city villa of the Illance noble family, and map feature #22 on the DUNGEON map) and The Cloven Shield (inn and tavern, and map feature #23 on the DUNGEON map).

10. Dawnturtle Isle (locals usually just say "Dawnturtle") lies due north of Stormrock Isle, southeast of Sharmran Isle, and west of Aertoprann's Isle. A lone bridge links it with Sharmran, but twin bridges link it with both the Stormrock and Aertoprann's Isle. A bustling crossroads full of seedy, sagging wooden dwellings with external porches and balconies dripping with molds and mosses, Dawnturtle was traditionally where visiting sailors slept or found medical attention or sought low-priced companionship. Though such pursuits have spread throughout the eastern Marsember islands, Dawnturtle remains the center of shopping, dining, and services that don't involve ships docking, loading or unloading, or the warehousing of cargo. The Platter of Plenty dining-house (feature #24 on the DUNGEON map) stands at the heart of Dawnturtle.

11. Sharmran Isle (local nickname "Fishgut Rock"). No longer the exclusive haunt of reeking fishmonger's cutting-houses and smokehouses, Sharmran remains an aromatic (okay, "stinking") place much hurried through by visitors and Marsembans alike. It was named for the long-dead "Harbor Witch," a darkly beautiful sorceress known to be able to take on aquatic shapes, and widely rumored to have seduced men and dragged them down to watery deaths, who dwelt in a long-vanished hut at its eastern end. Popular local lore insists she kept much treasure in underwater caves and clefts in the eastern face of the isle, but these have been searched many times over in the mucky water, and nothing beyond mussels and eels has ever been found.

12. Aertoprann's Isle lies due east of Dawnturtle Isle (two bridges link them), northeast of Stormrock Isle (a single bridge links them), immediately west of Spraystone Isle (two bridges link them), and southeast of Wrauntwreck Isle (a single bridge links them). Mistwind Towers (mansion of the Mistwind noble family and DUNGEON map feature 29) stands on Aertoprann's Isle, which is named for a long-ago bridge-builder and dredge-barge-operator of Marsember, who made a stupendous fortune by such activities -- and then mysteriously vanished one summer. Inter Aertoprann was probably murdered by shady business associates, but there are literally hundreds of wild local tales about his fate, from escaping pirates and smugglers who were trying to slay him by marrying into the Obarskyrs with the War Wizards changing his face and name for his own safety (and the royal family getting his millions in return), to Aertoprann getting tired of it

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all and buying access to a gate [3e: portal] to a distant corner of Faerun, to live out the rest of his life in anonymous idleness, reading books and making love to half a dozen hired Marsemban mistresses. There are also, of course, scores of tales about Aertoprann's hidden riches awaiting lucky finders, somewhere (or a lot of somewheres) in Marsember.

13. Spaer Isle is linked to only one other Marsemban island: Old Arn Isle, which lies directly to the north of it, between it and the eastern end of mainland Marsember. The scene of much action in both the DUNGEON adventure and Ed's recent novel *ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER*, Spaer is home to Indur's Warehouses (DUNGEON map feature #26), The Drowning Flagon (inn, and map feature #27), and Everet Villa (Delthrin's catacombs and map feature #28). Most of the buildings on it are warehouses in various states of decrepitude, and it's named for Ardreth Spaer, a fearless Marsemban seacaptain of old whose numerous (and far less famous or accomplished) descendants still work in many businesses all over the harbor.

14. Old Arn Isle (always just "Old Arn" to locals) lies between Spaer Isle, Sharmran Isle, east-end mainland Marsember, and Wrauntwreck Isle, and is linked to all of these places by bridges (two bridges to the mainland, and one span to each of the islands). The Barrelstone Inn (DUNGEON map feature #32) stands on Old Arn, though not where indicated on the published map (see my earlier post). Old Arn is where many harbor businesses, hiring offices, and dockworkers' abodes are located. It's named for 'Old' Dathmur Arnagus, a stonemason and quarry-owner whose workers built many harbor buildings and island-shore harbor wharves several centuries ago.

15. Spraystone Isle is the southeasternmost island of Marsember, and is linked by twin spans to both Aertoprann's Isle to the west and Wrauntwreck Isle to the north. The busiest wharves and 'offload' warehouses are now located here, and ever-larger cranes are rising on the island. Formerly a pirate haunt of linked, labyrinthine warehouses, drinking-dens and hideyholes, it was scoured clean by a disastrous fire caused by a spell-duel between wizards whose names are now forgotten or disputed, that befell several decades ago. Spraystone is named for the almost constant spray of waves breaking on its jagged natural palisades of rocks that presided here until the workers commanded by Arnagus rebuilt this 'useless' rock into a succession of wharves and dock-basins. Offload warehouses are small, heavily-manned buildings used to store and shelter a cargo that's just been unloaded from a ship, or one that is just about to be loaded onto a ship. Sorting occurs in them, for delivery to larger warehouses elsewhere in Marsember -- and because opportunities for theft (and tax evasion/smuggling) are high, so is security. Some 'eyes' belong to the warehouse owners, some to rival trade agents, and some to the Crown (various arms of government keep watch over each other as well as over dockside goings-on).

16. Wrauntwreck Isle (just "Wrauntwreck" to most Marsembans, most of the time) is north of both Aertoprann's Isle (to which it is linked by a single bridge) and Spraystone Isle (joined to it by two spans), and southeast of Old Arn Isle (a single bridge links Old Arn with Wrauntwreck). Dominated by warehouses and the offices of cargo trading companies, coopers, and crate-makers, Wrauntwreck's name comes from its tendency, in the days before Marsember's islands were rebuilt into seawalls, docksides, and wharves, to be where all the 'wash' from shipwrecks ended up ashore. (To some small extent this still holds true, although salvagers in small skiffs and barges swoop VERY swiftly on all visible wreckage.) Among the buildings on Wrauntwreck are The Drowned Sailors Society (club; DUNGEON map feature #30), Monthorhall (mansion of the Monthor noble family, and map feature #31), and Bracegauntlet Gard (fortified mansion of the Bracegauntlet noble family, and map feature #33).

Hmmm, running long again, I see. Please be patient with me, Mr. Krashos, as I sign off now and return with a third post to deal with Marsemban street names. This "setting things straight"

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business is more than a full-time occupation; my admiration for you, and Mr. Boyd, and Faraer, and so many other Realms fans increases.

Steady winds for now,  
THO

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July 18, 2004: Time to wrap up Marsember at last. Or not, if I know my fellow inquisitive scribes.

It's time to tackle street names, at least as much of them as I learned while running a character through the city in the 'home' Realms campaign. I can add very little to what Ed sent off to the DUNGEON folks, except of course locate them on the published map. With the islands named, it's relatively easy (so you'll need to reference my earlier post).

ASSANDER STREET runs north from a T-junction with another street near the south end of Harmuth Isle, and proceeds via bridges north across Antanmaran's Isle to the mainland city, where it crosses Calathanter Street and curves northwest to a city walltower and then southwest again to end in a moot with Calathanter Street.

CALATHANTER STREET runs east from the northern arch of the western gate of Marsember to meet with the end of Assander Street (see above) and then run on east clear across the city to enter the naval base through its northernmost gate, and end in a moot with the Dockmarch there.

CHANCEVER STREET begins in a moot with Calathanter Street that's between Calathanter's two meetings with Assander Street. It curves northeast to run along the city wall, where Stormhold (the home of Filfaeril Stormbillow, sorceress and seller of magic items and potions; see my first post for the correct location of this building, which is DUNGEON map feature #14) fronts on it. Chancever then curves southeast across Calathanter, passes along the south walls of Haelithortowers, the walled estate of Lady Joysil Ambrur and DUNGEON map feature #16) and is carried onto Old Arn Isle by the more westerly of the two northshore bridges of that island. It then runs east along the spine of Old Arn, to end in a moot with Varanth Lane.

DAUNSUL STREET begins in a moot with Chancever Street just west of Stormhold (see above), and runs south and east to reach Nornsar Isle via a bridge, and there end in a moot with Hammarhantus Lane.

DOCKMARCH (almost always "The Dockmarch" to Marsembans) is the cobbled street that runs from The Harbortower (DUNGEON map feature #36) all around the docks of the naval base, to end near the tip of Watchfire Point (the most southerly cape or spit of the naval base, east of Wrauntwreck Isle).

FENDROL'S WAY enters Marsember via the southern arch of the city's western gate, and runs east and south to cross (via bridges, of course) Harmuth Isle, West Darnmist, and East Darnmist, before ending in a moot with another street on Stormrock Isle, at the front gates of Iyrinthorn (the city villa of the Illance noble family, and DUNGEON map feature #22).

GELGULD LANE exits the naval base through the southernmost of its two gates and parallels the mainland city shore to a moot with Tarnsar Lane right outside the front doors of Felgontar's Firehelm (large, popular, and respectable dining-house, and DUNGEON map feature #11).

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HAMMARHANTUS LANE begins in a streetmoot at the center of Baerouth's Isle, and takes a bridge north to Nornsar Isle, where it meets with the southern end of Daunsul Street ere continuing east via a bridge to cross Gauntan Isle and take another bridge on east to Shamran Isle, and from there northeast via yet another bridge to Old Arn Isle, where it ends in a moot with Chancever Street.

TARNSAR LANE begins at a city walltower due north of the smithy belonging to Uorn Hallowhand, Armorer, Chainmaker, and Weaponsmith (mistakenly marked #13 on the DUNGEON map; see my first post about Marsember), and runs east and south to cross Calathanter Street and turn south to a moot with Gelguld Lane by Felgontar's Firehelm (large, popular, and respectable dining-house, and DUNGEON map feature #11), and on southeast from there via a bridge to Gauntan Isle, to end there in a moot with Hammarhantus Lane hard by Morningmist Hall (the city's temple of Lathander, and DUNGEON map feature #12).

THELVARSPIKE LANE begins at the front doors of Luckfist Hall (Marsember's shrine to Tymora, and DUNGEON map feature #20), and runs south across Calathanter Street to curve southeast and then south again, and end in a moot with Gelguld Lane.

VARANTH LANE begins in a moot with Gelguld Lane just west of the southernmost gate of the naval base, and takes a bridge south and east to Old Arn Isle, where it meets the eastern end of Chancever Street and continues south via another bridge to Wrauntwreck Isle, where it curves southeast and then back southwest in a great arc around Bracegauntlet Gard (fortified mansion of the Bracegauntlet noble family, and DUNGEON map feature #33) to cross onto Aertoprann's Isle, where it promptly ends in a streetmoot.

THE LIGHTLESS LAMP has recently become an important meeting-place and reference point for Marsembans, and features in the action in *ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER*. It's nothing more than a broken street-lamp on Thelvarspike Lane (which remains unfixed for reasons too complicated to delve into here), and is located at a point on Thelvarspike that can be readily found on the superbly-drawn DUNGEON map by counting buildings up the west side of Thelvarspike from its end-moot with Gelguld Lane. A building stands on the northwest corner of that moot, and another building abuts it to the north. Then there's a little space before one reaches a large and oddly-shaped warehouse, that's been extended to join another large warehouse to the southwest. Continuing past the warehouse up Thelvarspike, one next comes to a much smaller, almost square building standing alone -- which is the site of the Lightless Lamp.

And there you have it: 'Marsember Mended,' if you will. I hope this has been of help to scribes planning to use Marsember in a Realms campaign; I know Ed has been frustrated by several missed chances over the years for TSR and then WotC to print street names for Suzail and Silvermoon, because he takes the view that without the major streets being named in published products, it's hard for DMs to use cities as long-term campaign settings without a great likelihood that future Realms products will grandly contradict whatever name a particular DM gives to a street -- and that it's hard even to keep Realms novels and sourcebooks consistent, or easily pinpoint city locations and features, without named streets to refer to.

Yet I've tarried too long, and must away!

Cloak round me, and I ride to greet the day!  
THO

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July 20, 2004: As it happens, Ed and Eric Boyd have been discussing these very beasties, and Ed handed me this Realmslore to answer thy query:

We don't know exactly when either creature went extinct.

The Duergahydra went first, sometime around the year 50 DR, and the Mornhound died out far more recently (in the 1100s).

The Duergahydra, or 'gray evil of the Underdark,' was a smaller subspecies of the hydra. Possessed of a hard, gray stony hide and darkvision, it was an omnivorous, agile climbing and clinging lizard of long, whiplike build (long neck, long tail, central body about the size of a tall human) and swift, darting movement. All duergahydra were born with two necks and heads, and customarily kept one in reserve, bent around and hidden on their backs so as to resemble a hump or folded wings. However, if a duergahydra head or neck was damaged or severed, two grew in its place (unless the same preventative means as prevent trolls from regenerating were applied), from the stump or shrivelling and drying ruin of the original. In this way, an aggressive duergahydra could end up with six, seven, or more heads, becoming larger and slower with each one (until some became too massive to move at more than a painful crawl, and starved to death, losing their regenerative abilities with their lives). Duergahydra instinctively 'knew' they could heal, and were apt to be bold and aggressive in their hunting, literally sticking their necks into danger often. They were cunning, and quickly learned the details and tactics of prey and foes. Duergahydra always hunted alone, pairing only briefly (a matter of hours) to mate, and were fiercely independent. When they proved untrainable as mounts or guardians, and impossible to 'cow' or threaten into keeping away from human settlements or valuables, humans started slaughtering them on sight -- and eventually succeeded in eradicating them (unless some cunning mage kept eggs or live specimens in some sort of magical stasis).

Their ichor was useful in healing and regenerative potions known to the drow and illithids, who'd hunted them to near-extinction long before humans became widely aware of their existence.

Mornhounds, on the other hand, were all too useful, and eventually perished because of that. Resembling large, shaggy Irish wolfhounds, they would in 3.5e terms be very close to a dire wolf - - except that they were easily domesticated (to be steeds as well as hunters and sheep-herding experts usually able to operate without their human trainers), VERY loyal and very intelligent (able to carry messages and deliver them according to the situations they found, e.g. "give this scroll to Baeruld, but not if he's a captive or Dunthlass is also present").

In the wild, packs of mornhounds roamed the Heartlands and the Sword Coast North about as far north as the Evermoors, but many creatures (from orcs to dragons) found their flesh tasty and devoured them with enthusiasm, until they faded into the deepest woods, dwindling down to a few companions to human druids and wood elves... and eventually, oblivion.

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On July 20, 2004 THO said: Ah, such juiciness for Ed to bite into, the moment he has the time. Until then, it falls to me to relay what I know of his opinions and intent.

To David Lázaro: yes, it does mean more content (solid, meaty lore, and lots of it) is on its way, somewhere and somehow - but not soon enough to help with your campaign right now, I'm afraid.

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**Candlekeep**

Lashan, I'd LOVE to get my hands on a 'blank' Marsember map. Even if I didn't itch to correct city locations, a blank map of every city visited should be part of every DM's toolbox for use in play.

Archmage Daraath, Ed has one pagan among his original players, and play in the Realms has always reflected what we players like, dislike, and want to do (we vote on RSEs and rule adoptions, remember). In the case of the gods, Beowulf has hit upon Ed's approach: eschew the Graeco-Roman view of making the gods "larger than life mortals with very human foibles" in favour of keeping them VERY mysterious. When Mielikki appeared to Florin, and we saw Mystra, we were literally shaking and sobbing with awe. Part of that was having Ed describing and roleplaying (he has few equals as a ham actor ), but part of that was how rare Ed kept godly appearances, and how he built them up so that we, through our characters, did believe in them and tremble at their presence.

Ed prefers manifestations rather than avatars striding around talking and doing things. An example of a manifestation: a worshipper of Lathander wonders aloud if an action is right, or a battle should be joined - and a rosy glow appears out of nowhere to surround their weapon, or point the way. Keeping things mystical avoids all of the problems of disrespect or incorrect divine details Beowulf mentions, makes for better roleplaying, and really makes us regard the gods as special.

Gerath Hoan, I'll pass your queries about tea and smoking on to Ed (to join a long queue, I'm afraid). As for Harrowdale: yes, Ed was inspired in part by England's Westcountry. He loves the countryside of all of the British Isles and visits as often as he can (not very often these days, I'm afraid). As for Ed's next game release, now that Serpent Kingdoms is out (and not counting web columns, magazine articles, and sourcebooks by others that he just quietly helped with 'behind the scenes'), that'd probably be CASTLEMORN, despite its ever-receding publication date. His next fiction release will probably be the novelette "Stormsong" in SUMMONED TO DESTINY (Realms of Wonder 1), edited by Julie Czerneda and published by Trifolium (an imprint of FitzHenry & Whiteside), which is yet another superb-for-gaming fantasy setting. I don't know how he does it: world after world just spins off the man's fingertips!

Bergan, you're right about Elminster's almost daily use of magical guises. Yes, whim often guides his choices (as do situations: if you want to get close to a merchant who's entering a brothel, your choice of shape is rather obvious), but El tends to slip into characters he's used and developed before, often traveling merchants, for which he has developed detailed histories, accents, etc. I'll pass on your query to Ed, and we'll see if he'll reveal favourites (to me, one of his players, remember? ).

Ed tells me he has a day to read and blurb a novel by someone else and write a short story before he can finish Lathtar's Lantern for Borch. Sigh.

Until next,  
THO

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On July 21, 2004 THO said: Ed is busy trying to finish up a trio of short stories before he gets in the car and races off to the Conestoga Mall in Waterloo, Ontario, for the last stop on his current signing tour (he'll be at the Coles there from 1-3 pm on Saturday July 24th, for any interested scribes in the area), so I'll snatch this opportunity to belatedly reply to SiriusBlack and inform interested scribes in so doing.

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Sirius, Ed is pleased your player enjoyed THE KINGLESS LAND, and hopes she likes the rest of the series. Being the first Band of Four book, "Kingless" works best of them all as a 'stand-alone-I'm-only-gonna-read-one-of-these' titles, but it is the first of four, the others being:

2. THE VACANT THRONE
3. A DRAGON'S ASCENSION
4. THE DRAGON'S DOOM

(These are all available in mass market paperback from TOR Books, and the earlier TOR hardcover editions may still be found remaindered or used; they're also available on unabridged audio cassette from Blackstone Audiobooks, Inc.)

I found them all to be fast-paced, enjoyable romps.

The fifth Chronicle of Aglirta, THE SILENT HOUSE, is somewhat like CORMYR: A NOVEL in format, only with very abbreviated present-day scenes. In all of the Band of Four quartet, the haunted palace of the Silvertree noble family, Silvertree House, appears at least briefly as a setting: it's a vast, sprawling crumbling ruin that seems to change by itself, with towers rising and falling, new wings sprouting, and so on. It is, of course, inhabited by monsters who feed on the many treasure-seekers who venture into the House in search of the fabled Silvertree riches. The nickname "The Silent House" comes from the fact that anyone of Silvertree blood goes mad if they spend too long inside the palace, so none of the Silvertrees dare dwell there (hence, it's theoretically deserted and silent). THE SILENT HOUSE tells the story of this palace from when it was first built up through the centuries to the present day (that is, the time of the Band of Four, who appear only in the last few chapters). Most reviews of the first four books were of the "thrilling if you like game-related fantasy" variety, but for THE SILENT HOUSE Ed got the sort of review from Publishers Weekly that most writers would kill for; someone finally looked past the blood and monsters to note that Ed was writing superb, many-layered stuff. This book is hardcover only, right now, but there'll be a mass market edition soon enough.

Ed's editor for these books is Brian Thomsen, former head of TSR's Books Department, and Brian wanted Ed to write books very much in the Realms mode, so the writing style shouldn't be too much of a wrench for those used to TSR/WotC books (a trifle more adult, a smidgeon more sophisticated).

Ed tells me there are plans for at least two future books delving into the dawn of magic in Darsar (the world in which these books are set: "Aglirta" is the name of a single river-valley kingdom where almost all of the action in Ed's books occurs).

No one should worry that Ed's turning his back on the Realms, of course. There have already been discussions of the book Ed should write AFTER the Knights trilogy, and plans for at least two top-secret Realms projects (and probably a lot more I haven't even managed to get a whiff of) directly involving Ed.

Your servant in Realmslore,  
THO

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On July 21, 2004 THO said: I'm also going to respond to an entreaty by Krafus, and provide another little anecdote from the 'home' Realms campaign, as follows:

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The logo for Candlekeep, featuring the word "Candlekeep" in a stylized, yellow, gothic-style font with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

Early on in our time in Shadowdale, a Harper brought word to Storm Silverhand of an old Cormyrean noblewoman disappearing during a shopping visit to Hillsfar, and of the increasingly frantic attempts of her relatives to uncover her fate or whereabouts. Maalthiir's clerks and envoys met the most direct queries with sly demands for funds to "help them conduct searches."

This noblewoman, Bethra Battlebar, had been a Harper spy in her younger days, and remained a font of knowledge concerning private mercantile alliances among traders in Cormyr, Sembia, and Hillsfar (and attempts by Zhentil Keep and by various Thayan interests to infiltrate these), so her fate was also of interest to the Harpers.

Storm told Florin of this matter, and he agreed to go and try to find and bring back Bethra. Unbeknownst to him, he was being used by the Harpers as a decoy, to rampage around Hillsfar drawing Maalthiir's interest whilst more experienced Harpers did the real snooping. Florin was wise enough to know that his activities as the envoy of Shadowdale had made him more than a little well-known in the northern Dales and vicinity, so he hit upon the plan of using magical disguises on himself and the rest of us Knights, so we could 'take over' as caravan guards for a caravan running up through Shadowdale to Hillsfar.

Jhaele Silvermane agreed to aid in the switch, knowing of a caravan master, one Lorthan Mendlen of Eitarel, whose guards were giving him troubles (he'd lost some veterans to death or wounds, had others ailing of various sicknesses, had some green replacements on his hands, and also had some replacements he frankly suspected of being spies for the Zhents and just waiting to betray him into disaster). When Lorthan's run from Amn reached Suzail, he lost two of his best guards in a suspicious knife-fight, and was forced to continue with two more possibly-unreliable replacements. He called in a favour and managed to find out when the next Court messenger was riding out to the the Cormyrean trade-agent in Mistedale (this was in the days before that unfortunate diplomat was murdered by the Zhents), and offered to provide the man with the escort of a caravan, so that the bodyguard the Court would have to find could be much reduced. This scheme worked: if any of Lorthan's men were planning to betray the caravan to bandits or worse, they did nothing under the watchful eye of riders who were almost certainly retired veteran Purple Dragons drawing triple pension pay for bodyguard duty.

Lorthan knew who in Mistedale could get word to Alok, and ensure that a caravan picking its way up the narrow Ashabenford-bank trail through the woods from Mistedale to Shadowdale would have an elven escort that would keep forest marauders of all sorts at bay-elves who'd show themselves once or twice, to keep potential traitors among Lorthan's men honest, too.

So it was that Lorthan reached the Old Skull Inn safely, Jhaele spiked some wine and ale, and one group of caravan guards were spirited away to a certain farm at the north end of Shadowdale for rest, healing, and a covert watch over them by Harpers to see who tried to steal away and make contact with someone, and who didn't. An identical group of replacements (us) took over for the run through Voonlar (some tense moments there) and Yulash, to Hillsfar -- where the real fun began.

It seems that some of the merchants Bethra Battlebar had been gathering information on had become aware of her scrutiny, and decided to butcher the old lady. Wiser heads had remembered that she might be worth quite a ransom to her kin, and in the meantime could be pumped for all the other information she might know (especially about trade rivals). So she must be kept hidden but very much alive.

Sharp-witted old Bethra commenced to invent plausible but false information about all sorts of things and feed it to her captors -- but soon became aware that someone was magically sliding

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into her mind, to try to 'listen in.' She suspected it might be Maalthiir himself, and adjusted her revelations accordingly, trying to make her captors seem dangerous in his eyes and also trying to exaggerate the interest of various Sembians in being Maalthiir's foe and eventual downfall.

Maalthiir soon sent some agents to take custody of her, but other interests covertly moving into the city (from Calaut, Mulmaster, Thay, and Zhentil Keep), who had wizards of their own, were able to frustrate Maalthiir's forces -- and a deadly cat-and-mouse game began.

We, of course, crashed right into the middle of it, and were initially thought by everyone involved to be slayers hired by one of the other parties involved. So we got clobbered from all sides, with Harpers coming out of the woodwork all over Hillsfar trying to keep us alive so we'd continue to be the diversion they needed, while they tried to track down and rescue old Bethra before Maalthiir himself could.

Our stay in Hillsfar became one long running battle, and I think we'd have perished the moment exhaustion claimed us if it hadn't been for a little hidey-gem that Dove had given Florin, that provided us with an extra-dimensional safehold to retreat into for rest, spell-studying, and the like: at a cost of our life-forces (it drained anyone staying in it of hit points, more the longer their tarrying).

Lorthan didn't understand anything of what was really going on, of course (though he knew quite well who we were), and he called in another favour trying to help us.

This consisted of rousing an old adventuring companion and onetime lover of his out of retirement to help us: a fat, sour, ugly-as-an-old-boot mage named Natharra Haedlun, who just wanted to be left alone to shuffle around her shop farting and smoking a gigantic pipe, and paint twee little pictures of large-eyed kittens and dancing miniature dragons to sell to anyone interested. Natharra happened to be a more powerful mage than Maalthiir and several of the wizards ranged against him combined, and handed them all their scorched-robe behinds whilst keeping her own identity entirely concealed from them.

From then on, she retreated from the fray but kept magical watch over us. Not to help us, but to watch us as her daily entertainment as we scrambled to stay alive and find Bethra. SHE located Bethra right away, of course, and left a nice little trap waiting for Maalthiir so that whenever he tried to sidle back into Bethra's mind, or snuff it out, he got a backlash that left him senseless for the better part of a day.

Some of the Harpers eventually found Bethra and tried to rescue her. Unfortunately, she thought they were a new batch of nastier kidnapers, and did them much harm -- enough to allow some of the Zhents to find her, and do battle with said Harpers.

We hadn't found Bethra or these Harpers, but we had tracked down a few of the Zhents, and as they converged across the city to vanquish the Harpers and take Bethra, we converged with them.

Wily old Lorthan wasn't done helping us, however. He managed to get hold of a middling-rank Red Plume commander of some sort and point out all of this rapid and violent convergence -- and convince the man that Hillsfar was under attack.

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So in the space of a few short hornblasts we had the Red Plumes converging, too! Florin muttered something about it would be much appreciated for once if Elminster bampfed in to stage a sardonic rescue, about now, and this apparently made Natharra almost choke with laughter.

She DID choke, a few breaths later, when a Zhent tried to put a blade through Bethra and she, yes, turned into Elminster on the spot, and promptly blasted more than a few of the Zhents and Red Plumes back across the city. Then the Old Mage grinned at us, announced that he'd just whisked Bethra Battlebar back to her mansion in Cormyr and taken her place, wished us a pleasant adventure -- and vanished into thin air!

We Knights, of course, were left in the heart of Hillsfar, with an apoplectic Maalthiir hurling orders and murderous forces right and left, the Red Plumes riding in from all directions looking for folks to kill, various Zhents and sinister forces of Calaunt and Mulmaster and the Watching Gods alone knew who else trying to slay us, and a few Harpers (holding a by-then-wounded Lorthan) giving us dark looks and muttering about our less than subtle tactics as they gathered around us.

It was Torm who thought of the sewers, of course. It was Jhessail who promised to pull every last one of his body hairs out by the roots, eventually, if she had to submerge herself entirely in human sewage and swim to safety -- and it was Islif who had the satisfaction of drowning two Zhentarim wizards in said sewage during our frantic flight.

The Harpers saved us all by knowing how to get to a gate (portal) that whisked us into the backwoods of Turmish. We never did find out who'd made that gate, or why, because our precipitous arrival in that distant country landed us right in the heart of another lot of adventures, beginning with this:

Suspicious farmer of Turmish, with pitchfork in hand: "Come out of there, all of you -- and come out crawling! Who by Beshaba the Bitchlass are you, anyway?"

Torm (entirely covered with stinking excrement, except for his eyes and a wide, cheesy "you're not gonna believe this, are you?" grin): "We're devout followers of Ilmater, doing our Dung Penance, sir! A great magic worked by our temple has transported us here, at your mercy -- and, uh, where IS here, anyway?"

Farmer: "Expect me to believe that, horse-thieves?"

Jhessail (spitting shit): "I don't give a flying left nipple what you believe, old man -- but if you don't take that fork away and let me climb into yon pond and wash, right away, I'll make you believe we're all mightily-pissed-off archmages who can blast you clear across the Vilhon in an instant -- and I'll make you believe it the HARD way!"

Farmer: "Oh, well, lass -- why didn't ye just SAY so? Pond, sure, there she be . . . uh, can ye really make yer left nipple fly?"

(THAT, of course, was the line Torm recalled for Jhessail's benefit, farmer's hopeful accent and all, many times during the year that followed, until she finally crafted an illusion spell, complete with spurting blood as the bodily feature in question apparently tore free of the rest of her that fooled him into thinking she'd done just that. She chose to do it while he was eating, of course -- and was it her fault that he'd just drunk a very fine jack of firewine, and was startled into returning most of it to Faerûn, via his nose?)

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There you go, Krafus. See what you've unleashed?

(Yes, the other end of my leash is lying just over there. Go on, be brave. Try to pick it up.)  
THO

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On July 21, 2004 THO said: Yes, Sirius, the plan is for one Knights book a year, and Ed's hard at work on the first one now (which reminds me: if any scribe has an existing Realms character, place, event, or item they really would like to see in the Knights trilogy, post it here and I'll pass it on to Ed - with no guarantees that he'll use it, of course).

As for Wooly: now that you've got my leash, dear, what will you DO with it? (she asked challengingly, eyes flashing and breathing a little faster than usual).

I've plenty more Realmslore tales, though most of them aren't THAT dramatic (we do a lot of slow-paced detecting, asking casual questions, snooping into peoples' private lives, etc.). I should also mention that we found out later that Elminster-in-Bethra's-shape showed himself all over Hillsfar whilst we were glubbing our way along the sewers, drawing lots of pursuers after him and in at least one case causing one set of hot-on-the-trail slayers to attack another group of pursuers.

Ah, I hope Ed emerges from writing overload soon. I miss our back'n'forth e-chats.

Warm fires for now,  
THO

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On July 21, 2004 THO said: Existing as in official, I'm afraid. Remember when these books will be set (starting back when the Knights are formed as a fledgling chartered adventuring group in Cormyr), too. It's hard to have an unborn being or toddler play a useful role in the sort of book Ed's writing.

Sorry, Gerath and all who pounced on the same idea. :}  
THO

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On July 21, 2004 THO said: Oh, Sirius, do you have a feast awaiting you! Ed wasn't able to put HALF what he wanted about the baron-versus-baron intrigues into the books (Brian wanted the action to keep moving and the books to stay light, not turn into George R.R. Martin echoes), but the politics STILL pervades the books.

Let me just give you a teaser: Aglirta is a long, verdant east-west river valley (Silverflow Vale, as in the valley of the Silverflow), and the breadbasket of much of the continent of Asmarand (most of the other settlements of Asmarand that we've seen thus far in the series are coastal city-states). There's a wealthy city, Sirlptar, on both sides of the rivermouth of the silverflow, where it empties into the sea, but it's independent of Aglirta.

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THE KINGLESS LAND is another name for Aglirta, because its king has been "Sleeping" (so legend has it; to most folk, he's simply gone) for centuries, so the land is ruled by warring barons, each of whom holds a chunk of land somewhere along the river valley. There are outlaws, of course, and the clergies of the Three (gods), plus the VERY-politically-active Church of the Serpent. There are also city- and town-rulers called tersepts, who report to their respective barons. Because the king has been absent for so long, baronial feuds and ambitions hold sway, with various barons trying to hire wizards or mercenaries or both, make alliances with other barons to betray or overwhelm rivals, and so on. Two barons, Blackgult and Silvertree, have risen to become far more powerful than the rest, and as the first novel opens, we - no, I WON'T ruin it for you.

Suffice it to say that there are politics up the wazoo, all over the place. You're just going to have to read them yourself. Ed has detailed game-specific information about Aglirta up his sleeve for someday, and the only caveat I'll drop on you is: don't read THE SILENT HOUSE until after you've read the four BOF books.

I love them, as popcorn-devouring, sometimes arch and playful, good-old-fashioned FUN fantasy. What Conan tales might be if Conan had a sense of humour, lots of friends to josh, and his adventures all took place in a Robin Hood setting with lots of fat barons in armor vying for supremacy.

Happy reading!  
THO

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On July 29, 2004 THO said: Hello, fellow scribes.

Ed of the Greenwood remains in the ranks of the frantically overworked, most recently taking on some matters for WotC, a certain nearby moderator, and a fellow scribe rising to the status of co-conspirator (yes, you, "B" :) and he'll get back to you VERY soon), so I feel moved to take up the torch once more and tell another tale of the Realms.

Oh, Faraer: in Ed's 'home' Realms, psionics doesn't work through the Weave, and therefore stands apart from magic, can work in dead-magic zones, etc. As for 3.5e WotC Realms, Ed's not so sure... :}

Now (gentle flourish of harp strings) let us journey together back to a certain hot summer night in Waterdeep, and the unexpected arrival there of the Knights of Myth Drannor, stumbling through a hitherto-unknown gate (3e "portal") in Tilverton (and so probably now destroyed, though knowing Ed it might still exist, invisible and now floating high in midair, awaiting the unwary) that whisked us to a particular alleyway in Dock Ward.

We arrived in the midst of a startled Watch patrol, who were investigating their third identical murder of the night: all of the victims were Waterdhavian shopkeepers, and all of them had been throat-slit, tossed out of windows or otherwise from a height, and then dragged or cart-carried to be left elsewhere, with black masks affixed to their shattered heads.

Duty magists of the Watchful Order had been summoned to get some answers from the corpses, and so were on the scene when we appeared out of thin air. Naturally, they reacted by hurling

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spells, so some of us hurled spells right back, and others of us busily sent Watchmen off to dreamland -- and the chase was on.

Disgusted at being dumped into the midst of yet another run-and-fight crisis, and determined to enjoy the pleasures of Waterdeep by night, Torm and Rathan gave the Watch and the rest of us the slip, and set out into Castle Ward, seeking a nobles' revel to crash -- and a twit-nose noble or other to jump and impersonate, so as to gain an invitation. They were wildly in luck, for once. With the Watch still in hot pursuit but delayed by the rest of us Knights, Torm and Rathan found a swaggering dolt and defeated him... much to the delight of two VERY affectionate and good-looking young noble ladies, who'd been wondering how they could safely (i.e. without entering Dock Ward after dark) pick up a pair of genuine adventurers -- because the revel they were heading to was a "bring your own pet adventurer" affair.

So Torm and Rathan shortly found themselves at an unfamiliar noble villa, wearing ridiculously stylish black masks (nothing to do with the masked corpses, as far as we know) and staring at a lot of opportunistic Zhent trade agents, visiting outlander sneak thieves, and dashing young find-my-fortune blades of Tethyr who were in turn looking around for loot they could snatch and run off with. Things were complicated by a heavy and competent watchguard of senior Watchful Order wizards, great numbers of well-trained and -equipped noble house bodyguards, and (heh heh) certain members of the Company of Crazy Adventurers. As Rathan put it, "'Twas like watching a priestess of Shar and one of Selune reach for the same goblet on a revel tray, and knowing what was about to erupt, and being able to do utterly NOTHING to stop it."

Someone made an ill-advised snatch, someone else groped a beautiful young noble lady who was more than begging for it, and a third someone backhanded away an ancient, wrinkled, and overpainted noblewoman who was insistently demanding "a little adventure," and the place erupted. Which was just about the time the rest of us Knights arrived at a run to find Torm and Rathan (located by Jhessail's spells) and get the hell out of DodgeXXX er, Waterdeep, with half the City Watch and most of the Watchful Order hot on our heels.

Our solution was to plunge right into the revel and try to use it for cover as we got out the other side. Unfortunately, Torm wanted some souvenirs of the dazzling gemstone variety -- and when they wouldn't come loose, he took along their screaming, airheaded young noble wearer, jewelry, diaphanous silks, and all.

Unfortunately, she could be spell-traced, once missed, and didn't welcome the thought of a quick trip through the sewers. So we took to the rooftops instead, and to the music of her screams leapt and pelted back across a lot of Waterdeep to where a gate we knew of (in the City of the Dead) awaited.

Unfortunately for us (sense a theme here?), some of Waterdeep's finest are quite competent, and there was an ambush awaiting us.

An energetic fight ensued, and Torm was finally forced to literally toss the screaming young lass at them to let us avoid a toasting spell and get back through the gate... whereupon we enjoyed ANOTHER nice little chase, this one through Tilverton with a posse of angry Waterdhavian Watch and Watchful Order magists (who'd come through the gate) after us.

Now, Tilverton likes outlanders trying to impose law in their streets and taverns no better than the rest of us, so the moment Torm led us all into a tavern, general fun broke out, and we made our escape.

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Damned if Torm and Rathan didn't go right back through the gate, Torm looking for his young gem-lass and Rathan insisting we do SOMETHing to solve those murders.

Which won us a tenday of dogged detective work, with half the Waterdhavian authorities stalking US... until Torm found the gem-lass, Mirt found HIM, and Florin and Jhessail stepped in to do a little fast talking that won us special within-the-walls status as agents of Mirt, and a strong suggestion that we go home, right now, and stay there for a time. Thankfully, we did so, and were settling down to a well-earned feast in the Twisted Tower when Torm revealed the gems he'd just, er, happened to borrow from an incoming paychest on Mirt's hall table. So, yes, we didn't go back to Waterdeep for a season or so. :}

Just another lazy pair of evenings of Realmsplay (the second one covered the detective work).

Swash cloaks and blades high for now, fellow scribes!  
THO

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On July 31, 2004 THO said: Well met again, fellow scribes. Ed fully intended to e-toss me a Lathtarl's Lantern writeup for posting here (and I pass on his apologies, simontrinity; Ed thanks you for your patience, and promises to get to Aundable and Laspeera [as much as NDAs will let him, and yes, one does come into play here] Real Soon Now ), but when he and his good wife arrived home at the end of his current autographing tour, said marital unit finally blew her stxxx er, put her foot XXXX ahem, lost patience and demanded that Ed FINALLY dismantle their Christmas tree. Yes, that'd be the one Ed spent two days erecting last December. I should mention that Greenwood Christmas trees are legendary for bearing literally thousands of incredible ornaments that Ed collects all the time (often un-Christmasy models and miniatures and suchlike, not just the familiar glass balls and bells), and taking it all down and stowing it away is likely to take him a couple of days at least.

So in the meantime, I'll field thy queries unaided a trifle longer. First, to Vanguard: steam engines (monstrous "rolling-beam" stationary types, akin to those found in Cornish tin mines and elsewhere AND tiny 'using a fire one builds in a bowl' sorts) are in common use all over Lantan, but remain "dangerous" curiosities elsewhere (although many Faerunians know about harnessing the hot gas from a fire collected through a hood-and-pipe apparatus). As several posters have mentioned, Gond rules such pursuits, and copious prayers to him will be a part of any steam-work. What the Realms DOESN'T yet have is reliable steam propulsion (locomotives, that is -- although miners'-sweatwork and donkey- or mule-drawn mining railways, with little 'tip' ore cars, ARE used here and there, and are known to all dwarves and gnomes). Distillation and other simple steam-related procedures are widely known if not widely understood.

Secondly, to Karth: a very valid question, given my flippant delivery of said tale (oh, and BTW: although the Knights had nothing to do with those 'masked murders' they arrived in the midst of, we ended up deemed guilty by association, and had some seasons of troubles during our visits to Waterdeep, until we found and unmasked the murderer, although that's another and far less exciting story).

Here's the ahem, straight poo (one of the female players had a habit of saying, "Just give me your poo straight," which caused a lot of startlement to passersby over the years, whenever we happened to be playing in someone else's house, or Ed's kids had friends over).

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Torm and Rathan slipped away from the rest of us to have some fun. For Rathan, that consists of being amused at Torm's outrageousness at a revel and stuffing himself full of food and drink at a prodigious rate. He rapidly gets "mellow," which is to say: drunk but still upright and operating (just a little slower on alertness and awareness).

Torm just loves flirting and being rude and stealing small items (almost for fun more than for profit; he "likes to stay in practise," and IS a thief, after all). When Jhessail spell-traced him and we came running to collect our two errants, Torm didn't reveal that he was planning on stealing anything, and we saw him deeply engaged in drinking and flirting. Much tumult erupted during our precipitous running arrival, and none of us saw Torm snatch the lass. He said nothing to us about being after the gems, but instead told us (and despite the fact that we're all used to his triflings with the truth, Torm is an incredibly GOOD liar when he wants to be) that the lass was being spell-attacked by a lecherous noble bent on rearranging her wits to make her profess to fall in love with him so he could marry her. He attributed her screams and protests to those same spells at work, and even if we hadn't been busy fleeing, she was so loaded down with mind-protecting magic items (noble family heirlooms, worn when out on the town to guard against just such attacks) that I doubt we'd have managed to wander around in her mind enough to determine if Torm was telling the truth or not.

And Torm did toss her away readily, without stripping her of a single gem -- and when he went back through the gate, it was as Rathan's supportive friend (to investigate the murders). He said nothing about being after gems or trying to get that particular young and feminine walking window-display of jewelry back.

I'm sure he removed a few baubles from her, but all the gems Torm revealed to us when we were dining back in Shadowdale he presented as swiped from Mirt -- whom we regard as just as big a rogue as Torm, so if our companion swiped something from the Old Wolf, fair enough!

So at no time did we Knights see Torm as kidnapping the lass (he was RESCUING her), and we never saw him steal from her, or know this was his intention (as I recall, I loudly speculated at the time that his intentions had more to do with her own soft natural adornments than with glittering artificial accessories)

Now, your larger question is really how much we Knights turn a blind eye to our suspicions that Torm is up to his tricks again, and how we deal with clear evidence that he's doing naughty things. Well, here's how it works: for those of us who worship Tymora (such as Rathan), the "taking chances" streak in Torm's nature is hard to chide (particularly as Torm has not only made copious offerings to Tymora down the years, and saved not only Rathan but other clergy of Lady Luck, but also been careful to undertake dangerous tasks and missions "in reverence to Holy Tymora"). In other words, Torm's disarmed Rathan through both friendship and by earning himself heavy karma as an agent of Tymora. Rathan lectures Torm constantly on moral matters, but Torm is glib-tongued enough to turn most such charges into moral debates, and slide right on doing whatever he's doing. Add to that Rathan's sneaking admiration for someone who leaves so much of his life to chance (that is, "in the hands of Tymora") and is so dashing and bold and gets all the girls...

Which leaves Torm with the REST of us to deal with. Dove, Islif, and Florin have little patience with Torm's outrageous side, but Torm is well aware of this and VERY good at getting himself out from under their direct scrutiny under the guise of 'scouting' and other support-the-party tasks (often with Rathan sent along to "keep an eye on him"). Torm is swift and smooth: he can often arrange things for a later theft or swindle, or even manage a snatch-job, in the space of a few

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breaths, and then be back under their observation, all innocent (or better, acting just as outrageous as usual), so that they actually become his alibi.

Torm can be VERY charming, gives great footrubs and backrubs and ahem, otherbodypart rubs, produces needed items and refreshments at the drop of a murmur of need, is a master manipulator who constantly monitors the moods and aims of the rest of us Knights and so can ingratiate himself or maneuver us into splitting into groupings that let him get away with things . . . and despite all of this, he spends a LOT of time with his little fingers wired together, his thumbs wired together, hogtied and gagged with his own purse and with his own cloak bound around his head, slung across the saddle of Dove, Florin, or Islif. Because meting out harder punishments on him would usually endanger the rest of us 'in the field,' and because Torm NEVER holds grudges (though he never forgets, either), we seldom waste our time confining him. Instead, he gets dragged before clergy of Mask, who usually assign him a "steal X and then give the money freely to Y" penance, which he happily fulfills. THEN we drag him to clergy of Tymora who do the same thing, Torm thanks us all with a grin, plays a prank or two on some of us, and the whole cycle begins again.

Remember, we're all heavy roleplayers and old friends. More than once, John Hunter (who plays Florin) has observed, "Damn it, Victor, you're making me sound like James T. Kirk!" during our green tea break, because he's tired of doggedly trying to discipline Torm. [And ever since the fourth Star Trek movie was released, the reply was usually: "Admiral, would it be time for a colourful metaphor?" with someone else chiming in: "The hell it is!"... and so on.]

So yes, we do put firm stops to those sorts of things, but (short of murdering him) Torm never seems to STAY stopped.

Though Jhessail did come close to murdering him, as I recall, the day he slipped some live eels into her herbal bath...

THO

Produced at CANDLEKEEP.COM from original text by Ed Greenwood, via The Hooded One.

Document produced by Alaundo of Candlekeep.

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