

So saith Ed

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

Part 3

Aug - Oct 2004

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On August 3, 2003 THO said: Hello again, all. Kuje, Bakra has answered your query perfectly (including mention of "the supernatural," i.e. the influence of the goddess altering the usual lunar cycle). I should add that the clergy of Selune prefer to keep very quiet about any link between their activities and the strength/efficacy of their spells and the current phase of the moon.

Ed's Christmas stuff is down and packed away, but the fact that it's taken him this long to get to it, this year, is an example of just how busy he is.

He's e-promised me he'll send me Realmslore soon to gnaw away at a few more of the, ahem, rather LARGE stack of accumulated scribes' queries.

In the meantime, here's a tidbit of Knights lore: Torm apparently has his own private banks in Westgate and Selgaunt. He created them by purchasing and renovating tallhouses (the tall, narrow downtown city residences that often have rental space on the ground floor for shops, and sometimes wealthy tenants living on the floors above, usually one per floor, if the owner doesn't dwell therein, or only keeps a single floor as a 'seldom seen' city residence). Torm kept a few 'hidden rooms' in the cellars for himself, complete with concealed entrances both on the interior stairs and in the exterior walls (well above street level) to this secret suite. He also built some false walls around the cesspool, in the reek and stink wherein most folk won't go poking around - and one of these walls has a few unmortared stones that can be removed to reveal coin- and gem-caches.

Torm also maintains at least one suite in a Selgauntan tallhouse under another name, complete with extensive wardrobe and (hidden) documents, so he has 'another identity' in the city. His investments are busily making him (slowly but surely) VERY wealthy. He revealed this to the Knights once when we needed to take ship out of Selgaunt in rather a hurry and no one would take us: so Torm went around a dockside tavern and hired a crew, man by man, and then went and bought a caravel, on the spot, so we could sail away! :}

Lashan, the penance is for stealing something with such lack of subtlety that the thief's companions noticed and were upset: a punishment for sloppy style and for Torm breaking his agreements with his fellow Knights (the church of Mask is very big on worshippers keeping agreements they make, so as to mitigate against rulers "purging all thieves" and the like).

More from Ed soon,
THO

On August 13, 2004 THO said: Hello again, all. Just a quick answer to some concerned scribes -- and dearest Alaundo, too.

Yes, Lord Bakra, Ed drinks cups and cups of regular (black) tea by day (full-boiled British, not hot-water-and-teabag American), and green tea with dinner/supper/evenfeast. No arcane rituals about writing, though. He does try to get away from radio, television, or interesting-lyric music, though, because it slows his writing because he starts listening and paying attention to the sound source. Also, music is DANGEROUS when writing fiction: the emotional reactions and 'colour' it engenders has a way of tricking the writer's mind into thinking they've got that same emotional feeling and richness down onto the page, when they really haven't (Ed knows this).

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Wooly, of COURSE I'll not stop flirting. (Those bothered by explicit flirtation should just skip to the next paragraph right now, okay?) Why, all I'm wearing right now is handcuffs (ankle and wrist) and a wry smile, as I type this. Alaundo is right to warn you, but I hope he warns ME, too. Ummm, physically.

Alaundo, dearest?

Taelohn, I'd use the 3rd Edition version of EI, myself. Elminster's memory is failing, but in specifics it comes and goes depending on what's happening to him. The "new" Mystra can't resupply missing memories during full-mind-contact the way the old one routinely did, whilst ahem, 'enjoying' EI, but Azuth can and does do occasional "blow out the dust" retunings, and I see EI's basic 'other' class skills as just that: so basic that they can't ever be really forgotten. So I'd restore his ability to use fighter, thief, and cleric (of Mystra) again. The latter is almost automatic, really, and EI will lose dexterity and practise at manual-dexterity thief skills -- but never the sly swindles, tricks of booby-traps or learning answers, outthinking a foe or chosen victim and so on.

My musings for now. I hope Ed will be able to 'clock back in' before he departs for GenCon. He's still busily working away on projects to delight you all in future.

I remain, as ever, your delightfully obedient,
THO

On August 15, 2004 THO said: Hello again, fellow scribes. fourthmensch, thy curiosity should be assuaged forthwith.

Wherefore: I can't speak for all of the Knights, of course.

Two of us spent some years involved in computers for our livelihoods, and so never missed a chance to play computer games. When it came to the various FR computer games, their reactions were often winces and grimaces at the altered Realmslore and the often crude game mechanics -- not that the games were particularly bad vis-a-vis the technology of their time, just that keyboard roleplaying (as opposed to, say, first-person shooters) was so limited and clunky compared to flesh-and-blood (BLOOD! ahahahaha [ahem]) roleplaying. Being as certain of us got VERY big bucks for a time as programmers, that sometimes meant rewriting code for the buggy beta games so they'd actually run properly, and "while under the hood," so to speak, augmenting them to be better games. (And before various scribes rush in to say such things were illegal: nope. Not in the countries where such work was performed.)

My own professional work has sometimes involved complex simulations (put in all the factors, then sit back and watch where the computer ends up): SIMCity is probably the closest commercial computer games comes to these.

I can say that when we Knights manage to gather in our handfuls and less-than-full-quorums, we often play the 'beer-n-pretzels' side-games that have always delighted us: Arkham Horror, Kingmaker, Empires of the Middle Ages, Mille Bornes, International Oilman, Illuminati, Awful Green Things From Outer Space, Diplomacy, and dozens more. As far as roleplaying goes, we've always played and enjoyed Call of Cthulhu and Metamorphosis Alpha, as well as non-Realms 1st edition AD&D settings run by others of us besides Ed. Yes, we prefer "good old Realms

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goodness" to everything else, and most of us regard d20 releases as interesting 'buy-and-read-for-design-goodies' things rather than game products we'll actually use in play. You can probably tell from the above list that we're "old gaming farts" by today's standards.

To put things in real-world perspective, someone up here in Canada once asked Ken Dryden, a famous goalie (now a politician), what the golden age of hockey was, and he gave a brilliant answer: "Whenever YOU were twelve." Add a handful of years to that, and you have the golden age of gaming, for most of us. Even game designers who KNOW that recent games are better 'game technology' than most older releases have the same golden nostalgia we all do -- because gaming is all about getting together and having fun with friends, and most of us only really have leisure time to do a lot of that in our teens.

Heh-heh. For an editor, I can sure get wordy in my replies here. fourthmensch, I guess you'll have to spank me.

THO

August 15, 2004: Well met again, scribes. To Purple Dragon Knight, Ed makes this reply:

You're very welcome. I'm glad you're enjoying these. I wrote them more than a year ago, now, and (NDAs) have had to sit quiet as scribes discussed issues that I'd already answered; some of you may recall questions about Nimbral that I had to skate around rather than answer.

These two series (and the My Slice of Silverymoon web-article) are exactly the sort of Realmslore that I most enjoy doing: augmenting existing places and characters, and giving us "closer looks" at thus-far neglected locales. If the web team doesn't chop'n'change, there should be eight instalments on Nimbral when we're done.

I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize to scribes for my silence of late. I'm caught in a wild logjam of writing projects (most of which must remain mysterious for now, I'm afraid) requiring hasty resolutions both before and after GenCon. Those of you on the Realms-list know that I've also been answering lore questions on Cormyr's navy, and I hope to see a lot of you at GenCon, both as friends and as audiences at the various panels and workshops (my Thursday morning writing workshop, BTW, has been moved from the Marriott to the Consulate Room on the fifth floor of the Embassy Suites, northeast of the Marriott). A few of you share some future Realms secrets with me already, and although the months between now and year-end look to be professionally VERY busy for me, I hope to get back to answering your questions often (and volubly). There are secret Realms projects ahead, too, of course.

Sorry, can't resist teasing. I'll go now, and leave you in the capable hands (ahem) of The Hooded One.

So saith Ed. Who's safely hundreds of miles away from my hands, I'll have you know. He just wrote a BEAUTIFUL Realms short story that I read whilst visiting a month ago, but its title and where and when you'll see it must remain deeply secret -- and he's becoming something of a behind-the-scenes guru to various publishers and Hollywood companies, too, by the sounds of the incoming phone calls. Thank goodness he has no interest in becoming a movie star: the necessary cosmetic surgery would be frightful.

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Fare thee well for now, all!

THO

August 15, 2004: Hello again, all. I'm pecking away at all the queries I can, here, avoiding those that need Ed's "full bore Realmslore" replies, okay?

So Gareth Yaztromo is the lucky scribe this time. As Ed has said before, Elminster and all of the Chosen can choose to appear however they'd like to appear (if not sustained and altered by the Weave, remember, most of them would be piles of dust by now!). So shifting Elminster's appearance is no big thing. However, I think if you check most of Ed's prose closely, he sticks with El's "hawklike" nose, and blue (going to blue-gray according to emotional state) eyes. Except for his youth (recounted in *The Making Of A Mage*) El always has a beard, long and deft fingers, prefers to wear robes, and so on.

Years ago, fantasy writer Lin Carter wrote that he preferred to give the eye and hair colour of heroes upon their first appearance, and thereafter refer only to their general physique (body shape, muscles rippling and hair flying as they did things, etc.) so every reader could form their own personal mental picture of the character, and be happiest.

The 'shared world' aspect of the Realms pins Ed down to far less freedom than this, of course, but I know from discussions we had at Ed's cottage years back (and let me tell you, ONLY at Ed's cottage would you find nude females sunbathing on a point with nude guys among them, everyone lying on their backs staring at the clouds above and discussing details of an imaginary fantasy world!) that Ed liked Lin Carter's idea.

Regarding Torm and Silk: many Realms fans have commented on this. Torm was around first, of course, and there's no real possibility that either Ed or David Eddings copied from each other, nor that Victor's roleplaying was informed by reading about Silk (the character was well established long before Victor was handed a copy of *Pawn of Prophecy*). I see Silk, with his royal blood and years of trained expertise, as being far more mature and urbane than Torm, though they both have the "ruling streak" of being impudent, irresponsible, irrepressible, and 'playing the game for fun' more than for personal gain. Torm is just as sarcastic as Silk, but younger and less mature than Silk, and cares far less for consequences, international diplomacy, and so on. The essential truth here is that Torm and Silk both represent an archetypal character (Till Eulenspiegel/[several variant spellings exist] and many fairy tale characters echo the same archetype) of the "Merry Thief." What I regret is that Realms fans haven't really seen enough yet of Rathan being Torm's foil, and the byplay between the two of them. (If Ed sets the Knights trilogy at the formation of the Knights and doesn't "jump ahead" in time much, you won't even see Torm and Rathan in most of those books, because they won't have joined the Knights yet.)

As for writing books about the individual characters: of course there's a possibility. I'm not sure if WotC wants to go in that direction -- but I suppose if the Knights trilogy is a HUGE hit...

This is of course what TSR should have done with Realms fiction back in, say, 1988 and 1989. Then Florin and Torm and Rathan and Jhessail and Mirt would all be as well-known as, say, Drizzt, and we'd all be looking at a richer Realms tapestry. (And Ed might be [shudder to think what he might try to do] writing Star Wars books!).

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If you've just read the first EI novel, Gareth, I envy you. What a treat you have ahead! EI in Myth Drannor is a direct sequel to Making Of A Mage, then Temptation jumps ahead about five hundred years, Elminster in Hell (a very DIFFERENT novel than most straight-ahead-chronological fantasy novels, and to my mind the closest thing to serious literature Ed has thus far published -- so it's VERY good, but has disappointed many Realms readers who were expecting just one more "fun romp read") is very recent in the Realms timeline, and Elminster's Daughter (yes, a romp, and one of Ed's most satisfying Realms books) is current Realms time. Elminster does of course manage to worm his way into a lot of Ed's other books, too, notably Spellfire and the Shadows of the Avatar trilogy -- and no one should miss "Elminster At the MageFair" (in print right now in the Best of the Realms Volume 1 collection, and first published in the out-of-print Realms of Valor paperback).

Ed toyed with the idea of doing an entire Elminster side-novel once, covering EI's youthful career as a thief in the city of Hastarl, but although some Realms book editors were enthusiastic, others didn't want to make space on the schedule for such a thing (at the time, TSR was VERY sensitive to right-wing-religious criticisms that D&D was a Satanic game that corrupted youth, and the LAST thing they wanted was a novel that showed thieves cavorting in a big city, with gang fights, heist techniques displayed before the reader's eyes, and so on).

But I blather overmuch again, as usual. So I'll pass on your desire that Ed keep up the good work to him, and we'll both see what gets published!

Ed

August 16, 2004: Yes, 'tis me again, you can't stop me!

Lashan is the man this time, specifically his queries about Torm's temple punishments.

The Mask-clergy-ordered thefts were usually covert (and sometimes puzzling to Torm) redistributions of specific items, rather than "take any valuables" affairs. I would say that they were to increase the effectiveness and strength of the Church of Mask and its allies, and thereby augment the reputation of the Church AMONG THIEVES, but not necessarily to increase its public popularity or reputation. The thefts weren't always take from the rich and give to the poor, but they WERE often take from the powerful and oppressive (e.g. petty local rulers, guildmasters, and gang bosses) and give to the weak and disadvantaged. There may be nothing at all 'noble' about this, but rather that the clergy of Mask wanted to give said weak individuals more ability to fight back/stand up for something else/hamper the increase in power of those taken from (for some long-range, cryptic Church of Mask reason). Occasionally, yes, the thefts were from an enemy of the Church of Mask and to be given to an ally of the Church of Mask.

The Church of Tymora celebrates and values daring, the taking of chances -- and sometimes their penances would be to return items Torm had stolen TO THE EXACT SPOT he'd taken them from, braving all increased guardians and traps his first theft might have engendered. In most cases, however, it was to do a specific dangerous and daring task AND REFRAIN FROM stealing tempting valuables that the task would bring him into contact with. For instance, a particular Calishite satrap kept gemstones his buyers had acquired but his gemcutters hadn't yet valued and examined with an eye to remounting them in customized jewelry in a large but shallow stone bowl-depression or 'pit' in an inner room. Torm's task brought him to a landing in that pit full of gems, without telling him about it -- but he knew better than to scoop any gems, recognizing it as

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a temptation the Church of Tymora had led him into, and warned him (in general terms, of course) about. And that's it from me, this time.

Ed will of course be silent whilst attending GenCon, and I'll probably also be heard from very little in the next few weeks (I must attend a professional get-together that's a lot less fun than GenCon!). We'll both be back, never fear.

So ta-ta for now,
THO

P.S. Ah, Faraer: you ALWAYS get it right. Florin, yesss. You'll get to see Florin at the young-and-still-learning stage at the beginning of the first Knights novel, I believe.

On August 16, 2004 THO said: Hello, all. Two quick answers: no, Blueblade, I'm afraid I can't make GenCon this year (although I have attended some GenCons, years back). Real-world work keeps me too busy just now, I'm afraid.

Bergan, Ed has three thus-far-unpublished short stories relating incidents at various MageFairs, but as far as I know there aren't any other "direct" descriptions in published Realmslore beyond Ed's Realms of Valor story, just passing references to MageFairs and events befalling at various MageFairs. I'll check with Ed when he gets back from GenCon, though, and get Ye Definitive Answer. In the meantime, can other scribes help, perhaps pointing out something I've missed?

THO

August 28, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes!

I apologize for my lengthy silence. Ed is finally back from GenCon but preoccupied with family matters, and so will remain e-quiet for a little longer, I'm afraid. He did want to pass on his thanks to Garen Thal for being such good company at GenCon, and to all of his "seen once a year friends" he managed to see once more. He THINKS Mary-Liz and Chris Perkins will both recover from spending time on panels with him.

Ed's also pleased that so many folks have enjoyed his Candlekeep intro (yes, this is the Big Surprise that's been mooted for some time now), and thinks Alaundo has done a VERY nice job of 'presenting' it. (And * I * think 'tis lovely, too!) So you're welcome, Alaundo, and thank YOU!

A few swift lore replies, now...

To The Blue Sorceress and Kajehase: many but by no means all Ilmatari practise celibacy. It's a matter of avoiding distractions over one's personal pain and suffering, not anything the church or the deity regard as "exalted." A technique rather than doctrine, if you will, but by no means frowned upon by the church. Like hair shirts, flagellation, stuffing undergarments with nettles, and so on: accepted means to the greater goal. Marriage isn't prohibited, and there are numerous instances of committed partners serving together in the priesthood or in lay worship, dealing loving pain to each other (S&M devotees take note).

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Moonharp, it's not that Ed prefers external conflicts to internal: it's that most of his editors do. They want action fantasy, and Ed tends to stuff his books so full of subplots and supporting character and lore/ 'colour' that there's little room for internal strife. However, check out ELMINSTER IN HELL for perhaps the ultimate in internal conflict.

kuje31, your editing is correct: "day" should indeed be "dagger" in THE SILENT HOUSE passage you mention. And yes, Ed gave no eulogy at GenCon. My spies at the con (remember my profession, and yes, there ARE FBI agents at GenCon every year, unidentified amongst you bwoohahahahahem) tell me he outdid himself at his writing seminars and the FR seminar (reducing Chris Perkins to helpless laughter over a certain comment about "15 Manshoons showing up for the same hotel reservation") - and the AUDIENCE outdid themselves this year in filthily inventive suggestions for story elements for the 2004 Spin A Yarn (Mary-Elizabeth even offered to spank Ed, which should be a standing-room-only event NEXT year if she can be convinced to actually go through with it). So kudos to all. I think.

Ed is also furiously busy with a secret project, just now, AND finishing his last charity short story and his tale for the next Diamond Throne anthology from Sue and Monte Cook at Malhavoc. So busy, in fact, that he's skipping Worldcon this year and so missing another chance to do a panel with his friend Terry Pratchett. Ah, well: he has to write all of these books SOMETIME.

Ed did mention that his meeting with Keith Baker (like his chat with the Salvatores) was all too brief, and he wants to at least take the new Worldmaster out for drinks at GenCon next year. He's well aware that some scribes may feel the perils of advancing age overcoming them as they wait and wait and, oh, yes, wait for their Realmslore requests to be answered, but he assures me that he's typing just as fast as he can.

Yours until Manshoon stops all that cloning around,
THO

On September 1, 2004 THO said: Well met again, fellow scribes.

Lorelord George, you pose a superb question, probing as it does at the awkward aspects of power imbalances in play.

Herewith, my attempt at a reply: Dove's true status and identity wasn't known to any of us at first, of course, after Florin rescued her from cruel straits in which she was playing a part in order to learn some things from her captors (men similarly unaware of her true powers, name, and lineage).

Intrigued by the hero who'd rescued her, she did what any wary, experienced, hardly-daring-to-hope woman would do: she subtly tested him for months, to make sure he didn't have overly large feet of clay beneath his hero's boots.

It was some time thereafter, long after she dared to trust him and their romance had begun, that we learned her true status (she'd obviously come to some agreement with her sisters and EI not to spill the beans to us). Dove dislikes using magic or calling on the Weave often, preferring to use her wits and her sword in most dealings, and this contributed to concealing her true nature for some time.

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She made her inherent independence clear from the very beginning, hinting that she was much older than she looked "thanks to magic" (we assumed potions of longevity, of course), and revealing that she did much Harper work and other covert things for the good of the Dales and Cormyr and law-abiding, peace-loving folk everywhere - work that kept her busy off on her own for days and even months at a time.

Florin accepted that, so all of the rest of us did, too. Torm tried to follow and spy on her once, and ended up neatly stymied (she knew of his skulking, and with gentle amusement led him astray).

She seldom "went adventuring" with us, although on at least two occasions she showed up to save our butts when we ended up 'in over our heads.' Our assault on the altar-gates of Myth Drannor was one notable exception, and she also stood with us in one defense of Shadowdale against Zhent armies, hewing her way through most of a flanking force ON HER OWN. So, yes, Dove was largely absent ("busy elsewhere"), and with rare exceptions (such as Weave-healing PCs at the death's door), never called on her Chosen-super-powers. She and Storm of the Seven prefer not to use magic often in their daily lives (and she moreso than Storm). I might add that Ed is a masterful actor and has forged a roleplaying "style" for the Knights sessions that makes game rules almost superfluous and matters of power far less important than 'becoming' one's character and dealing with the Realms around in that manner. (The "football-quarterback" situation of planning party combats, for instance, almost never arises in our play sessions - so neither do discussions of "Can't Dove just do this, as a Chosen, and then we'll...")

I hope that helps to answer your question. I'm off on an assignment for a few days, now, so don't let my e-silence alarm you. The nature of my work means I'm not always free to just grab a handy Net access and surf, answer e-mails, and so on.

Blades high for now!

THO

September 10, 2004: Hello to all scribes. Ed is still up to the end of his beard in family and other matters, but I managed to shift the longhaired cat who is the only fetching young lady on my naked lap (sorry, Karth) aside long enough to pound out a query to the Creator of the Realms, and managed to catch him late at night, as he arrived home and start wading through his e-mail (queries from Hollywood types into the "not bloody likely" folder; queries from game companies into the "groan, like I have TIME" folder; queries from editors into the "grovel quickly, ASAP" folder, and so on :}).

He sent this reply:

Zandilar, the quick answer to your initial question is that every time I try to write anything non-standard regarding gender and characters who are "strong"/dominant or "weak"/submissive [strong females paired or interacting with weaker males, for example, such as Shandril and Narm] my editors have fits ("Doesn't fit our readership! Will hurt sales! Must fix at once!"). Such things "don't fit" the genre expectations.

In various ways, there's been a (usually friendly) tug-of-war between me and TSR/WotC/Hasbro over various details of the Realms since my first hints of the Realms were published in (what was then) "The Dragon" back in 1979. The "original" Realms, "my" Realms, was my own imaginary

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fantasy setting for fiction before D&D® ever existed, and then my own D&D campaign world for years before it became an "official" D&D® setting. It was purchased to be the official 'home' of the 2nd Edition D&D® game, and therefore by definition had to be, and still must be, 'all things to all people.'

In light of that prime philosophy and publishing need, it's foolish to upset some Realms fans by stating matters too baldly and being too definite when we (various Realms designers and authors) can HINT to our collective hearts' content -- and in doing so, leave DMs full leeway to run particular characters however best suits their principles and preferences.

In fact, it's ALWAYS better design work to hint ("Elminster says he's heard of many orc sightings in and about the ruins") rather than stating things too precisely ("There are six orcs and one hobgoblin in the ruins, and they'll be found waiting for PCs in the following rooms..."). Hence the very existence of unreliable narrators such as Elminster, and storytelling colour ("fluff" to some) over rules stats in most Realms writings. The Realms is people (characters) and THEIR STORIES, not stats -- and not merely their bedchamber preferences, either.

It should come as news to no one that many consumers, particularly in the United States, have religious and societal views that clash with in-thy-face lesbian, gay male, and bisexual lifestyles.

With that said, yes there are a LOT of "non-modern-real-world-American-mores-standard" relationships in the Realms. I don't make a big issue of it for several reasons.

First, offending some fans as referred to above. Secondly, TSR Code of Ethics/WotC and Hasbro Code of Conduct prohibitions (e.g. on sodomy, incest, etc.) and editorial censorship, which has (as some scribes have already noted) by and large been relaxing over the years, but has occasionally reached ridiculous heights. For example, I once had a fight with a DRAGON assistant editor over an article (which I refused to finish, under such conditions) wherein I wrote that many Arthurian tales describe Lancelot and Guinevere as "lovers," and was told that I couldn't use the word "lovers" or IN ANY WAY IMPLY extramarital sex (i.e. Arthur could be assumed to make love to his wife so long as I made no direct reference to it, but I couldn't even hint that someone else could). Sheesh. I directed the editor to the standard roster of Greek and Roman myths, legends, and fables for hardcore sexual hijinks, but she dismissed my point as irrelevant.

So what you correctly refer to as "dance around definitions," Zandilar, is how staffers at WotC have to operate, and merely good business sense (again, those who wish to read the obvious hints re. lifestyles can do so, and those offended by such matters don't get their noses rubbed in it so harshly that it ruins their enjoyment of the setting). simontrinity is correct in saying that I can go much farther in sexual matters (and, yes, innuendo, which I enjoy) these days than I could when I started writing Realms books. So the horizons ARE widening.

However, my great friend and Realms-champion Steven Schend has, as usual, already said it best in this thread: that we shouldn't be defining characters by their sexual preferences. There's far more to people than their jobs, or their hobbies, or how they like to dress, or how they engage in sexual behaviour.

I've actually written many gay (and far more bi-) males and females into the Realms that NO ONE recognizes as such, purely because they DON'T adopt modern real-world stereotypical styles (such as so-called "butch" behaviour or effeminate "limp-wristed and lisping").

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In "my" Realms, there's no general prejudice against love of same gender or love of both genders. There ARE individuals who hold such prejudices, and in general, members of nobility or royalty or any other group in which lineage and inheritance is important frown on deviance from whatever their locally accepted norm of pairing is, so that "the line can be maintained in a clear, can't-be-challenged manner."

I'm not sure if you'll see a clearly lesbian or gay male character in a novel soon, because the only way to give them that status "clearly" is to engage in protracted sex scenes, which are seldom okay with editors (a story would have to be constructed that would make such matters integral to the plotline and not "gratuitous," and although I can and have written colourful porn, it's not something WotC would welcome in the Realms line). Let's just see how far I can go in the Knights novels, shall we? :}

And yes, I regard your problem ("I personally would love to see characters in the Realms that I can personally relate to, and I keep coming up short.") as something that Realms fiction as a whole should address, for as wide a variety of Realms readers as we can collectively manage. So in design or creative terms, there is or should be a "place at the table" for, say, openly lesbian characters.

Bear in mind, however, that many Realms fans delight in pouncing on me for being a dirty-minded "pervert" (most of them, of course, not even understanding the meaning of that word) for merely showing casual nudity, kissing, caresses, and even footrubs in my fiction... things many Canadians (and, from my conversations with them, more than a few Americans) who went to summer camp in their teens accepted as normal in such settings. (And being as the Realms is "my" setting, *I* get to define what is 'normal' in the Realms; that's even in the original Realms agreement).

So let me turn this matter back to fellow scribes: how much overt sex would YOU like to read in, say, Ed Greenwood-penned Realms novels? Where's the "line of comfort" for you?

(I seriously want to read posted opinions here, without offending Alaundo or others by getting too explicit. Anyone who's attended any of the annual Spin A Yarn seminars at GenCon knows that although my own flirtations encourage Realms fans to delve into matters "blue," they're always VERY eager to do so. I encourage the racy stuff, but the audience provides it.)

On to polyamory (committed relationships): quite common in backlands Realms villages, often 'dressed up' in annual festival customs (such as Midsummer Night) to make the maximum number of people comfortable with it. In many farming and frontier areas of the Realms, "families" dwelling and working together may consist of several males and several females, not "one-man-one-woman." Again, don't expect this to be underscored in print in official products, because it points towards incest and the polygamous controversies current in some American states, and in general upsets some folks who might otherwise happily buy Realms products. Remember the editorial fits I caused just mentioning brothelsXXXX ahem, "feshalls." My view was that I was just reporting, a la National Geographic: 'The native women have long, floppy...' and the TSR editors disagreed violently. BTW, the very existence of all those brothels point to the number of men and women in the Realms who want casual sex, or who don't get what they want at home, or who don't want to wait until they get home. Sex IS alive and well in the Realms.

Please also always remember that the long-lived members of the Chosen are EXCEPTIONS to the rules: their very longevity and loss of sanity leads them to grasp at affection whenever they can, and to consider themselves so far beyond all notions of prudishness and propriety (they've outlived entire kingdoms full of social thou-shalt-nots, and been around long enough to see many

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priesthoods make major changes in doctrine) that they just don't care what others may think of them -- unless they need the support and aid of particular "others" at the moment.

So, yes, Alustriel does take pleasure in hosting orgies in which she physically enjoys both males and females, and lots of them enjoy each other, and lah dee dee dah dah. This does not make her a nymphomaniac, an empty-headed lust bunny, or deficient in any way. In fact, she's achieved more through seduction and founding firm friendships and making others long for another chance to dive into the comfort of one of Alustriel's large and well-filled baths than many rulers ever manage with dozens of treaties and scores of wars, skirmishes, and threats.

If you need validation, yes, Alustriel and Zelauma make love. Storm makes love with both guys and gals (the Harpers don't regard her as a 'den mother' for nothing :)). Think of her as the comforting arms they run to, for advice and soothing companionship and understanding. However, she does as much listening and dispensing warm soup as she does riding and being ridden.

I hesitate to wander around identifying major NPCs as gay males or females, because someone else reading this may be far more comfortable in their use of the Realms if I never put such notions into their heads regarding particular characters.

So let me say just this much: most males in the Realms weep, hug, and even caress and kiss as much as real-world modern females do. How comfortable a given character is with doing such things with others of the same gender (or, for that matter, with persons of different races) varies widely -- but it's safe to say that given the opportunity, most characters have "tried everything" at least once, and between travelers outside their own communities (where such acts might well upset family members, especially if loss of virginity is involved), there's little or no stigma in such experimentation.

Please note the full implications of this: if your character in the Realms is part of an adventuring "party" and female or male characters in that party hop from bedroll to bedroll as nights on the trail pass, those bed-hoppers WILL NOT be generally viewed as "loose" or "perverted." Note that I said "generally." Couples in committed relationships whose partner goes off jumping the bones of others without prearrangement are going to feel just as hurt and betrayed as you might expect. Moreover, some characters will be uncomfortable with such behaviour, sometimes for religious reasons. Myself, I see this as best left to the roleplaying chemistry of individual gaming groups rather than shoved down anyone's throat by my or anyone else's Realms writings.

However, Zandilar, just between you and me (and of course everyone across the world with Net access who reads this :)): I personally happen to be a guy who likes gals, but I'm quite comfortable kissing, hugging, and even caressing or comforting guys. Such activities don't happen to turn me on sexually. I'm a "toucher," and always have been: I hug and kiss a lot, perhaps more naturally than I shake hands (when greeting females formally, I was taught to kneel and kiss their hands). However, I know that such close contact gives a lot of people the creeps, and I have utterly no interest in upsetting people outside of a roleplaying session in which we're both acting: if someone goes red or jerks away from me, oops: MY bad. That's why I don't want to write too forcefully about such things.

But I hint like crazy. Steven not only expressed Khelben and Laeral's relationship perfectly, he directed you to some of his character writeups for a look-see, and I'll do the same: look back over my Realms writings (such as the NPC sections of the Volo's Guides) and the hints are there. Bushels of them, in fact. :}

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Although overly aggressive butch lesbian behaviour and over-the-top prancing 'mincing' gay male behaviour both strike me as ridiculous, the relationships underlying them (including the physical sides of such relationships) do not. When the lesbians who happen to own the cottage four down from mine go out on their dock at dusk to make love, I don't yell angrily at them, ridicule them, or rudely watch them, but if I happen to be out on my point (which is high enough to overlook their dock), I'll smile and wave at first sight and then carry on as if they're not doing anything. This has led to them in turn casually accepting my distant presence: they usually make love, then plunge in for a dip that includes lots of splashing and laughter, and then they climb back out on the dock to dry off (if the night's too cold or mosquito-ridden for that, it's on with the towels and back inside). Either way, they usually wave and call "good night" as they go.

That's the same style and balance I'd like to strike in my Realms writings: casual acceptance of such matters for those interested in them, and a tacit agreement to overlook them for those who aren't.

With the ground prepared, so to speak, I can now tackle your query about strong female characters choosing older, fatter, hairier males. (And for readers waiting to denounce this as my personal sexual wish-fulfillment, I proffer three words: oh, grow up. I did, after all, establish these characters and relationships when I was a skinny, young, bespectacled nerd of a youngster who never thought he'd ever either get fat or grow a beard. Old, yes, I knew that would happen if I didn't get myself killed. But I digress. :})

My point in depicting several "gals like old fat hairy males" relationships was deliberately to point out that these particular females chose what they wanted, and it wasn't "brainless handsome hunks" but rather men with wits and characters they could respect.

For example, in the case of Mirt and Asper, I wanted to show a Realms instance of something that happened many times in real-world past history: a young ward growing up to genuinely love her much older guardian (yes, I'm well aware that there were even more real-world instances of guardians forcing themselves on their wards, or marrying them over their objections). I've written a story that you'll probably never see (because it does include several explicit love scenes) wherein Mirt uncomfortably rebuffs his increasingly amorous 'little girl,' and succeeds only in driving the past-puberty-and-in-the-thrall-of-raging-hormones Asper to seduce him: she's taken her measure of a lot of men in Waterdeep, and decided the man who raised her is the best, and she'll have HIM, thank-you-very-much.

I, too, don't like gals to collapse into mush whenever Macho Hero Number 36 strides manfully onto the scene. However, I have written several scenes in which women who know quite well that their physical strength and personal social standing can't win them a clear victory over Mister Macho, and who have enough personal self-confidence not to have to be seen to "win" every moment, do the collapse act to manipulate Macho into doing what they wanted, WITHOUT a large and damaging conflict. MY pet-hate, never-want-to-write characters are STUPID females (except as passing villains who get what they deserve).

What sort of things would you like to know about Caladnei of Cormyr? I didn't create her, but have used her in my Realms of Shadow story and in Elminster's Daughter (the mind-meld sequences therein shared important highlights of her personal 'back story' with readers), and plan to reveal more of her in tales to come. To some extent, the Royal Magician of Cormyr must have some 'air of mystery' to be effective, and Caladnei is very much 'learning on the job' and growing and changing in doing so. (And if it's hints of lesbianism you're looking for, take a good look at Caladnei and Alusair in that Realms of Shadow story.)

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I'm not sure how soon Laeral of Loudwater will reappear in print. It depends on a lot of not-yet-settled projects, but is unlikely to be less than three years or so. You may in a year or so see a rather powerful story concerning Alusair and her sexuality. Or may not; again, we'll have to see.

Regarding slash: although I'm well aware that in this age of instant Net publishing examples of slash writing can be distressing to some authors, I personally have no trouble with it, so long as it's always made clear it's not the work of the original author. Satire defenses aside, I also fully understand when someone is upset by a depiction of his or her character and tries to vigorously defend the original by legally punishing the writer of the slash, or getting the slash removed from circulation, and so on.

However, I regard all fannish writing as something humans DO. Have always done. In the same way that children play with dolls, readers play with characters they develop an affection (or love-hate) for. I have read some wonderfully affectionate fan writings about the Realms, and some vicious and hilarious slash about Realms characters. (The one in which Elminster was magically cursed to continuously grow breasts and vaginas that roamed around the surface of his body, whilst he exuded an aroma that made all humans and elves [especially drow, OF COURSE] around him mad with lust for him, had me rolling on the floor whooping with laughter. I just wish the writer had been competent enough to go on to tell a good story after the few vivid scenes of debauchery. But I digress again. :))

I hope I've answered your questions without overly offending anyone, Zandilar and other scribes. As you can probably tell, I'm not shy about discussing such topics, and I'm sure Alaundo and Tethoril will step in if they think matters are getting (ahem) out of hand, so if you've follow-up questions, feel free. However, folks, please let's NOT get into an endless round of "So is Manshoon gay? Is Fzoul? Okay, how about Larloch?"

I would hope there are more things to talk about in the Realms than that.

So saith Ed.

Thy Hooded One will demurely add just this much to the words of the Master: Ed can parody the mincing male homosexual with devastating verve while DMing, and in our original Realms group (never shy about matters sexual) could, ahem, bring to colourful life orgies, the entry of the Knights into brothels or bedchambers, and so on. However, I've also seen him "turn off" this side of play completely when running sessions of younger gamers at GenCons: as he said, it's all about what your particular gaming groups want the Realms to be for them.

And in the interests of full disclosure: I'm happily heterosexual but have enjoyed several lesbian relationships of the "cozy longtime friends who enjoy occasional fun sex" variety. And I happily offer my shoulders, back, and feet to Ed to rub whenever he's within reach, because he's so good at it -- and DOESN'T expect it to lead to our leaping onto the gaming table together for wild sex in the next few minutes. (Though, if he ever offered...)

Love to all,
THO

September 10, 2004: Hail-ho again, fellow scribes. Thy Hooded One, back in harness again, bringing the latest words of Ed, to whit:

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Dargoth, all of the priesthoods have their official (doctrine) and individual (varying from priest to priest, but with most priests bolstering their personal views with "righteousness") on morals (including sexual matters), and (subtly) promote these regardless of local laws. However, most organized churches benefit from social stability and the rule of law, and so tend to more or less agree on such matters. Where they disagree, they tend to offset or counterbalance each other.

Some deities prefer specific races and genders among their priests, as you've noted, but only in a few cases do they favour 'their own' customary gender. Lolth has a no-males policy among her 'upper clergy,' but this is an exception, and I don't know of any "glass ceilings."

And yes, I'd not like to see 'politically correct' Realms novels that dictated character rosters or topics.

simontrinity, thanks for raising the Turmish reminder. This is another example of something not emphasized overmuch to avoid 'turning off' those who wouldn't find it inviting -- that as a result of not being dwelt upon, tends to get forgotten by the majority of Realms fans. And to both you and Capn Charlie: exactly, we should include the amount of sex appropriate to the story we're telling. The story arcs attempted thus far haven't required detailed descriptions of sexual acts, and that's unlikely to change.

Zandilar, you're welcome, and if it's fine with Alaundo to link to the page, it's certainly fine with me. Your mention of the Howard government's new law not recognizing homosexuals married in countries where same-sex marriages are legal is a prime example of "having one's cake and eating it, too." Such a law CAN'T be legal under the existing passport-recognition, diplomatic, and extradition treaties (both United Nations and Commonwealth) Australia has signed and remains party to. Oz can't demand, say, Canada recognize its passports and diplomatic immunities and the like while at the same time refusing to recognize any marriage that is legal in Canada. (The United States is currently trying to pull the same sort of thing: demanding captured war criminals face justice at the International Court of Justice, a.k.a. the "World Court," in the Hague but at the same time trying to argue that American citizens should be exempt from the jurisdiction of that same court.) However, such political machinations have always taken place, will continue to do so as the ages and cultures pass, and can be drawn on by Dungeon Masters for fascinating in-campaign intrigues that I find make for far richer play than open warfare.

And, yes, of course there are other ways to show female choice besides having strong gals pick old fat hairy males, and I've used many of them (unnoticed, it seems :}). Some, such as the notorious female noble at the subterranean revel in Elminster's Daughter, choose by 'not choosing' (or rather, not confining themselves to one choice). I can see where the older male thing might seem a touch chauvinistic in intent, but in both the seduction-of-Mirt story and the initial tryst involving Vangey in Elminster's Daughter, the older male is portrayed as being astonished-to-disbelieving, reluctant, flattered, and shyly tentative at the advances of the female, never as making the advances himself, or "accepting his due," or "awaiting her inevitable coming to her senses by picking me."

Myrmeen Lhal is in her late forties by now (darn those passing days; just can't stop them), though she doesn't look it, in two ways: she's always been ruggedly fit and blessed with "fine cheekbones" good looks that weather well; and she's always led a life of action and looked a trifle battered as a result -- so as the years pass, she hasn't visibly aged all that much.

I can see how Caladnei's sparring sequence in "When Shadows Come Seeking a Throne" might make her seem almost psionic; what I was striving for was Alusair using a real everyday weapon, and Caladnei trying to strengthen her own concentration and mental endurance by maintaining

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and animating a spell-spun parrying blade. And yes, she is supposed to be 'learning on the job,' a mage of less power in Art than many War Wizards, having to survive through wits and diplomacy rather than brute force-of-spells. Smack you, you say? Oh, no: I'm in enough trouble already! :}

I remember the titanic Oz book prices from my Australian tour (1992, I think), and they still make me wince. And here I thought Canadian (typically two-thirds higher to twice as high as American) book prices were steep! Sheesh; you folks are DEDICATED Realms fans.

I'd not have done what your DM did with either Alusair or Caladnei, but on the other hand both can call on heavy War Wizard aid (everpresent bodyguards, if you'd like), inherited "magic items of office" or of royal ownership, and a reputation throughout Cormyr (thanks to Azoun IV and Vangerdahast) of being able to do just about anything. In other words, if they don't blow it, both women can "fool a lot of the people for a lot of the time to come."

I quite see where characters like Laeral of Loudwater seem to pop up out of nowhere. I carry the ongoing tapestry of the Realms in my head, including literally scores of short stories you've never seen and may never see, some of them written literally decades ago. So Laeral didn't 'pop up out of nowhere' for me, but of course she seemed to, for you. I've several dozen characters I'd like to develop more fully, but the WotC reliance on "signature characters" and series about them makes this difficult. I have to repeatedly sneak people like Mirt and Glarastee Rhauligan in, as supporting characters.

Thanks for your questions, as always. I regard those who share my love of the Realms as firm friends, even if we've never met. Be well, and may happiness find you often.

Ed

So saith The Man. I echo his sentiments, and will add a few more passing comments.

kuje31, Eric Boyd's your man to ask about Trenahes. He did all the lore work for the CD, compiling scores of 'map tags' out of pure love of the Realms. The place isn't familiar to me from Ed running the original Realms campaign, and we traversed the trails betwixt Shadowdale and Mistedale more than a dozen times that I can remember, without seeing much more than a few abandoned-under-elven-encouragement woodcutters' glades.

Bruce, I'm fine, thanks -- and hello right back! I'm sure Karth and Wooly will be happy to know that I'm as bare as usual, curled up in front of my keyboard with a mug of warm green tea and a tankard of cold mint lemonade within easy reach, taking alternate sips and happily remembering adventuresome moments in the Realms. Wooly still has hold of the other end of my leash, as I recall, but I'm afraid I was just kidding about the piercings. The near end of said leash ends in clamps, yes, but piercings, no. Which is probably more than enough teasing detail for some scribes.

Vanguard, a few pages back (48, to be precise), you asked about the advancement of science in the Realms. I've discussed this informally with Ed, and here's a sort of general reply: science is quite advanced, but aside from ongoing Lantanna 'tinkering engineering,' which tends to be quite organized (via the Church of Gond, ideas are shared, or rather, one inventor of Lantan often gets a chance to examine the work of another), almost all scientific knowledge is held by individuals, or passed on verbally as 'folklore' and inevitably distorted in the process. In other words, sages write incomplete, opinionated, and often quite skewed books, but aside from short, just-the-basics chapbooks sold in Waterdeep and by wagon-merchants and peddlers elsewhere, there are no

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generally-available 'textbooks' or commonly-accepted body of knowledge. This keeps the 'advance' of science at a slow, unpredictable pace: the wild acceleration seen in our real world through improvements in communications hasn't happened and shows no signs of happening. Temple libraries, of course, from Candlekeep to the private collections of priests of other deities who just "have to know the Inner Truths and Great Secrets," help to preserve knowledge (and misinformation, too), but there's no way to access most of it except by busting in and stealing the books. Now THAT would make for a fascinating campaign.

But this post grows lengthy, and I do have real-world work to do, so I'll sign off for now. I feel a tugging that means Wooly might be getting closer...

Love to all,
THO

September 11, 2004: I bring you a hello from Ed, and an 'official' reply:

Its first scene takes place on 16 Flamerule in 1356 (the Year of the Worm), but the main action in Spellfire begins on Mirtul 6 of 1357 (the Year of the Prince), and ends on 10 Flamerule of that year. Crown of Fire ends in the early hours of 22 Flamerule, 1357.

Hand of Fire overlaps Crown slightly, beginning on the night of 21 Flamerule, and its main action continues through the night of 27 Flamerule, though the Epilogue runs up to the night of 1 Eleint, 1357.

And there you have it. Firm dates for the saga.

Your servant in Realmslore,
THO

September 14, 2004: Well met again, Bruce. I bring you these words from Ed:

Once an Avowed, always an Avowed (unless all of the senior monks [or if you are the black sheep, all except you] cast you out, which has normally only been done for book thieves, book destroyers, and individuals who 'got in' disguised in order to change writings, hide writings, or do harm to fellow 'Learned'). In other words, mere absence from Candlekeep has no effect at all on one's status. It should be noted, however, that under NO circumstances can off-site monks get writings from Candlekeep sent to them. Letters from fellow monks containing requested information, yes; original tomes or copies of any spell or magical lore, no.

And there you have it, from The Loremaster himself. Who hopes to resurface soon.

THO

September 17, 2004: Well met again, fellow scribes.

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Beowulf, Wooly (and Wooly, regarding the leash, I promise to start convincing you in my own arch manner the moment time affords) is as right as usual: Lathander has a "soft h"

Karth, I'm glad you're suitably mollified. :}

Zandilar, Garen Thal did a very good job of answering you re. Cormyr. I bring you these words of Ed as a backup:

Garen is eloquently correct, as usual. Regarding the crown passing to royal sons versus daughters, the official rule is eldest progeny regardless of gender, but what has always happened in 'real life' in Cormyr is eldest progeny UNLESS other legitimate (no 'bastard') offspring are far more popular with other Obarskyrs and to a lesser extent powerful and influential nobles. (In truth, the support of the War Wizards, in particular the Royal Magician, play a large part in successions, because they can and have used magical means to make various Obarskyrs seem other than they are, or sickly, or untrustworthy (or even treasonous), or even to eliminate undesirable heirs... without, in almost all cases, the general public being aware that they're doing so.)

To tackle your specific questions in order, many folk (who don't own land in areas where land has a monetary value, such as cities, or who don't hold family titles, ranks, or wealth) in the Realms don't have surnames. Others have 'bestowed by the neighbours' surnames (e.g. Barakh the Smith, Ruldar of the Grove). A large number were ORIGINALLY chosen by mutual agreement between two persons getting married, but are 'set' by about four generations (i.e. everyone involved is used to them and proud of them, and would never think of changing or dropping them unless marrying into money or acquiring a title elsewhere).

As for folks marrying into other families, in some places (Tharsult, Altumbel, Priapurl, Glistar, Rashemen, Sossal) they're matrilineal, in others (Cormyr, Sembia, Waterdeep, Amn, Tethyr) patrilineal, yet even in these places there are exceptions.

And many, many people in the Realms (particularly adventurers) take another name if they establish new lives elsewhere. So, yes, they ARE mutable. And to a large extent, yes, they only matter to nobility - - and both the formal and informal rules governing nobility vary from realm to realm (something I very much hope we can cover in depth in future Realms releases).

So there you have it!

More later, but I'll be e-silent this weekend (and so, of course, will Ed). Fare thee well, until next!

THO

On September 22, 2004 THO said: Dearest Steven,

Ed and I send likewise back to you, copiously. Ed wants you to know he'll be at a gaming convention (Phantasm, in Peterborough, Ontario) this weekend, and so won't be available once again (and has a houseguest during the weekend and week after that, and family visiting the week after THAT), but is happy and busy (surprise), although he's running into increasing NDA problems when developing some of the long-awaited lore answers for scribes here at Candlekeep.

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Thanks very much for the omlar reply, and here's a tidbit for all:

Filfaeril has some secrets from her past involving senior nobles of the realm, and Azoun has a daughter (not by her) among the ranks of the hitherto-in-print-faceless junior War Wizards. Food for thought, but be warned that I'll say no more (because Ed's told me no more, and with a grin tells me he won't, either).

Bright banners to all,
THO

On September 23, 2004 THO said: Console yourselves with this thought: Ed of the Greenwood has a first draft of Book 2 of the Last Mythal Trilogy in his hands right now, so it WILL appear eventually. Smile at this addendum: although he of course won't tell me one word of what's in it and I won't ask (both of us like to pretend to be professionals for almost an hour a day), thus far: he's liking it. A lot.

THO

September 24, 2004: A LONG time ago (mid-May, I believe, and around about page 32 or so of this compiled thread), Bookwyrms felt moved to interrupt my flirtation and ask about insects of the Realms. He later received a rather brief 'yes to this critter, no to that' answer, but I'd like to assure him and all scribes that the Overloaded Ed Never Sleeps, and has just coughed up this short tidbit:

I'm running into NDA troubles on Borch's Lathtar's Lantern query and the Wizards' Reach background request from Métis, but I did manage to dredge up some 1972 (! Yes, before D&D!) notes of mine on insects of the Heartlands:

tarm [singular], tarmar [plural] = clouds of tiny dancing insects that can momentarily blind and choke on contact, but do no real damage (=midges, marsh swarms)

dyne ["DIE-nn;" singular and plural the same] = whining, stinging blood-drinking insects (= mosquitoes)

must [singular and plural the same] a.k.a. 'tinydaggers' = small swarming flies that leave painful bites (=black flies)

skarn [singular and plural the same] = biting flies (=horse flies)

blackfist, blackfists = any large moth

also, ants are either called, yes, 'ants' or they're called 'thella' [plural: 'thellen' or 'thelcrawl']

termites are called 'woodgnaws' or 'aezel' ("AY-zel"), never 'termites'

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So saith Ed, who is happily hard at work on the first Knights book, some more web columns, a short story I can't say anything more about just yet, and a big secret project ditto. Ah, I'm such a tease.

I guess, she added in a sultry whisper, you'll just have to... live with that.

THO

On September 27, 2004 THO said: Ahh, Purple Dragon Knight, WELL done. Stan is still, all these years after his tragic death, one of Ed's favourite singers. (BTW, when Ed is warmed up, he can do a stunningly accurate imitation of Stan: Ed has the depth and range, but lacks Stan's bulk and therefore his breath.)

The Cormyte's Boast is, of course, Ed's parody of the famous British folksong "The Vicar of Bray" (or "Braye" if one prefers).

Are you familiar, perchance, with the 'official' parody of Barrett's Privateers? (This was done long ago, when Garnet was playing fiddle in Stan's band rather than the solo work he's doing now, and it's called "Garnet's Homemade Beer.")

Ed apparently arrived home very late last night, and I haven't hooked up with him yet, but I have e-heard from two gamers who attended the con, who say Ed not only did a stunning workshop and game session, but spent hours explaining the ropes to some guys who wanted to start their own game publishing company, and (at her invitation, of course) helped a young gamer ready her fantasy romance story for submission to Harlequin's Luna imprint. That's my Ed...

Sweet rest to thee all this night,
THO

September 28, 2004: Hello, fellow scribes.

Athenon, you have the Lis correct. Let me quote from Ed's unpublished 'What Your Character Knows' notes:

Much blood has been spilled over control of the Lis, but the terrain itself has defeated any longterm control beyond the "as far as the point of my blade/reach of my spells extends" sort.

The term 'the Lisen Sands' refers to treacherous marine navigation and flooded areas, not broad beaches or desert area. You recall brackish water from the freshwater swamps (fed by local streams and springs) emptying into a broad, shallow, VERY silty saltwater river that generates lots of oxbows, side-channels, quicksand, dunes (that unlike 'desert dunes' change only by water action, not wind, as they're well-anchored with vegetation), standing dead 'drowned' trees, lots of choking vines and stunted wetland living trees (in short, large marshes with lots of ground cover for lurking outlaws and critters)... and everywhere insects, insects, clouds of stinging insects.

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Through the heart of it all winds the broad, slow, mud-opaque-water Lis, sometimes impassable to deep-keeled ships, but never choked so much that water cannot pass from the Moonsea to the Dragonreach. Indeed, spring storms in particular (and fierce winds blowing up heading-south waves at all times of year) can generate 'Scourings' of the Lis that briefly give it depths of more than forty feet and a clear, straight channel. Usually, it's 12 to 15 feet deep (with a soft-chocolate-mud bottom that will allow solid objects to readily pass or sink through it for about another six feet or so), and permanently cloudy.

As far as the songs go, PDK, I've HEARD some British folk groups (Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention) do very good versions of it onstage, but I haven't found a good recorded version of it either. I believe this is because of its age (to put it in Canadian terms, it would be rather like Gordon Lightfoot recording "Alouette" or a prominent American folk group recording "Yankee Doodle Dandy"). Kinda... uncool.

And for the "Homemade Beer" parody, it's been played on the CBC radio network many times (as part of reflections on/remembrances of Stan's life), but of course never commercially released-like all the good (and usually legally actionable) folk parodies (although this was one that both Stan and Garnet were quite pleased about, and apparently often sang themselves).

Wooly and Faraer, I'm split on the timeline matter, and I know that Ed is too. While we both believe that there must be REAL change/ongoing events in the setting (that's its LIFE), there are two 'mitigating factors.' One is that we haven't yet had the chance to paint in some of the important 'gaps in the map,' and are being prevented from doing so by the need for new update products on 'the same old places.' The other is that most humans resist and dislike change, emotionally, except for that subset of changes they mentally label as 'exciting new ideas/opportunities for me and mine.' And insofar as this fantasy gaming we do should be more attractive and inviting than merely watching the nightly news and seeing the forcible changes wrought in the real world, we as DMs and designers want to control change so it doesn't mean "chaos chaos everywhere, and every character and place you love and respect is swept away - again!"

I know (from our own campaign) that Ed is reluctant to do an updated 'org chart' for the Zhents, for two reasons: he doesn't want to restrict other Realms designers and fiction writers, and more importantly, discovering the relationships/hierarchy/working communications between characters is something he believes can be 'half the fun' for our PCs, and something he also doesn't want to ruin. However, let me see how far I can er, bend him on this...

Beowulf, Ed has often been asked about how he feels about others taking the Realms in directions that might not please him. Let me quote one of his replies from several years back:

Yes, of course, it can be irritating, particularly when (example: the behaviour of most of the Shadowdale-based NPCs in the early Avatar books) characters seem to 'act out of character' to suit the current needs of an unfolding plot. Every inconsistency is a flaw, so if a writer ever deliberately changed things ("Let's make this male a female, let's change this character's race, let's just change the name of the deity or place," and BTW, all of those things have happened in Realms-writing), it would be the ultimate sin of disrespect to everyone else working creatively in the Realms. I also dislike names and features that echo our real world (or our past real-world history) too closely.

However, on balance, it's great. It means if I die tomorrow, there's a team of people who not only love the Realms, but are experienced professionals at guiding and describing the Realms, so that

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(unlike, say, Roger Zelazny's Amber) it shouldn't wobble one bit if a single creative individual departs the scene.

Moreover, the one thing 'my own Realms' could never do while I was its sole creator was: SURPRISE me. I always knew what was around the next bend in the trail, because I was the one who put it all there. And that's a great gift. The Realms is demonstrably richer and stronger because of other viewpoints: other creative imaginations at work, from Bob Salvatore and Elaine Cunningham to Jeff Grubb and Steven Schend. George Krashos, Eric Boyd, and a dozen others demonstrate a deep and abiding love of the Realms as fans almost daily with their behind-the-scenes lorework, and watching all of these good friends playing in the sandbox I built (and improving it as they go, into a sandbox mansion with hot tub and air conditioning and drinks fountains!) is a personal delight for me.

So although I may from time to time gripe about this or that detail of the published Realms or publishing decision that led to it, my gripes are those of a fiercely loving parent, not any sort of adversarial critic.

So saith Ed.

And there you have it for now.

love to all,
THO

September 28, 2004: While I'm warmed up to do more 'tidying up Realmslore,' it's time to return to Proc's long-neglected request about the Watch (last addressed on page 34 of this thread, I believe). Ed has provided these additional tidbits:

A covert salute from one Watch officer of any rank to another of any rank (used in exaggerated, not-trying-to-hide form by officers not certain of the rank of the unfamiliar person they're saluting): Put heel of horizontal right hand on one's own belt, then swing fingers together in a single 'tap' against the belt (as if patting one's own belly). If this is IMMEDIATELY followed by a move to scratch one's own left shoulder, it means, roughly, "Hi, there! I've got trouble, big trouble, and need you to stay and confer with me. Contrive to get close to me in some non-obvious manner, so we can talk."

A salute from a low-ranking Watch officer to one of a higher rank: bring one's swordarm from down alongside one's leg (with hand empty of weapon) sharply up and across the breast to slap one's own opposite shoulder with the flat of that sword-hand.

A salute from a high-ranking Watch officer to one of a lower rank: bring one's swordarm from down alongside one's leg smoothly up to the middle of one's chest, extending one's thumb to touch the middle of the chest whilst the hand and fingers are held together and outstretched (as if one was about to slap the shoulder, as in the other salute). This position should be held for a single inhalation or exhalation; to just jab with the thumb and end the salute is considered insulting.

(All three of these salutes are used as responses, when one has been saluted.)

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When addressing officers of superior rank, the word "sir" is the all-purpose formal address. "Sorn" is an added term of respect, somewhere between "trusted" and "worthy" in meaning, and is applied thus: "Sorn sir."

"Sorn" is also used in the other direction (by higher ranks addressing lower), but instead of "sir," it's added (or not added, if the speaker is grumpy or disapproving or merely bored) to the word "trusty."

Moreover, in general (i.e. when speaking in barracks or the streets, not in front of a Lord or Palace official or at a nobles' revel), Watch officers tend to ignore rank formalities when their ranks are similar (for instance, the leader of a Watch patrol would think something was wrong, or he was being mocked, if the men of his own patrol started calling him "sir" or "sorn sir," and so would a senior commander, if officers one rank lower than him did the same thing. This is due in part to the practice, now almost universal in the Watch, of carefully being VERY formal and polite when you think your superior is making a mistake, or breaking the rules, or just being an ox-haunch (= making an ass of him/her -self): in other words, clearly indicating your disapproval by tone and excessive formality without actually saying a single word of disagreement.

It's important to note that the Watch places far more importance on diligent behaviour on duty, and springing to the aid of/thoughtfulness towards one's fellow Watch officers, than on matters of etiquette. There's little or no discipline (beyond a sharp comment) for missing a salute or stumbling over another officer's title; the Watch prides itself on being 'family' (albeit a gruff, ungentle 'slap-on-the-back, mock-one's-fellows' family) and not 'a bunch of sniff-nosed, post-headed warriors.'

Various Realms sources have described Watch patrols as using a variety of ranks, uniforms, and strengths, for the very good reason that the Watch is continually varying such things, experimenting with this and that and trying to manage two impossibly-conflicting aims: to SOMETIMES catch miscreants by surprising them with persons they don't identify as Watch officers, and to USUALLY reassure citizens and enable them to cry for ready aid by allowing them to readily identify Watch officers from afar, on sight, due to distinctive uniforms (and at night, distinctive lanterns and the like). What can be said with certainty is that all Watch patrols will be armed, and will have more than one 'Watch horn' among its officers (signal horns that officers can blow various [and slightly altered from time to time] patterns of calls with, to: summon aid; let others know that an alert or search is now ended/someone has been found; warn Watch away from a dangerous spot or delicate situation; call in magical assistance or healers... and so on). Inevitably Watch officers become experts in particular neighbourhoods, but the Watch has made an effort in recent years to rotate patrol duties, mixing 'area veterans' with men from other areas of the city, so every Watch officer at least knows the street layout (and places of treacherous footing or bad visibility or particular ambush danger) of the entire city.

Some Realms sources give the names of various Watch officers, usually of high rank, but here are two hardy, experienced Watch veterans (men of low and middling rank who're happy to remain so):

Burlagh Stementor: a fat, hairy man of great sagging jowls, breasts, and belly-folds, who grumbles, wheezes, farts, and growls almost constantly as he lurches along the streets. He can't climb any longer, but can run (and tackle) with astonishing speed, is a strong swimmer, and has arms and shoulders of prodigious strength (he can bend iron bars and gates open). Never forgets a face, and 'knows everyone' in Dock Ward and South Ward.

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Heldrokh Murtim: a tall, thin, poker-faced man of nondescript looks and very dry humour (never known to laugh, and rarely known to smile), who remembers and recites legal statements, proclamations, contracts, and conversations PRECISELY. An expert in North Ward.

So saith Ed.

To this, I should add that Ed's short story in REALMS OF DRAGONS has some brief scenes involving Watch patrols, in the streets, under duress.

Ed has a houseguest this week and will probably remain rather e-silent, but Thy Hooded One remains on duty, as ever, to field Realmslore requests, juggle them uneasily for a few days, and whenever possible concoct answers from Ed's notes.

love to all,
THO

On September 29, 2004 THO said: Hello, kuje31. Aluroon's request is somewhat thorny on the NDA front and on the design front. Here's my preliminary take:

1. How many Elven High Mages are left in the Realms?

A: I know Ed's NOT ever going to give a clear answer on this, because it restricts Realms designers, fiction writers, and DMs too much, and does so for no clear gain. A precise answer, unless one is looking for confirmation of extinction or a very small number, is useless. (How does 342 help more than 347?) If it's a preliminary query to: "Thanks for the total, okay, now please list them," I'm afraid THAT reply isn't going to happen, either. It's just bad design. On the other hand, giving a rough idea of the relative scarcity, collective power, and influence of High Mages.

2. And how are they spread out (how many in Evermeet, how many in Evereska, etc.)?

A: Yes, Ed can probably provide a (qualified) answer on this, and I'll get after him to do so.

3. Also if there are any plans in the works for books that would give us some High Mage info.

A: Yes. (And no, Ed can't say ANYTHING more: NDAs.)

So there you have it. For now.

love to all,
THO

On September 30, 2004 THO said: FoolishOwl, I think you're right: Ed's world-view of living in balance with nature (brought about more by living in the city but having grandparents whom he visited, who lived on their own farms in the country, than by the movements of the Sixties, though I'm sure they both legitimized Ed's views, in his own mind, AND made them seem 'cool' to the very young man he then was) has heavily influenced what the Realms is and how it's been

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presented to the rest of us. For one thing, Ed can 'think like races other than human' better than any other DM I've ever met, and design the social life and domestic details of creatures (for example, the portrait of the yuan-ti he presented in Serpent Kingdoms) accordingly.

I know that as a player, I loved to view the Realms (from Shadowdale outwards) as one great living, breathing landscape, an approach Ed constantly encouraged by the word-pictures he painted, and the challenges and events he dropped into our laps. It's a great way to view real life, too: as a great, endlessly-unrolling tapestry, in which we all just get to briefly weave our own personal little threads... a tapestry that will just go rolling on after our thread has snapped and we are no more, but that which (if we weave with sufficient beauty and care) we might be able to influence the design of, in tiny ways, by inspiring or teaching other weavers.

Whew. Heavy stuff, and my eyes are suspiciously... bright. I think I'll go make some tea and bid all your fellow scribes adieu for another night. Ed e-mailed me to say that he's very tired but very happy, after a second day of enjoying the sights (this time of Prince Edward County).

Bright weavings, all,
THO

October 1, 2004: Hello, fellow scribes.

Ed e-sent me his handout notes for his Worldbuilding workshop at Phantasm, with permission to share with you all. He stresses that this is just a framework for discussion/list of reminders of "elements and topics not to forget" rather than hard 'how to' data -- and that it's just one approach to crafting a setting.

Here follow Ed's words:

First, what do you AND YOUR PLAYERS (as DM, it's your job to entertain them, remember) want in play? How much acting, how much game-rules? Intrigue in a city, or exploring wilderness? Mainly fighting horrible monsters, or mainly fighting sinister NPCs? Lots of traps/no traps? Lots of magic/little or no magic?

Era: Medieval? Three Musketeers? Exploring the unknown in a fantasy equivalent of the time of Columbus? Gates to our modern world? What?

From these things, you can decide the tone of your setting.

Anything special about the landscape (wild magic, dead magic, mountains, desert, caves or deep woods or ravines or other difficult terrain teeming with monsters, etc., mountains as barriers, endless seas with islands so you spend all your time sailing except when you're fighting pirates or BEING a pirate, perhaps a central lake or sea for easy travel across the setting) that affects play.

If you're going to use a lot of published adventures (what we used to call "modules") what elements (kingdoms, particular monsters, specific priesthoods or types of faiths) do they incorporate/demand?

These are basics, but think about them and WRITE YOUR DECISIONS DOWN. Most people don't bother, and it shows.

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From these basics, it's time to plan.

For every topic, decide what's common knowledge (what most inhabitants know) and then your DM secrets.

First, your 'heartland' setting or main country.

A quick overview of how most inhabitants live their lives (farmers? miners? fisherfolk? loggers? crafters? city or rural or frontier?) and the economy works, and laws and their enforcement, if any. What races live there? How do they regard each other (the cliché 'dwarves and elves hate each other, everybody hates the orcs' standard, or something else)?

Who rules? Who REALLY rules?

What's the general attitude towards adventurers? If you need healing, where do you go and how do you get it? Ditto, supplies. Do adventurers immediately get enemies (evil priests, outlaws watching them to pounce, heavy-law-enforcing nobles who don't want armed swaggerers in their lands)

Rival kingdoms? Establish ongoing and 'right now' CONFLICTS, both inside your 'heartland' country and between it and others. Trade and travel: routes, easy/hard, how done [wagons, dragonback flying, sailing on seas or rivers], does it allow smuggling, adventurers getting in and out of a country quickly, and so on.

Time to START drawing a map. Where's the treasure going to be? Why hasn't someone taken it years before your adventurers were born?

What are the favourite legends about treasures and monsters and adventurers and outlaws? Who are the people (rulers, nobles, high priests, whoever) that everyone "knows about" and gossips about, even if they've never seen them; who are the 'big wheels' in this world? Who are the power groups, especially hidden outlaw or rebel bands and secret societies?

Any local flavour you want to add (to make you and your players FEEL like your imaginary places are real) like strange names, customs, and so on?

When thinking about character deeds and misfortunes, don't forget to cover CONSEQUENCES (like diseases, disfigurements, reputation). This goes double for PCs and their ongoing relationships with clergy.

Which brings us to gods, priesthoods, and holy rules and rituals. Decisions must be made, because PC and NPC personal freedoms are determined by setting (climate, weather, monsters, terrain, need for food and water), rulership (laws and monarchs or equivalent), and faith (personal beliefs and how much priests or holy messengers or the gods themselves 'horn in' and dictate or threaten people into particular behaviours)

For the usual D&D setting, we start with 'where you go for healing and what'll it cost' and quickly progress into: major clergy, 'key' spells, creed (the rules characters must follow: do's and don'ts, attitudes to particular races, deeds, and events), the personal aims (and views) of priests, the ambitions of the powerful priests and the church as a whole, and so on.

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So, we end up with:

- o Country (climate, topography with dominant flora and fauna, industries, brief overview tour)
- o People (racial makeup of populace, general attitudes, overall nature of everyday life [rural farming])
- o Faiths
- o Rulership
- o Authority (the court and/or bureaucrats)
- o Laws and Law Enforcement (plus armies, if any)
- o Power Groups
- o Powerful People: NPCs and groups (social status: nobles?)
- o Locales (cities and other settlements, or in a city-based campaign, individual neighbourhoods)
- o Flavour/Colour Stuff: coinage, customs (births, deaths, weddings), strange names, Cool Stuff like enchanted wells and shapechangers, and suchlike, legends, how do people dress, some notes on how news/rumor travels and how fast
- o Intrigues that PCs are going to get mixed up in
- o Adventures: what will the PCs start off wanting to go and see? Why? (Do they need cash? Respect? What are the goads?)... and what will you as DM end up running them through? How will this feed into future adventures and intrigues?

So saith Ed. Nothing new here, and lots missing, but hopefully a helpful summary.

love to all,
THO

On October 2, 2004 THO said: Blueblade,

I'll relay your questions to Ed in the usual way. He's still entertaining, and so might take most of the day to reply, or even longer, but I can start to answer for him:

Question 1: When he gets going, Ed is one of the FASTEST writers I have ever met, heard of, or worked with. A throwback to the pulp writers who wrote a (much shorter than today's, but just as complex) book a week, or even two a week (e.g. John Creasey).

Question 2: I have asked Ed this very same question myself. He replied that although the Old Mage will have to put in an appearance from time to time, he emphatically does NOT intend these books to be dominated by EI.

THO

On October 3, 2004 THO said: LC modules?

Ed contributed the Vast to LC2, did the City of Ravens Bluff accessory, and wrote at least two of the LC modules handed out to RPGA members for tournament use (Ed is a Charter Life member of the RPGA, and at one time was empowered to write certs, like Wes Nicholson in Australia, but I've no idea what part he takes in current RPGA doings; the constant "computer crash and loss of all our points" was a source of ongoing hilarity amongst the 'original' Realms players, but I do recall Ed receiving a Grand Master ribbon at one point, and at another time seeing a GenCon tournament printout that listed him as a 9th level judge and 6th level player, and I also seem to

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remember him receiving a service medal). "Spellstorm" was the first of Ed's for-tournament-use modules, I believe, and "The Gauntlet of the Sisterhood" and "Thraldigar's Tower" may have been others. BTW, the RPGA version of Spellstorm, with all of his visual aids removed so as to strip it of its mystery-solving character, displeased him very much. Sigh.
THO

October 3, 2004: Hail, fellow scribes. I bring you some words of Ed;

As my delightfully hooded lady commented, NDAs prevent me from revealing overmuch about Elven High Magic or its practitioners, but I can say that Evermeet holds AT LEAST 26 elven High Mages, and that the mainland holds more than that, widely scattered (and no, I'm not going to say more: that's where the NDAs come in. :})

And I echo THO's reply to your third question. "Yes," and no more. :}

None of the Knights of Myth Drannor trilogy novels are finished yet, but I don't want Elminster to feature prominently in them. He must 'be there' in several scenes, but this is the Knights' story, not his, and I hope to keep it that way.

And yes, I produce things at a great rate because I can write quickly, and because I'm still learning how to say "No." :} Seriously, I love to write, I live to write, and far more than many people, I've managed to arrange both myself and my life so I manage to do a lot of putting my bum on a chair and my fingers on a keyboard and actually writing, instead of just talking about it or planning to do it.

Falconfar is a "vaportome" trilogy at the moment, and may remain so for some time (some deals fell through). It seems some publishers (not WotC nor Tor Books; this series was offered to neither of them) are seizing on the current downturn in the publishing industry to try to roll back payment scales and contract conditions to the 1930s or so (claiming to be unable to afford to pay advances, and to only be able to pay royalty rates of a few percent MINUS all publishing costs; conditions that leave writers who accept them unable to even pay for enough food to survive the time it takes to type the works), and although I've been known to do gaming products 'for free' out of friendship and because of interest in participating in a particular setting or project, I won't let publishers who I know to already be fat and rich despite a history of crying the financial blues continue that act on my back. Not when I can concentrate on my first love, the Realms, and on projects over which I'll have a little more artistic control. No hard feelings towards them; they'll just have to find other suckers to write for them, that's all. :}

So saith Ed.

He did e-mention that he hopes to have a leetle more time for converse in the weeks ahead-but then, hope is a shining horse that many dreamers ride.

love to all,
THO

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On October 4, 2004 THO said: fourthmensch, Ed's 'What Your Character Knows' notes were furnished to each of the Knights with their character background. The Lisen details came from Lanseril's notes, because he spent some time in a hut very close to the west bank of the River Lis, being trained by a senior druid (and so knew all about the fauna, flora, and natural processes and cycles of the terrain right in front of him during his instruction). At a later time, we Knights journeyed to this area, and Ed agreed that Ian Hunter (who played Lanseril) could share this portion of his notes with the rest of us, to game-simulate Lanseril Snowmantle telling his fellow Knights what they were heading into.

So the Notes WERE encyclopaedic, but also had big gaps. I've seen the 'Player Pack' that Ed prepared for The Company of the Stag (one of his later library program groups: a chartered band of PC adventurers whose careers were fated to last for thirteen weekly four-hour play sessions), and it was some forty pages long, with an index. He gave the TSR designers a copy of it, as I recall.

Which reminds me of an idea discussed elsewhere: a party of PC adventurers who were ALL bastard offspring of Azoun IV. Ed did just this with a library PC group, although only the Cormaeril and the Thundersword sons knew their true parentage by the end of play. He's not sure just how suspicious the other players were as to the bloodlines of their characters, but said the whole thing made for fascinating roleplaying, "even better than I expected, despite a recurring player tendency to just say to the Nine Hells with it all and hack something, rather than wading into the intrigues and trying to worm out more truths."

Just one more spicy little slice of Realmslore.
THO

On October 6, 2004 THO said: Hello, all.

simontrinity, Ed tells me he's just sent what he called "a rambling screed" on Cormyr off to the Realms-List (or rather, to Jeff Thetford, to post there) that will answer your question. So after it appears there, I'll repost it here (if that's okay with you, Alaundo; it's okay with Ed).

Melfius, Ed warns me that a lot of Halastran info is behind his NDA wall. Apprentices (beyond what's been dug up thus far by my able fellow scribes) in particular. So, what precise narrow-focus questions would you like answered? (The narrower the better, as it allows Ed to pick his way through the NDA minefield and answer all he can.)

Love to all,
THO

October 7, 2004: Well met, fellow scribes. Here follows what Ed called his 'rambling screed' on Cormyr, with a few VERY minor amendments he's made since for clarity. I've not quoted the posts on the Realms-list that monitor Jeff Thetford asked him to respond to, because Ed's comments suggest very well what they were. (One poster, Jimbo Bean, has since made a brief comment there about Ed's misunderstanding of demihumans that puzzles me, but as yet neither Ed nor any other Realms-list member has responded to it. If it develops into something

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interesting, Realmslore-wise, I'm sure Ed will be asked for a response that may well find its way here.) Anyhoo, here are the words of Ed:

Before I weigh into this very interesting converse on Cormyr, let me say how delighted I still get, after all these years, when folks discuss my creation so passionately. It's an honour to listen in.

So please don't think I'm angry when someone posts something I disagree with, or slams this or that detail or concept of the Realms. I'm pleased that you all care enough about the Realms to form and argue opinions.

Some sort of updated coverage of Cormyr is needed, but when such a thing ultimately appears, its contents may well not match what I say hereafter. However, until then, my blatherings are, by the Realms agreement, canon by definition (I'm aware that some folks disagree with this, but, well, too bad: just as Tolkien was THE expert on Middle Earth and McCaffrey is the source for Pern, I'm the guy for the Realms, something that would be accepted without question if there were no Realms publications except my fiction writings and the Realms wasn't a shared world - - and something that's enshrined as part of the shared world agreement that brought you the published Realms, so like it or not, we're all stuck with it).

It may seem ridiculous to speak of what's "correct" and "not correct" about an imaginary land painted in colourfully imaginary details, but I'm going to try to do so. In fact, I'd better, because the sequence and scope of published Realms products thus far have, somehow, made it irritatingly difficult to convey the full 'feel' of Cormyr.

It may surprise some who read this to learn that I think the Charles Phipps interpretation of the Azuth/Elminster conversation at the beginning of Temptation is pretty close to accurate (with two important exceptions). The problem is the next step. Too many folks on this list aren't "thinking Realms" (considering how creatures of and in the Realms would think) when they view Realms events and situations. In this case: faith. The whole point of BELIEVING in gods (in Realms terms, passionately worshipping deities one knows to be real because they 'walk among us') is that both Azuth and Elminster would come to know this about Mystra and love and serve her ANYWAY.

This is where Charles gets it wrong (one of the exceptions I noted earlier, the other being the idea that Mystra doesn't love El): the notion that somehow Azuth and El both lack the 'dignity' to leave Mystra. Their faith IS their dignity. A modern real-world Western and essentially secular individual might have a hard time accepting this, but someone of Faerun wouldn't. This 'unable to see the Realms except through modern eyes' viewpoint governs or influences many of the posted comments on Cormyr, too. Before I wade into those, let me just briefly deal with the folly of equating 'Mystra as manipulator' with 'Mystra doesn't love her tools.' Of COURSE she does. Not only are they her champions, but in the case of Elminster, he's the link she desperately needs, and clings to, to retain some memory of her onetime mortality: her sense of self. To lose him is to lose her most important anchor (something even her successor realized - - hence the later Mystra's behaviour in ELMINSTER IN HELL). Azuth was her former mortal anchor, and his achievement of divinity changed him enough that she could no longer use him for that - - and discovered just how desperately she missed it.

Right, on to Cormyr (as I continue to ramble). And as usual, the chief focus of disputes are Azoun, Alusair, and the nobles. I hope to soon show you a little more of Alusair's character (including, yes, her sexual character) in a future Realms publication, and more of all of these matters in the Knights of Myth Drannor trilogy.

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Charles is right again when he says that Azoun and Alusair are/were great rulers and "stomped on the nobility." However, I disagree with his use of "but" in front of "stomped," and his generalized use of "the nobility." As Jerry Davis correctly pointed out, the nobles aren't monolithic: they hold all sorts of different degrees of loyalty and personal like and dislike of the ruler and various Obarskyrs (and for that matter, each other). Inevitably, Realms publications are concerned with adventure and therefore strife, and tend to focus on treason and 'bad' nobles and disputes: by and large, you don't get to see all that much in print of the (vast majority of) 'boring' loyal, law-abiding nobles. Both Azoun and Alusair stomped on PARTICULAR nobles, usually for blatant treason or for defying the Crown in times when the realm was in crisis. If one looks back at the history of Cormyr, one can easily make the case for Azoun and his younger daughter being far more patient and gentle with ah, 'overly independent' nobles than many previous monarchs.

The nobles can't force any sort of Magna Carta for two reasons: they aren't a monolithic group (their own feuds and rivalries, between this noble house and that, are far stronger than their disagreements with the Crown), and the Court (the centralized bureaucracy, supported by the War Wizards) are running affairs in Cormyr in such a way that the nobles have no real beefs except what their personal greed and grudges engender: in other words, they don't have enough common, strong discontent to ever rise up and conspire all together. One poster views Cormyr's nobles as being on the verge of overthrowing the Obarskyrs because the "downsizing" of two noble families has brought home to them that their hereditary rights are threatened. A Sembian might well see things this way, and so think every second noble patriarch of Cormyr can be sweet-whispered into open rebellion, but that Sembian would be wrong.

All of the Mages Royal (Vangerdahast and his predecessors) have taken great pains to structure the laws of Cormyr, with full support from the heralds, to make it bluntly, explicitly clear that all nobles hold their lands and titles "at the favour of" the Crown. They have personal rights of treatment (the reason why Azoun exiled the noble relatives of actual traitors, instead of beheading them all - - which would have been wiser, for personal security reasons, and also the reason why he turned a blind eye to their hastily packing up and departing with almost all of their wealth and mobile goods, instead of sending Purple Dragons to seize it all at swordpoint), yes, but any monarch of Cormyr can disinherit them on a whim. (Kings of Cormyr have done it before Azoun; he wasn't breaking any new ground, or law for that matter, when he 'broke' the Bleths and the Cormaerils. There's also a tradition of some disinherited noble individuals winning back their personal standing by their demonstrated loyalty to the realm or the Crown.)

Of course, that's how the War Wizards gain the support of the nobles who'd otherwise hate and fear them enough to slay them at every covert chance they got: we, the War Wizards, are YOUR defense against an angry king, or a bad king, or just an Obarskyr who happens to hate your tripes.

"I like to give credit though and view if nothing else, Faerun is actually DIFFERENT in morality and not existing in a modern times world morality like so many other fantasy worlds." Now THIS poster has hit the nail on the proverbial head. Exactly. Judge the Realms by its own codes, not by our own modern real-world ones (precisely because so many folks here and elsewhere hold a wide variety of different views, and end up arguing over the Realms in part because they use words to mean different things, and start speaking from their own differing world-views). I fully admit that sometimes it's hard to glean from published Realmslore precisely what those morals are, in a particular place in the Realms, and OF COURSE every DM can cast aside such things to run their own campaign version of Waterdeep or the Dales or Cormyr differently, but the published "shared" version does express, in however confused and fragmented a manner, belief and ethics systems different than our own. (Trust me: I put most of them there.) It's a subtle layer that can readily be ignored by those who want their Realms more clear-cut and simple for their

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home games - - but should never be ignored by sages of Realmslore (including Realms authors and game designers).

The posted comment about Alusair having more "kingly" qualities than her father is an example of this. 'Kingly' by whose standards? Father and daughter were quite alike when young, aside from obvious differences in gender and temper (Azoun has more charm and can keep his cool a trifle longer, and Alusair is more short-tempered and impatient with honeyed words), but Azoun was tempered by Filfaeril's diplomacy and Vangerdahast's dealings, whereas Alusair (as many a child does) rebelled against them.

Azoun learned to win more battles with honey than with vinegar, whereas Alusair rejected all the petty, empty words of Court and noble etiquette (of the elder nobles of her father's generation) in favour of riding to hunt and fight and make love and rough-house with the young nobles of her age. She reveled in the opportunity to brawl in actual fistfights with her 'Blades,' and they reveled in their opportunities to not only bed the woman they came to regard as a friend and their rightful social and battlefield leader, but to shape her character - - and so shape the future of the realm to be 'better' than the velvet-tongued intrigues of their own parents (whom THEY were rebelling against).

For his part, Vangey approved, as did the senior War Wizards. Oh, Alusair and her Blades had to be watched carefully and constantly to make sure they didn't fall under the influences of the wrong people, but with that precaution met, they were a breath of fresh air thrusting the nobility of the realm (over the years to come) away from decadence and increasing 'unfitness' to more intelligently and energetically support order, prosperity, and good governance throughout the realm.

In short, the Blades represented a near-future nobility who (unlike their parents) wouldn't almost all be detrimental-to-commoners drones or veiled traitors (some of whom pursued intrigues as personal entertainment, caring nothing for the good of the realm but not caring much about the harm they might do to it, either). They'd be men who'd roughed it in the wilderlands, been wounded and rescued by their fellows, done messy and demeaning work with their hands and backs - - and so could 'walk the walk' rather than just talking about it. Interestingly (given the converse about Alusair possibly being barren), in my original Realmslore (never touched by TSR because of the Code of Conduct, of course), Vangey told Alusair just that when she started to 'run wild with the boys,' precisely because he didn't want any awkwardness among her partners over such thoughts as: "gee, I might get her pregnant and then the King will literally slay me, only SLOWLY" or "heh-heh: if I get her with child AND get her to love me, I'm damn near 'next king of Cormyr,' aren't I?" to arise. She could sweep such problems away at any time by admitting that she couldn't have children. (Vangey was, of course, applying magical contraception to Alusair from a very young age, without her knowing it. Later, she accepted it willingly - - but may well chafe from time to time over its necessity). Alusair does take commoners as lovers (she's no snob who only likes dashing young nobles), and prefers physically strong men, but Vangey and the other War Wizards (such as Laspeera) have been subtly steering her into building and maintaining her fellowship of Blades over the years. Not eschewing dalliances with commoners, but letting her see, sometimes through planted dream-visions, how important and glorious it could be to forge a fellowship with nobles with whom she could defend the realm in years to come.

The other half of the 'kingly' comment puzzles me. Azoun seems "like a Viking ruling over Agincourt"? Now, I PRESUME this doesn't mean a 'Northman raider conquering a bloody battlefield where French knights have fallen riding vainly into the volleys of arrows sent by English yeomen archers,' and that the poster really meant to say something like 'a brawling barbarian lording it over sophisticated, cultured nobles.'

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If that's the case, I must take great issue with it. The poster seems to be rooting a perception of Azoun (as some sort of barbarian) in a modern-world moral judgement about Azoun's habit of bedding good-looking females who came within reach. Now, Azoun's appetites may have been legendary, but his BEHAVIOUR was nothing unusual for the nobles of Cormyr, many of whom, male and female, also behave like this. It's not to everyone's taste, and there are dignified and 'proper' ways of romancing and ways of flirtation and seduction that are seen as less than tasteful, but among the nobles, who have access to very reliable herbal contraception (and magical contraception, too, via the War Wizards), 'swinging' is not only tolerated but expected. What nobles have to guard against is unintended, unwanted offspring who will have a claim on the family titles and lands (i.e. children born out of wedlock as a result of dalliances with individuals from other noble families).

The royals are an exception: EVERY noble family wants more ties with the ruling Obarskysrs, because such exalt their position in the pecking order and their influence at Court. Moreover, except for those he'd made personal enemies of, Azoun IV was VERY popular among both commoners and nobles. He was a handsome, charismatic man, dashing at feasts and on the battlefield alike. He was seen as fair and just, and most importantly as understanding and CARING about every one of his subjects, high and low. He had the knack of getting gruff old men, scared young lads, and worn-ragged housewives alike to sit down and spill their innermost opinions and feelings to, without fearing royal rage or reprisals. He often helped the humble, and always dealt with the common folk fairly. Quite simply, the realm loved him.

Nobles older than Azoun IV sniffed and grumbled about him in the usual 'look down our noses at everything' manner, of course, and certain nobles - - those he'd exiled and dispossessed, in particular - - hated or disliked him. However, throughout his reign, Azoun had a handy focus for popular dislike: Vangerdahast.

The Royal Magician was the man most folk hated and feared, if they felt ill will towards the Crown at all. Azoun was very likable, so it was easy for folk to blame unpopular things he said and did on the influence (perhaps even mind-governing spells!) of Vangerdahast.

So it was almost a matter of pride among female nobles AND their male relations to have a touch or four of "Azoun's favour" among the family babies. Those who didn't want such things, and who had any inkling of the ahem, bestowal of his seed, could call on the contraceptive means available to all nobles (the same means Filfaeril, Tanalasta, Alusair, and Azoun himself could all call upon, given proper prior opportunities). Hence the lack of any "scare" about Azoun (or Alusair, if one suspected her claims to be 'barren' to be so much diplomatic piffle) bedding one's own favoured noble son or daughter.

The posted assumption about Chauntea's blessing making Tanalasta very likely to conceive at her first bedding by Rowen (low Cormyrean slang for this is 'ploughing' and nobles call it 'riding,' by the way, for fairly obvious reasons) is correct.

Though some 'oldblood' nobles may choose to sniff at the Obarskysrs as behaving like uncultured barbarians (which usually means a particular Obarskyr has made a decree or treaty, or consorted with someone, that the looking-down-their-own-nose noble disagrees with), no Cormyrean alive today (with the possible exception of some long-lived elves who keep low public profiles) truly believes the Obarskysrs are barbarians. Rather, the Obarskysrs ARE the Realm, its founders and its central bloodline. So Azoun IV (who gave his life fighting for all Cormyr, as the War Wizards - - a VERY effective bunch of propagandists, when it suits them -- were very careful to make clear to the entire kingdom, complete with hastily-composed ballads) is an admired hero, more like a revered rock star than any sort of 'barbarian.'

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Note that I'm NOT saying he was perfect: Ben is quite right to remind us of that and of the legitimate grievances any 'good' character can end up having against a ruler; I'm speaking now of the public perception of Azoun IV.

In short, Azoun was very much NOT hated by every noble. Quite the reverse, in fact: he was gallant to the ladies, a good drinking buddy to some of the guys, a sympathetic ear to everyone, an admired war leader, and quietly loaned a lot of the "crusty old brigade" nobles funds or quietly forgave their debts in return for "the noble service" they'd rendered the realm. He was NOT an unsubtle bear of a man, nor stupid. He was very shrewd, though yes, I believe Alusair is a trifle smarter than her father was. Filfaeril is the smartest of them all, by a long rod.

Which brings us to the "oh my gosh, look at all of randy Azoun's bastards - - Cormyr totters on the brink of civil war!" discussion. Ascending the throne of Cormyr always involves support from the War Wizards and significant nobles if there is no clear legitimate Obarskyr heir.

The moment there is an Obarskyr heir on the scene (assuming that person is seen as healthy enough in mind and body to function as a monarch), everyone, from guilds to Purple Dragons to dung sweepers, will agree that the Obarskyr heir is "the only true King" (or Queen). They might not agree with much enthusiasm, but the alternative is far worse. Remember: no shrewd noble can contemplate a rebellion or civil war as something they'll likely win or even survive. Not with the War Wizards as an integral part of the realm, and Purple Dragons around who have personal loyalty to Alusair and to the memory of Azoun IV. And the nobles are 'on top' in the status quo: any attack on the status quo threatens them more than anyone else.

Rather than shattering your own beloved homeland in a bloody war, it's much more desirable to befriend and aid the Steel Regent, earn her respect and approval, and be as close as possible to Azoun V as he grows up, so as to win HIS respect and friendship. And everyone can see that Alusair's TRYING to become more diplomatic, and to do what's best for the realm. For one thing, she visits scores of places and directly asks the advice of everyone, nobles and commoners alike, wanting to know what angers them WITHOUT filtering everything through 'local lords' and courtiers. She makes promises and keeps them. It's taking a long time for some folks to accept the 'new Alusair,' but most of them see her as "the best thing the gods sent us, if they had to take her father away from us."

So having scores of Azoun IV's bastards running around is seen (by Vangey and others) as "strengthening the bloodlines of the Realm," not "thrusting the realm straight into civil war." If there were only one or two bastards, perhaps they'd represent a threat to the current holder of the throne (if backed by the right private armies and handlers, possibly traitor-nobles or ambitious Sembians). However, there are more than a hundred bastard sons and daughters of Azoun IV, and most noble families have at least one - - so they all offset each other by their very wealth of numbers. And yes, Vangey and all of the senior War Wizards (not just Laspeera and Caladnei) know very well who and where ALL of Azoun's bastards are. Not to mention those of Bhereu, Thomdor, Rhigaerd II, and so on and so forth. :}

What has weakened Cormyr so much in these last few years is the war against the Devil Dragon (and the ghazneths and goblins). So many able-bodied fighting men and women lost their lives that the realm lies vulnerable to poor harvests and starvation (not enough folk left to tend and harvest enough fields), to Zhent and outlaw raiders out of the Stonelands (particularly once Shade appeared and such lurkers stopped thinking of the Stonelands as their private, cozy little impenetrable stronghold), and from various Sembian-sponsored attempts to grab land and set up (through bribery) puppet rulers, Court officials, and nobles. Add to this the ambitions of nobles (and exiled former nobles, operating primarily out of Westgate) seeking to gain power or take

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control of the infant Azoun V and thereby rule of the kingdom, and you have the present tense situation. (My REALMS OF SHADOW short story should serve to illustrate potential threats, and ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER show something of the 'business as usual, conspiracies as usual' tenor of life in Cormyr.)

The retirement of Vangerdahast has left Alusair seemingly alone to guide Cormyr (I say "seemingly" because to think thus is to seriously underestimate Laspeera, Caladnei, Filfaeril, Alaphondar, and the Highknights such as Rhauligan), and so everyone with an interest in a weakened Cormyr, or in controlling its ruler, is taking a keen look at the Forest Kingdom. Such gazers would of course include various Red Wizard and Zhent factions, trading costers, and Sembian nobles. (It's also fair to say that Caladnei is very much "learning on the job" and a much weaker Royal Magician than Vangey was, that Alaphondar the Sage is about as far as one can get from a strong man of action, and that there are frighteningly few veteran Highknights still alive after the Dragon War. A competent War Wizard gone rogue would be a REAL problem for Cormyr, just now.)

Alusair's 'wanton' behaviour has earned her the disapproval of the older, more conservative nobles (NOT her Blades or the female nobles of the same age, most of whom were very glad to have Alusair take the 'randy pranksome pesterers with wandering hands' out of their bodices and from under their skirts at every revel or 'private' moment), of the city gossips who delight in disapproving of darn near EVERYTHING, and of the more conservative commoners (who DO have to worry about unwanted offspring, or may follow faiths that don't smile upon frequent and casual lovemaking), but that doesn't make her "unpopular." It's more that her abrasiveness has made her a lot of enemies, and her ways have made most people wary of her. That's a long way from all Cormyr wanting her gone and overthrown as Regent. Now, if she were to publicly butcher Azoun V and announce she was now Queen forever, that would be VERY different.

Nor does the loss of Tilverton reflect badly on Alusair - - because many folk of Cormyr think of it as some foreign fort or other, occupied by the Purple Dragons "just to keep the Zhents off our backs," not as part of the realm. Unless you (as a citizen of Cormyr) travel to and from the northern Dales, Tilverton is just (to you) "that rough and ragged place in Tilver's Gap," that Azoun's troops occupied as a protectorate. In the wake of the war against the Devil Dragon, with the Purple Dragons a pale shadow of their former strength, it merely makes sense to pull back from such outposts to rebuild Arabel and "guard our cabbages right outside our own doors." (Jason quite properly reminded us of how recent its annexation was, and how folk in the heart of Cormyr would regard its loss.)

Arabel and Marsember have traditionally been centers of undercover dissent, but with some of the nobles who built such feelings into undercover 'secret societies' and the like gone, this has largely lapsed into the age-old rivalries between cities ("Ah, them as sleeps in Suzail think the sun rises and sets out o' their own backsides, an' never think we of Arabel might have two wits of our own, in all our city!"). The folk of Arabel love the staunchly loyal Myrmeen Lhal, and the fierce energy with which Dowager Queen Filfaeril oversaw the rebuilding of Arabel, "the gem of our realm," has touched and mollified Arabellans. The strong garrison has remained there, and for the time being, I'd scratch Arabel off any list of 'places that'll rebel the moment an Obarskyr back is turned.'

Marsember, now, is a different matter: exiled nobles are just across the water in Westgate, and all the old smuggling and slave-running concerns that want all authority gone or swept in confusion are still lurking. With Sembian investments in their pockets, yet.

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One last thing for now: one poster makes the mistaken assumption that commoners aren't trained in the arts of war or familiar with weapons. Not only are knives, scythes, and the tools of hunting (slings, javelins, bows, and boar-spears) all weapons many farm-folk are very familiar with, Purple Dragons are encouraged to train their children (both genders) and mates in how to raise the alarm, how to defend their home, where locally to run and hide and gather, and the basics of armed fighting. That's different from allowing everyone to swagger around with weapons at their belts, yes, but the original 'unfamiliar with weapons' assumption is incorrect.

I'm sure these comments will stir up many a response. Have at ye, fellow fans of the Realms.:}
Ed

So saith Ed.

I know he'll be responding to Halaster questions and probably the Shadovar query soon, though he remains frantically busy writing short-order-needed fiction and game lore today and tomorrow. I'll bring you what he writes, as soon as I get it.

love to all,
THO

October 8, 2004: Melfius, I bring you the rather frisky (and incomplete; see hereafter) replies of Ed, as follows:

1. [NDA]
2. Yes, but they've not been remembered by, or are not known to, our Realms sources consulted thus far. Perhaps they'll be revealed in the fullness of [NDA]
3. No. However, that doesn't mean no offspring exist. In fact, [NDA]
4. Halaster thought he was establishing MageFairs on his own, but in fact more than one deity of magic was whispering subtle suggestions in more than one mortal ear to bring it about. Otherwise, given the paranoid nature of most mages, it's likely the MageFairs would never have been more than Halaster waiting in some tranquil, remote locale for one or two mages to show up (and the Fairs would have ended the moment one arriving mage attacked, or was attacked by, another). As for who these deities and other mortals were, specifically, I'd have to [NDA]
5. [NDA]
6. A long time ago, specifically [NDA] in [NDA]
7. Like any long-lived mage, Halaster isn't what most other mortals would call 'normal,' and never will be. However, Mystra did some major mental healing (that also involved binding Halaster more closely to her service), 'offstage' in the latter part of ELMINSTER IN HELL and thereafter. Halaster did NOT become a Chosen, but reached a 'separate peace' with her in return for serving her as an agent (in the events recounted in ELMINSTER IN HELL). He still has his 'raving times,' but they're fewer, shorter, and less severe than before (i.e. he's far more in touch with reality, and more cunning and less reckless whilst in the throes of them); most of the time he's in complete control of himself - - and this is no longer governed by his location (in Undermountain or outside

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of it). That doesn't mean he's a 'happy camper.' For one thing, he's both enraged and ashamed at how many years he's wasted 'drifting' in sub-sanity, and is just climbing out of considering himself an utter failure and a rot-fungus on the face of Faerun and into deciding what he'll devote the rest of his life to. Consider him a magical whirlwind that's stopped spinning and is poised to decide what to do next. Tremble, Faerun, tremble.

8. Halaster HAD access to the Shadow Weave; much of his madness was due to Shar's whisperings (attempts to mind-control him), which is specifically what he meant by her 'touch.' Shar's influence gave him access to the Shadow Weave, but Halaster's aged, busy, brilliantly-magic-creative mind couldn't simultaneously handle mastery of both Weave and Shadow Weave, and so he was losing his sanity (and only thereby keeping Shar at bay: she couldn't control a mind in such internal chaos). Mystra in effect thrust Shar out (in any contest of pure magic and of mortal mastery of magic, in which Mystra and Shar can exert equal forces against each other, Mystra will always win, because she IS magic, and has supremacy) of Halaster's mind, banishing all traces of the Shadow Weave forever. What she left behind makes Halaster one of the few mortals whom Shar can never subvert, now. She can break his mind and his body, but not corrupt and come to control him. (In other words, he's equal to a Chosen of Mystra in this regard. The Chosen who've failed Mystra in the past have lost their sanity and 'fallen away from her love,' and so become corruptible.)

9. Yes. :}

:}

:}

Oh, ALL right: I'll unleash THO to answer this when she can (I know she's very busy this weekend), and at that time return with some feeble attempts to answer your other three questions, too.

Ed

So saith the Master.

Gawds, Halaster [shudder]! You WOULD have to make me relive those disasters, wouldn't you?
THO

On October 8, 2004 THO said: Hello again, all.

Gerath Hoan, I want to reassure you that Ed will in the fullness of time answer all the Realmslore queries put to him here that NDAs don't absolutely forbid him to answer. Some of them may take a LONG time, for four reasons:

1. Ed has three novels to write or rewrite between now and December 15th.
2. Ed answers lore queries almost daily for Realms designers, authors, and sub-license folk (computer game folk, etc.), and answers questions here and on the Realms-list, and works on both WotC website columns and charity work, and on non-Realms fiction and game design projects, AND (oh, yes) has a 'real job,' working in a library, too.

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3. Ed knows about a lot of Realms projects by other writers that involve topics, places, and characters he's been asked about. To avoid restricting those creatives, he doesn't want to answer any 'infringing' lore queries until he's at least seen a draft of all such projects, so as not to introduce (more) contradictions into Realmslore.

4. In many cases of broad-focus questions, there are very good design reasons not to give a definitive answer, because it will restrict future Realms possibilities for no better reason than to satisfy one poster's curiosity. Ed tries to limit this last reason to a specific, narrow interpretation, but a good example of what he doesn't want to do is the recent request to list (and therefore identify) and locate all Elven High Mages, on Evermeet and off Evermeet.

However, what zeathiel just asked (Hey! ZEATHIEL PLEASE NOTICE THIS! Ahem.) is fine: yes, there ARE more Chosen (not many, and some of them are very old, well-hidden, and by human standards rather 'inactive'), so a DM is free to add. Please bear in mind that Chosen aren't "superheroes for Good," but rather 'encourage-widespread-use-of-magic' agents of Mystra, who are sometimes given strange and seemingly boring tasks to do.

Right now, Ed's stuck on a writeup of Lathtarl's Lantern for Borch because the Paul Culotta adventure set therein published in DUNGEON happens to be one of the issues in Ed's subscription that never arrived (and the current publishers of the mag have no back issues of such old vintage). However, consider me Ed's Christmas Elf, who keeps a long and ever-lengthening list of "answers he's gotta give," and pesters him about them. Often. Hope this helps soothe the gnawing pangs of impatience for all who've posted here.

Oh, yes, one sneak peak: Ed just finished writing a lot of lore about Sembian mercantile practices, but I can't say when or where you'll see it. It's details I wish we Knights had known a lot earlier: it would have prevented a lot of blundering around on our parts when we had dealings with various "Rich Fat Merchants."

love to all,
THO

October 8, 2004: Beowulf, Ed says there are a LOT of stunningly impressive (and sometimes beautiful; they're not always the same thing) buildings in the Realms, some of them really being carved-out and sculpted mountain crags, but because of the wide divergence of races and faiths, no one has ever thought of assembling a "Seven Wonders" list or anything of the kind. Some posters have already mentioned buildings, and Ed will note a few in the future.

In the meantime, to answer your specific questions (paraphrasing Ed's notes to me):

No, the roofs of Lathanderite temples are usually rose-red tile (covered by bird droppings), and the soaring inner ceilings are usually rose-red stucco or painted plaster (dark red around the lower edges, lightening to a glorious orange-rose at the uppermost domes), NOT depictions of anything.

Yes, temples of Sune often have beautiful life-sized and smaller statues and statuettes of beautiful women, usually at least partially unclad and usually depicted dancing, sometimes depicted with expressions of rapture, but otherwise expressions of eager happiness. Not always,

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and not always of Sune herself; often these are remembrances of faithful (now dead) priestesses of the goddess.

Cathedrals of Gond are seldom seen on the mainland, where shrines are the rule. These are typically dominated by extremely complicated, large 'perpetual motion'-like machines, wherein small pushes by priests and by faithful worshippers are magnified by flywheels, gears, counterweights, and so on into impressive and long-lasting symphonies of movement that seldom do anything useful, but sometimes serve to drill things, grind things, and so on.

I hope this is of help.

Love to all,
THO

On October 9, 2004 THO said: Hello again, all.

Ed is overwhelmed with family at the moment (Canadian Thanksgiving), and with looking up lore and old publishing details for WotC, but will send me replies for you all as soon as he can. On the phone he said to say a fond hello to Steven Schend and invite him to drop in on this thread "any time, and often."

He also said, Gareth, that you remember correctly about the "real" Manshoon, and that "more will be revealed in the fullness of time."

Heh-heh.

Love to all,
THO

October 10, 2004: Hello, all. I bring the words of Ed of the Greenwood, in reply to fourthmensch:

Hi! As you guessed, I wasn't involved at all in the creation or development of the city of Shade and its inhabitants, nor the Shadow Weave itself. The latter came from an orphaned Birthright novel by Rich Baker, and the former were the 'big Realms event' for the novel line that provided the in-game coverage of the 'bolting on' of all of the Shadow-related material to the Realms. As you and many other Realms fans have noticed, there's a degree of awkwardness in how the Realms and the Shadow-stuff go together.

My own personal 'home' Realms campaign exists primarily to entertain my long-time players. In that Realms, the original, the Time of Troubles hasn't happened (because my players, who slid only uneasily from 1st Edition to 2nd, weren't interested at all in what they read and saw of the Avatar trilogy or 3rd Edition, either - - and they vote on rules changes and what of the published Realms we adopt and use), and neither has Shade appeared or its inhabitants 'returned.'

The published Realms, however, serves a wider audience, and (sometimes successfully, sometimes less so) various designers and fiction writers are always trying to describe dramatic

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events in the Realms and increase play possibilities for everyone: opportunities for gamers who like large-scale wars and for gamers who like subtle intrigues, gamers who like cool new villains and gamers interested in exploring new territory. Like it or dislike it, the Return of the Archwizards fiction and related game material aims at tossing some new toys onto the table.

As the father of the Realms, a part of my job is to constantly scramble all over the unfolding tapestry of the Realms, as dozens of designers and fiction writers busily work on creating their own little bits of that tapestry, and 'tidy up.' I tug the tapestry flat here, I weave some new little linking bits in over there, and I get out my flashlight and shine it on this hitherto neglected or unknown flap over HERE, to try to keep the whole thing alive and colourful and somehow hanging together. I'm not trying to pat myself on the head here or pose for praise like some bulging-thewed superhero: unsung Realms fans like Eric Boyd and George Krashos and Tom Costa and "Garen Thal" and Steven Schend and dozens of others do the very same thing, and so do all the other Realms designers and fiction writers besides myself, plus some very capable Realms managers at WotC.

However, in my chosen role of tapestry-unfurler, I consider it part of my stitching-together duty to allude to major nearby Realms events in my fiction, and that's what Zlorn's utterance is. I deliberately crafted my allusion so that a DM who doesn't want to use Shade can, yes, "consider this to be simple hyperbole from an admittedly dubious source."

The Lords of Darkness entry had the High Princes "divided on the question of whether to begin open hostilities or to subtly maneuver the kingdoms of the Heartlands towards destabilization" for the same reason: to leave it up to the DM. In other words, here are the toys if you want to play with them, but we're NOT going to force you to use them.

What I'd do, personally, as a DM is to consider that the events of the Return of the Archwizards taught the High Princes that there are some VERY powerful players in the Faerun of 'now' (Larloch, the Chosen, Halruaa, and any number of 'loose cannons' like Halaster, the various Manshoons, the zulkirs of Thay, the sharn, and so on: they haven't even really run up against the Malaugrym yet, or the elven power groups that Rich Baker is exploring in The Last Mythal trilogy) that it would only be prudent to learn more about before lashing out. Moreover, some of the High Princes are wise enough to know that when one is as powerful as they are, and reaches out to seize something desirable, it's often all too easily to unintentionally destroy what one is trying to grasp.

Therefore, a majority of the High Princes want to learn a lot more about the Heartlands before initiating any open hostilities. Besides, they derive a lot of entertainment from deft infiltration and manipulation, and all of the processes of establishing spy and agent networks. This allows a DM to use Shadovar influence as much or as little as he or she wants, whereas going the other commits a DM to plunging much of Faerun into cataclysmic war.

So, a FEW of the Shadovar might be impatient to lash out and smite and conquer, and there might be instances of them sneaking out and doing so (therefore, to answer your question directly: yes, it's possible they're doing both), but the governing policy of Shade, for now, is to learn all about the current societies of of the Heartlands and lay the groundwork for subtly maneuvering the Heartland realms into chaos or Shadovar takeover (probably through puppet regimes rather than open conquest).

So in MY Realms, if Shade had appeared and things had progressed to 'now,' the Shadovar would be subverting creatures to be their agents (or installing beings loyal to them or even of their own lower ranks) within the Zhentarim, the Red Wizards, the Harpers, the War Wizards of

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Cormyr, various Sembian merchant cabals and families, nobility in various lands and city-states, a dozen other power groups, and in ruling courts all over the Heartlands. Not that PCs would know this until they stumbled over something that left the awful truth in their laps, and Shadovar agents closing in on them eager to wipe them out before they could share this truth with anyone - and no one else believing them.

Years of fun (you'll just have to imagine my wolfish grin, here, okay?)
Ed

So saith the Master.

Myself, I'd just like to thank fourthmensch (NOT!) for putting such ideas into Ed's head. As if he doesn't have enough punishment thought up for us already!
THO

On October 10, 2004 THO said: Gerath Hoan,

All I can do is point you in the direction of the WotC website and counsel patience. Ed provided some details of Tharsult over a year ago, now, for posting thereon, but I seem to recall him mentioning Eric Boyd having some Realmslore need for same. If Eric the Much-Read reads this, perhaps he could provide us with more information. Eric?
THO

October 10, 2004: Hello again, all.

I bring you now the words of Ed, to the query from Melfius about what types of games Halaster enjoys:

I envision Halaster as knowing the rules of many Faerunian games (see my comments earlier in this thread for rules of some games played in the Realms), but having no interest whatsoever in dice, card, and other 'primarily gambling' sorts of games. I see him as being fairly good at, but essentially bored by, strategy board games (chess, et al). The reason for this is that his primary fascination and delight lies in judging character and successfully figuring out how to manipulate and 'out-think' opponents (for which read: any creature he wants to manipulate). Yes, 'brute blasting spells' can engender fear, and fear can move many an adventurer in Undermountain (greed and overconfident pride moves many of the rest), but over the years Halaster became used to matching wits with rulers who commanded many resources (including capable agents) and mages and sorcerers who had great personal mental strength -- and such struggles are what interest him most. As strategy board games don't allow for manipulation of the minds of individual playing-pieces, and the games themselves are abstract struggles that have no lasting effect in the real-life Realms, Halaster sees them as time-wasters -- and he values even his idle moments as time too valuable to waste.

So saith Ed.

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Melfius, I'll try to have my own reply for you later re. the Knights' few encounters with Halaster (the Crazy Adventurers had a few, too, but I wasn't on the scene then), after the family madness of Thanksgiving is well past.

love to all,
THO

October 11, 2004: Hello, all.

Beowulf, I'll get to Ed as soon as I can for some more answers, but from his notes I can give you the definitive Realms answer for religious building definitions:

A "cathedral" is a temple (usually very large, prosperous, and ornate, presided over by a very high-ranking priest (the equivalent of a real-world Roman Catholic bishop, or higher).

A "temple" is a permanently, at-all-hours staffed (by ordained clergy) house of worship to a Faerunian deity or deities. Usually priests capable of raising the dead dwell and worship there. A temple always has a consecrated altar to the deity, the staff wear holy vestments and make use of consecrated items in their rituals, and regular rituals (usually several times daily) are held. Lay worshippers (the general public) are usually admitted to rituals and for religious advice, aid, or discipline. Priests are often sent forth from a temple to minister to outlying faithful and to further church business (including actual commercial businesses).

A "monastery" ("nunnery" if the clergy are female only; if mixed, the term "monastery" is usually used, the exceptions being for female deities whose clergy is predominantly female, such as Sune and Sharess) is a religious community, often walled and usually in a remote rural location, with a temple (and usually a farm or other means of self-supporting food source, like mushroom-growing caverns, alpine sheep pastures, etc., plus often a business [mill, tannery, etc.] for generating income from the sale of goods). Priests ("monks") always dwell on site, often lifelong or for years at a time, under a strict regimen or 'rule' of regular rituals, prayer, and work for the deity (which often really means work to advance the wealth and influence of the priesthood, from pursuing intrigues to making medicines and liqueurs for sale).

A "shrine" is a small, simple site for worship of a deity or deities. It is usually identifiable by the symbol of the god, and its altar may be either consecrated or improvised. It may or may not have a staff; many shrines are maintained by reclusive hermits or local lay worshippers, and only visited by traveling priests for cleansing, renewal, and collection of any offerings that may have been left there.

Shrines to some deities (depending on the deity) may have caches of healing potions, holy water (or unholy water), or items consecrated to the god (holy symbols, weapons blessed by the priests of Tempus in a shrine to Tempus, dice blessed by the priests of Tymora in a shrine of Tymora, etc.).

Shrines don't usually have resident (staff) priests, but some faiths 'man' them with month-long shifts of clergy dwelling onsite.

A "chapel" is a small shrine or temple attached to a larger structure, or enclosed within its walls (e.g. a stone building within or built against the inside of a castle). In royal castles, ruling courts,

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or the keeps of the nobility, it's quite often a room or rooms within the larger structure. Sometimes, chapels are reserved exclusively for the use of a royal or noble family, and their existence may even be kept secret from the wider world.

So saith Ed.

Who hopefully will be replying in person again soon.

love to all,
THO

October 12, 2004: Hello, all.

I bring you now two brief inglorious moments from the annals of the Knights of Myth Drannor: our encounters with Halaster.

A portal in the ruins of the Halls of the Beast-Tamers in Myth Drannor whisked us to a certain l-o-o-o-ng hallway on the 'first' level of Undermountain. With collective hearty bad feelings about our unintended trip into unfamiliar subterranean unpleasantness strong in our minds, we encountered a Harper of our acquaintance running full-tilt towards us, ward-spell after ward-spell shattering at her heels. She cried out a warning to us, and Jhessail cast a spell The Simbul had given her in payment for timely aid, that twisted the Harper's last remaining ward into a spell-reflection magic, hurling whatever magic was sent against it back at the source.

The ward promptly vanished in a crackling of energies as the expected attack-spell struck it, the Harper seized the moments she'd been given to teleport away -- and the reflected spell slammed into its caster with a satisfactory Undermountain-shaking blast.

Whereupon that caster chuckled, and I knew we were in REAL trouble. Had Dove not been with us, to call on her sisters for aid and bring both Laeral and Alustriel onto the scene, Halaster would very probably have transformed the fabled Knights into smears of blood on the passage walls in the space of a few breaths.

As it was, he gleefully attacked three of the Seven Sisters instead, and most of us were stunned senseless in a trice, as Dove slashed herself and used the leaking silver fire to spin a protective cage around us, keeping spells out and the passage ceiling from falling -- and Laeral and Alustriel traded 'anything you can blast I can blast louder' magics with the Mad Mage of Undermountain.

Now, readers of Ed's novels (wherein he was encouraged to play up the magic-heavy aspect of the Realms) may think titanic spell-battles happen all the time in Realms sessions.

Not so. Silken threats do, yes, but intrigue rules our Realmsplay hours far more than swordplay or spell-hurling. This was an exception... and for days afterwards, all of us but Dove suffered from the tingling side-effects of the magical 'sidewash:' our bodies kept trying to 'slip' into other shapes, hues, and sizes. Most unsettling, and cost my character much dignity and even more ruined clothing.

Our return engagement with Halaster was a chance meeting in Skullport, wherein he beamed at the sight of us (recognizing us in an instant from the battle years before) and teleported us

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individually into various perils, in hopes of luring Elminster to our aid so he could 'have it out' with the Old Mage. El responded by teleporting a succession of monsters he'd trapped and spellbound over the years right back at Halaster, interrupting the Mad Mage's fun and forcing him to defend himself. We fled like screaming children, which El pronounced our wisest collective act in years. We haven't been back to Skullport since.

As I recall, Melfius, we've now reached number ten in your questions:

(10. Where/When did Halaster begin training his apprentices?)

My reply is as follows: A long time ago, specifically [NDA], in a [NDA] far, far away, a ragtag [NDA]

11. Who trained Halaster?

My reply: [MAJOR NDA MAJOR NDA MAJOR NDA ASSUME CONTROL ASSUME CONTROL]

Ahem. It will probably come as no surprise to you to learn that my answers to 12 (What would Halaster's alignment have been a)when he began training his apprentices b)when he created Halaster's Hold?) must also be the grim silence of the NDA fortress wall. (Sorry. I am, truly.)

Which brings me to Dargoth, and HIS question about Halaster (Does that mean that Halaster has now gone back to being Lawful Evil?)

Sorry, Dargoth, but that's behind the NDA wall, too. This is one I'd love to answer, but I'm afraid silence must be my stern reply.

And so to Steven, old friend and dear. We MUST get together again sometime, somehow. Start an industry-shaking game company and get invited to GenCon as a Guest of Honor or something, willya? And please, drop in on this thread ANY time, no forgiveness needed! Like you, I've never been overmuch interested in the gods themselves, because mortal player characters can never really know the truths about their natures and doings (and really, what does it matter to your character precisely what happened in the Dawn Cataclysm, anyway?). Priesthoods, yes, doctrines, of course... but for what it's worth, your idea about Shar makes perfect sense. So let's make it so (er, if someone hasn't swiped that particular phrase already :}).

Shar's failure to subvert Halaster--a battle that seems to have lasted many a century--WAS why Shar destroyed Ibrandul. She has her lynchpin of interest in the great dungeon of the North through the Ibrandlin and those worshipers, but the difficulties with Halaster were why she didn't just leave Ibrandul to be a patsy/servant god of hers.

Done. :}

As for Halaster's tittering and giggling: I'd say he's over that, now, unless REALLY startled.

Which brings me to Gerath Hoan, and the subject of my business and lack of sleep: thanks for your kind words, GH. The Realms is and remains a labour of love (hey, if you saw my paycheques you'd certainly agree! :}), but it's one that rewards me daily, from pleased and satisfied e-mails from fellow scribes when we've collectively nailed down some obscure detail or other to the delight and praises of gamers I meet at cons and here at Candlekeep. As long as all of you who love the Realms keep asking and probing and joking, I'll keep on slinging the lore and

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stitching things together and buffing and polishing the result. Because I LOVE doing this, and sometimes can't believe I can actually make a (bit of a) living doing something I love so much.

So keep buying and demanding more Realms stuff, folks, and make my old age colourful and happy. :}

I've just seen the Realms latest things G- - -, E- - - and R- - - are working on, for instance, and I'm VERY happy. So thanks, GH and all, for making me FEEL much appreciated.

So saith Ed.

Who'll have more to say tomorrow, because he has to put the recycling out now and cover the plants against the first frost of the season - - and he's bone-weary after cutting down more than twenty dead trees today (with his son-in-law, who was visiting for [Canadian] Thanksgiving), to start the backup firewood pile.

love to all,
THO

October 13, 2004: Hello, all. I bring you the words of Ed on matters chapeaux:

Elminster has worn various hats down the years (most of them as part of his various disguises), but Faraer is correct: the hat was largely a creation of the TSR Art Department (long robes, beard, pointy hat, staff = wizard). Check Ned Dameron's interior art for El at the Magefair, and the art in the FR comic issues 7 and 8, for the 'right' look for El, most of the time [note the tall/gaunt appearance, LONG hair and beard].

The decision to change Elminster's look was made by WotC for 3rd edition; I heard the words "look less like Gandalf," but I have no idea if it was because WotC was then bidding for the LOTR card game license or not. And, yes, the Brand Manager of the day decreed that "El lost his hat when going through the dimensional rift into Hell." He meant destroyed, not 'strayed.'

Myself, I don't mind what Elminster looks like as long as Realms readers, gamers, and fans know it's Elminster (most of the time :}). After all, he can alter his appearance at will. So long as we have an in-game reason for why he decides to appear in a particular guise, I'm fine.

Now, writing a story that uses Elminster's hat is fine for your own entertainment, but of course it's NOT okay for publication, and WotC holds the copyright and will probably defend it. Note that "publication" DOES include posting it here or anywhere on the Net, distributing it to your friends, and even reading it aloud. Sorry. Mr. Phil Athans handles the Realms fiction at WotC, and Mr. Peter Archer manages all of the book lines (I can never keep up with their current formal titles), so they would be the ones to contact for permission, but I'm afraid I don't expect that you'll receive it. Sorry.

Note that you could very well HINT that the hat "fell from the sky, through a rift reeking of brimstone" without ever mentioning Elminster or Shadowdale (or any other Realms locale or character by name; don't use the name of the world or setting, either), and thereby be free to publish it, but please be careful.

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(I personally don't have any problems with folks writing Realms stories, but it's not up to me, and WotC does have trademarks and the brand associated with them to protect. I daydream of things like an Elminster iPod, wherein the Old Mage would interrupt insipid songs with an exasperated, "Ye're not going to rot thy ears and mind with THIS tripe again, are ye?"... but 'tis just that: a daydream.)

So saith Ed.

Who's still frantically busy (book launch this Saturday, short story due before then, and -- oh yes - a Knights of Myth Drannor novel to get done.

love to all,
THO

On October 15, 2004 THO said: Hello, all.

Blind Ranger, Ed's busy fixing a friend's novel tonight, but I can begin to provide an answer for you (until he becomes available again, probably Sunday, and does a far more eloquent job himself) by quoting these earlier words of his on this same topic:

My first reading of Elfshadow made me think Elaine had somehow flitted wraithlike into our game sessions and eavesdropped: she got Waterdeep (especially Elaith) EXACTLY right. So for a long time I've wanted to work with her on a Waterdeep novel, and now we've got the chance.

I've done several collaborations now, and the fun part of each of them has been the challenge of "doing things someone else's way," so I always ask how my collaborator wants to divvy things up, and go along with it.

In this case, we tossed ideas, characters, and elements we wanted to put into the novel back and forth (with our editor, Peter Archer, too), and then Elaine came up with a plot and some characters.

I shot holes in the plot and added some suggestions and some more characters, and Elaine rewrote the plot.

We took the plot to Peter at last year's GenCon Indy and HE shot holes in it. We talked, and Elaine came up with the "final" (ha ha) plot. This time with a chapter-by-chapter outline deciding who would write what. We tinkered briefly with that, and then got to work writing the first draft.

And (of course!) being a Waterdeep novel, the danged thing took on a life of its own and started changing as we wrote it. So we were both riding bareback, hanging on for dear life and writing hard and hoping we didn't introduce TOO many screw-ups (ahem: "features").

By THIS year's GenCon Indy, Peter Archer had read the draft and noted things we should fix or amplify or polish. So now we're doing that.

The result will be a pulse-pounding, Realms-shaking... ohh, forget all THAT. I can say this: no Danilo and Arilyn, precious little Mirt and Durnan and Piergeiron and Khelben and all that gang,

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and no Skullport, but nobles coming out the wazoo, Elaith, new characters, and some social issues looked at HARD.

I wanted a book that from time to time would let the reader smell Waterdeep, feel its cobbles underfoot, see and taste and 'be there,' and I think we'll manage to achieve that, here and there.

And my admiration for Elaine has increased.

So saith Ed, in an e-mail to several of us Knights.

A peek behind the curtain, as it were.

love to all,
THO

October 15, 2004: Hello, all.

I've been busily flinging your posts on to Ed's inbox, not expecting any replies soon because of all he's dealing with, just now, but I was surprised to get one swift reply back.

Accordingly, I bring the reply of Ed of the Greenwood to kuje31, as follows:

I rarely think of the Realms in clear-cut 'good' versus 'evil' terms: if one considers it a 'real' place, most creatures are 'gray' rather than black and white: they're essentially selfish, but lack a vicious, predatory side to their everyday behaviour.

I don't think evil and good are essentially out of balance in the Realms. What happens, over the years of publishing geographical-focus Realms products (e.g. Waterdeep, Cormyr), is that inevitably there's a focus on organized communities where there's law and fairly reliable 'order' on a day-to-day basis.

I've never understood why some gamers and readers of Realms fiction (given that so many game adventures and FR novels concentrate on treachery or war or murders or plots to unseat rulers or steal things) seem to think there's 'too much good' in the Realms, or that champions of good are too numerous or too powerful. I have realized over the years that too many folks glancing at the Realms think that the Chosen of Mystra and the Harpers are all clear-cut champions of good, which isn't quite the case.

The old TSR Code of Ethics forced us to show good always winning, and evil NEVER profiting from evil deeds, and as a result the organized forces of evil were sometimes portrayed as bumbling. However, it's my belief (as, hey, THE expert on the Forgotten Realms) that the forces of good are all too often weak, riddled with corruption or just dissent, and woefully small compared to the rapacious, raiding forces arrayed against them, from prowling hungry monsters to racial tensions to authoritarian rulers to worshippers of out-and-out evil deities.

What explorations of the Sword Coast Heartlands, Waterdeep, Cormyr, and the Dales have shown us (and what little we've been told about Sembia, Amn, and Tethyr have reinforced) is that a LOT of beings in the Realms see the benefits of trade, and of keeping enough safety and rule of

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law in place governing trade routes and trading centers (such as port cities) to make sure trade continues, as being worth all the trouble and bloodshed -- and, in fact, being necessary for the survival of humankind in a world where orcs are more numerous and brutal, dragons are far more powerful, elves formerly had better magic, and so on.

From the first, the reason for the published Realms was to give D&D gamers who'd already mastered dungeon crawls and large sandtable (first version of CHAINMAIL) setpiece battles a WORLD to play in, something 'outside the dungeon' to provide a frame and a meaning for it all. Of necessity, that setting had to offer intrigues and healing and something else besides "a dungeon next door" or "more orcs" or "the next dragon's lair," so TSR picked up my world with its histories of lost magical books and feuding nobles and secret societies. Those things posit realms with some social sophistication, and so inevitably there'll be laws and rulers. Yet "law" and "order" DOESN'T precisely equal "good," and it's just as valid to view the Realms as a series of tiny outposts of good (tiny twinkling stars) in a vast world of darkness (lawless, 'rule of claw and blade' evil). After all, if the forces of good WERE all-powerful, there'd be no need for adventurers, would there?

Gamers familiar only with the 3rd Edition Realms books must be missing LORDS OF DARKNESS, UNDERDARK, SERPENT KINGDOMS, and CITY OF THE SPIDER QUEEN, and to have ignored large sections of SILVER MARCHES, UNAPPROACHABLE EAST, and THE SHINING SOUTH, to have ever come to the conclusion that good "overpowers" evil.

About as far as the prevalence of good goes is this: personal daily life can be fairly good, for those who have good health and money enough, in parts of Waterdeep, Cormyr, the Dales, and Sembia -- most of the time.

Let's see, now: orc hordes every few decades, Thay spreading tentXXX ahem, enclaves across the known Realms, the drow on the move, the daemonfey ditto, even dragons now getting into the act in a large-scale and organized manner, the Zhentarim, the Twisted Rune and the Arcane Brotherhood and half a dozen other evil sinister cabals of note, Larloch and his plots, the lurking clones of Manshoon, the Zhentarim, the Cult of the Dragon, slavers and pirates and... no, I'm sorry, I just don't see how the nebulous 'forces of good' overpower all of these. Not with the evil we know is lurking in Calaunt and Mulmaster and Telflamm and Westgate and various Calishite cities, too, the intrigues endemic to the nobility of Amn, Tethyr, Waterdeep, and Cormyr, and serious schisms in the Harpers and in the League of the Silver Marches. To say nothing of the Malaugrym, the Phaerimm, the Shadovar, users of the Shadow Weave popping up everywhere, a concerted attack on the dryland realms from undersea forces only a few years back, the rise of a major new evil god (Cyric)...

Hmmm. Are you SURE these folk who think good overpowers evil are truly familiar with the Realms? Or have they just formed an impression, and see only what reinforces it?

Are they entirely unfamiliar with (gasp) Volo, Master of Evil? :}

Now. to answer your second question:

In my own games, these days, there's very little monster-fighting, and in fact very little drawing of weapons at all. What there IS, is lots of spying and talking and taking part in intrigues, uncovering the deceit and corruption and 'shady little deals' that influence almost every throne in the known Realms. The kidnapers of heirs and wealthy persons (to be sold into slavery or 'broken' into a new faith [subverted, person and coin, to the control of a priesthood]) to be thwarted, traitors

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unmasked, and unscrupulous traders to be curbed. Politics to be engaged in, murder mysteries to be solved, false rumours to be countered and those spreading them stopped.

This isn't so distant from the hints and 'second level' of play hinted at and built into every good Realms sourcebook. However, WotC must assume many buyers are unfamiliar with the area or topic any Realms product covers, and so must 'go over the basics.' They must also provide something for the monster-bashers and the explorers of unfamiliar terrain and every other sort of D&D play -- whereas I as a DM am bound to the foremost duty of providing my own players with the style of play they like, and have settled into.

Hope this helps to provide an answer. Something else that I should mention before I shut up is this: for the Realms to be a place we like to escape to or game in, it has to have some shining allure, some good things: moments of heroism and beauty and noble behaviour for us to cherish. I make no apology for putting those on display rather than wallowing in the butchery of raw evil. Realms designers have given Dungeon Masters who prefer a darker tone plenty to work with. Truly.

So saith Ed, and rather emphatically, too.

love to all,
THO

On October 16, 2004 THO said: Well said! Yes, Ed has a BRILLIANT radio voice. What you heard today was him speaking swiftly and in 'light' voice, so as to try to hear through the echoes of what he was himself saying. When he cuts loose with full, deep "I am the Voice of Doom" tones, or imitates (with deadly accuracy) various BBC and CBC announcers, it's REALLY impressive.

I was once standing beside Ed at a party when a Leonard Cohen song came on, and Brad Roberts (vocalist of the Crash Test Dummies) "sang along" several notes lower - - - whereupon Ed grinned and came in an entire OCTAVE lower than Mr. Roberts. His voice has lost a lot since his throat surgery, but Ed used to be able to imitate both Stan Rogers and Paul Robeson (!), note for note.

And you haven't really died until you've been adventuring in the Realms, and watched Torm of the Knights reach out a hand to a solid gold holy symbol of Azuth in a temple to Azuth, and had Azuth himself (Ed, of course), suddenly boom: "I THINK NOT."

As I recall, Victor (Torm) darn near wet himself...
THO

October 18, 2004: Hello, all. I think Bookwurm and Faraer have dealt with MisterChow admirably already (and I can vouch for everything Blueblade posted, too, having heard Ed express similar sentiments on many occasions), so I won't be forwarding all of that to Ed. He's got enough real Realmslore to serve up already. :}

Speaking of which:

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Beowulf, I've never really had the opportunity to properly explore painting, sculpture, and music of the Realms in detail, in print thus far.

It's a big topic, from the humble wind-chimes (stones, bones, and shells hung on rawhide thongs across many a farmstead doorway or window, to tell of trespass or rising breezes) to the elaborate 'song-cycles' with silent acting of scenes in the background (bards sing and play in foreground, occasionally pointing at the actors and commenting on the dramatic scenes from the past or the invented romance that are being acted out, though the actors never speak) favoured in the most 'civilized' human cities. Elves always dance (often using magic so they can 'fly' and so engage in aerial ballets), and their actors always sing and orate. Dwarves and gnomes rarely dance, and their actors tend to unison-chant (plainsong) and orate. Halflings try just about anything, as do human minstrels doing broad comedy. And so on.

Illusions and magic are mistrusted by most common folk, so the most they're used in dramatic arts are wizards using illusions to provide animated 'you are there' scenes of important battles and events to audiences at feasts and formal gatherings (with forewarning, to avoid upset or violence), or the illusions of spell effects at dramatic moments in a play.

The wealthiest nobles sometimes purchase paintings that have minor illusions cast on them suggesting motion (hair of person stirring occasionally in unseen winds, a smile that comes and goes, the gaze of the depicted person moving about, small gestures), but again, most people regard these as "creepy" and want nothing to do with them. Most nobles commission these to impress (and hint that the paintings harbour more formidable defensive magics, so would-be thieves and other intruders had best beware).

Most folk buy paintings as portraits of places they'd visited, such as Waterdeep (yes, as "I've been there" souvenirs!), remembrances of realms they had to leave behind (usually birthplaces); portraits of monarchs they revere; holy events (usually mortals receiving divine aid or rapture rather than actual depictions of deities) of faiths they follow; or people they know (parents, more remote ancestors, loved ones, or selves). Pictures of people are sometimes painted as plaques (palm-sized slate or wood carry-arounds, either carried wrapped or fitted with little 'doors' like many a modern real-world dartboard), but are usually life-sized, shoulders-up pictures hung on walls in the best rooms of domiciles or guild offices. Most curio shops in Waterdeep have an assortment of 'portraits of dead nobodies' hung up for sale, and yes, there's a brisk trade in portraits of scantily-clad female beauties, often mounted 'on the back' of a family portrait so the thing can be hastily turned around when Aunt Oskaula comes to call.

Most guild offices have the symbol of the guild (guild, coster, and family badges and full heraldic displays are the most popular 'expensive art,' by the way) hung up on the wall as a painted wooden carving, a portrait or portraits of the founder(s) of the guild, prominent past (long dead and famous in their field) guild members, and present and past guildmasters. A few guilds have begun to demonstrate their wealth in a way increasingly adopted by 'wannabe-noble' rich merchants (but thus far, sneeringly dismissed by 'real' nobles, at least in Waterdeep): they've purchased 'waiting-room' paintings, usually of guild-related elements (smiths would have anvils, forgehammers, tongs, and so on), that are 'everchanging' or 'living.' These terms are, of course, misnomers: what such paintings (typically large dark square pieces) really do is to display the same sequence of painted elements over and over.

To use the smiths' example: a fire kindles and seems to 'grow' out of the painting, tongs and a bar of metal can be seen thrusting into it, and then the flames fade to reveal an anvil looming up. As it 'drifts' forward dramatically, the now-glowing bar is lowered onto it, a forgehammer smashes down on it twice, the scattering sparks wash away anvil and bar to leave just the mighty hammer

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(backlit by forge-glow). We see it slowly rise and fall, emphasizing the force with which it is wielded, and then it fades to reveal a tiny tumbling object that comes 'out of the distance' towards us, growing rapidly in size. We see that it's a horseshoe, and then it dwindles again, back into flames that become the kindling fire (and the cycle repeats from there).

Such pictures are the latest fad, although some of them (like paintings of fires blazing in hearths) have actually been available for years. They're very expensive, and it remains to be seen if they'll really catch on outside of Waterdeep, Athkatla, and the largest cities of Sembia.

Which brings us to sculptures. As with paintings, abstract sculptures are almost unknown in human art (elven art often employs sweeping curves that suggest ocean waves but that incorporate elements that might be spreading branches, or straining wings). Statuettes, particularly small pieces no taller than the length of a human forearm, are quite common. Most are crude depictions of human heads, 'severed' orc heads (often with comical 'bumpkin' expressions rather than trying to look horrific), or full-body human figures (nude female dancers are popular, of course), and many are placed as finials atop fence-posts, gate-spires, and the like. In at least one place, Tharsult, statuettes have been used as money.

Many dwarves and gnomes dwelling in human cities spend their lives carving small stone statues for sale to folk desiring to 'dress up' their gardens or homes with either dramatic warriors (often passed off as ancestors) or, again, feminine beauty in various forms. Halflings more often carve in wood, and elf artisans work in blown glass -- but increasingly (as the years pass and everyone tries everything), these are stereotypes rather than accurate summations of racial habits.

Larger statues are less common and are quite expensive. Rulers raise monuments to themselves or to commemorate battles (usually just those they consider glorious victories), and temples often feature statues (either three-dimensional holy symbols or non-human divine servant creatures, the equivalent of Christian 'angels'). Statues of the deity are usually large and dramatic, and unless they're part of the shape of the temple building, tend to be inside the building, dominating the main area of worship (usually towering over the altar).

Single figures (or a single figure with smaller 'suplicants' twined about its legs, or bodies of fallen around its feet, are far more common than tableaux of multiple figures, though there are occasional exceptions (usually scenes of princes or kings fighting monsters -- yes, the 'Azoun battling the Devil Dragon' (or at least its head, curving 'up and over' from behind to loom down from above the valiant king, jaws agape) pieces are starting to appear).

If you haven't fallen asleep yet, all of this rambling brings me to the heart of your questions, asking after details of the "best" statue of Sune.

Now, this is a toughie, because there are lot of exquisitely beautiful depictions of Lady Firehair, some of them enspelled so as to seem to be flesh, and to have hair that's literally on fire. Some of these statues are provocative, and some are VERY provocative (some are located in the very private chapels of wealthy worshippers, and their poses leave no doubt as to the uses to which they're put). There are also temple statues exaggerated in physical features in various ways -- and, like the beauty of real living females, personal preferences have a lot to do with what individual worshippers deem the 'best.'

However, it's GENERALLY thought among the faithful (the clergy themselves officially have no preferences, always stating something along the lines of 'personal mind-contact with the Goddess so eclipses everything else that these feeble reminders can be to us no more than that') that the

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forty-foot-tall altar-statue of Sune at the House of Rapture temple in Nyth (presided over by High Ladyhostess Loumrae Darszuauntra, a CG female human Clr14 of Sune) is the best.

Known as 'the Lady Rapturous,' it depicts the goddess with her right hand raised to her own lips, its fingers in her mouth, and her left hand just rising from her thighs (the bottom of the piece, which is legless). Her torso is twisted, emphasizing the shape of her breasts, her arms are long, graceful, and posed as if captured in a moment of moving with great force, and her head is thrown back, her eyes half-closed, and her hair clinging to her "like the clawing hands of a hundred feverish lechers," as one pilgrim (Asgrum of Iriaebor, writing a decade ago) put it.

It is undeniably striking, and its beauty is superb. It looks incredibly lifelike (if, that is, Sune was a giant-sized, legless human woman), and the illusion is only enhanced by a spell placed on the statue by priestesses of the House of Rapture, that causes the Rapturous to emit deep, rich, edge-of-moan gasps. This latter magic has been termed "ludicrous" by some visitors to the temple, but is undeniably effective in moving most lay worshippers to the edge of rapture themselves.

There's apparently an ongoing struggle among senior clergy of Sune to have the statue moved to the House of Firehair in Daerlun or the Temple of Beauty in Waterdeep (or to various other temples as they're built or enlarged), but thus far the Rapturous remains where 'she' was erected.

The Rapturous was sculpted over six years by the irascible, four-foot-tall bearded orgy- and melon pie-loving artisan Ruldán of Westgate (a pompous, hot-tempered and arrogant little schemer who tries to seduce every woman he sees, and who long ago was forced to abruptly relocate from Westgate to Athkatla when an outraged mother came after him with some VERY sharp knives). Ruldán directed a team of five local dwarves, and many folk are of the opinion that their skills are what made the statue so beautiful, not Ruldán's tirades and tantrum-embroidered opinions and 'deep vision.'

This is borne out, some say, by the 'sameness' of Ruldán's work since (he trained a crew of young women and gnomes to work under his direction, churning out statues in just a few poses for the walls, gardens, and interiors of various grand Athkatlan houses; only the faces of the statues vary, to match the requests of patrons).

Ruldán personally carved just one other statue of Sune, which can be seen at the Bower of the Lady roadside shrine north of Ordulin, in Sembia. Much smaller (nine feet in height), cruder, and darker (it's of crimson-hued stone), it nevertheless conveys a sense of lush, lust-inducing beauty, depicting a magnificently-bosomed Sune reaching out to worshippers as if to draw them to her. An enchantment placed on the eyes and mouth of the statue, that makes it seem like tiny fires stir and flicker there, reportedly infuriated Ruldán, who's refused to have anything to do with "meddling priests" since.

So saith Ed.

Whew. Seems a little warm in here, just now... Woolly? Sirius? I feel in need of a little... flirtation.

(Hmmm, I see no little smiley for purring, exactly, so this one will have to do.)
THO

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October 18, 2004: Hello, all. To Gerath Hoan, Ed of the Greenwood doth make this reply:

Archendale's proud folk are a bit of an exception among the dales, and always have been (they like to think of themselves as an independent 'elder realm' caught between Cormyr and Sembia, both of whom they've militarily defeated in the past and then ignored rather than going on to conquer them because 'we like it here, in the best place in all the Realms').

The 'nobles' of Archendale are indeed "an unofficial merchant nobility in the same sense as Sembia." The wealthiest, proudest local families (such as the Claels, the Rodaern and the Ilkurhorns) fancy themselves as grand as anyone in all Faerun, though they sadly lack the money, lands, and great buildings to fool any objective observer. They DO have considerable wealth, invested in city real estate and small, shady moneylending firms in Marsember and the southern coastal cities of Sembia, because they've always been able to make a lot of money smuggling between the two realms.

Other Dales also have their old and proud families, but most Dalefolk laugh at the pretensions of those "bloody-handed longnoses of Archendale," and don't really regard Arkhen-folk as 'real' Dalefolk (too dishonest, warlike, and close to the affairs, fashions, and pretensions of Cormyr and Sembia). No, no Dale has an official nobility, though many of them have or remember ruling families, and various Dales bristle with titles -- just not hereditary titles. Most of them have 'Keeper of the Bridge' this, and 'Huntmaster' that, a 'Caller of the Hounds' here and a 'Harvestmother' there (so feel free to invent to your hearts' content, DMs), but no 'noble' titles. Note that most dales use 'Lord' as a courtesy form of address for their mayor-equivalent or members of ruling council, for all wizards, priests, and druids known to be of formidable personal power, for some widely-respected former rulers, and for the leaders of their militia or other defensive force. Again, these are titles given to individuals, not inherited honorifics.

So saith Ed.

Who tells me he'll be sending some more replies soon.

love to all (and Sirius, you would unhood me? The rest of me, gladly, but my hood no man -- nor woman -- may touch. A girl must maintain SOME privacy, after all. Yes, this pond is cool, but I presume your warmth will... gasp... amend that?)
THO

October 19, 2004: Hello, all. And a special hello and apology to Wooly Rupert. Ah, Wooly, how could I? This hood oft blinds me, true, but how could I mistake the warm firmness of my Wooly? You'll just have to punish me. Again. Ohhh, I'm such a naughty girl. So many men, so little time...

Ahem, as they say. I bring the words of Ed, this time to ijkay, in response to his second question about the Curse of the Blood Royal:

Hi, ijkay. Garen Thal has done his usual superbly authoritative job in answering you, and correctly says: "Just what the Curse of the Blood Royal is isn't clear, but there are many rumors about it."

Even at Court (in Suzail), and among sages who often discuss such things, there are conflicting beliefs about the Curse, and (in the words of Filfaeril, discussing not this matter but the usual behaviour at the Court) "rumors parade as juicy truth all too often."

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The most reliable sources (only when they've wanted to be) to consult about the Curse are the Mages Royal, and Vangerdahast said once said this about the Curse (again, discussing another aspect of its involvement, not the ruined temple):

"There is truth in this matter of the Curse. All who bear Obarskyr blood -- the royals and their direct bastard offspring -- may pronounce it, but only as they die. If they return to life, their curse is broken. Briefly put, to undo a thing done in the name of the Curse, or to do a thing forbidden or foresworn by one bestowing the Curse, is to be personally haunted henceforth by a whispering spirit of a long-dead Obarskyr. A hostile, vengeful presence that works to bring ill on the Cursed person, until they set right their transgression against the will of the Blood Royal.'

'A Cursed one will sleep but poorly, their mind beset by cutting comments from the dead one. They will see phantoms of other dead Obarskyr, or loyal retainers and Purple Dragons, menacing them or directing them or just watching them. Sometimes the whispers and the apparitions will be visible to others, to the lasting shame of the Cursed one. The Presence will see to it that the transgression of the Cursed one is known to others (not all others, but many), and make the Cursed one's life a misery, until they put right what they have done. If they cannot, no forgiveness is possible. Only departure from Cormyr, and forever remaining far from it, can relieve the effects of the Curse -- and even then, in nightmares, the whisperings and the haunting visions will continue."

In other words, in the case of the Everpresent Shield, anyone rebuilding it would suffer this fate. Perhaps Helm would intercede, and perhaps not: as Garen Thal points out, there IS a "mystical connection between the land itself and the people and creatures that inhabit it," which is little understood but demonstrably real and powerful. You might say it's the Great Inhibitor: everyone from Obarskyrs and would-be Obarskyr bastard pretenders to nobles harbouring treason in their hearts and rebellious Marsembians 'thinks twice' about 'going too far' in what they do (regarding the realm as a whole), for fear of what 'the land might do to them.'

I'm afraid that for maximum DM and Realms-writer utility I'll have to leave things that mysterious for now, but hopefully many scribes here will reflect on the juicy uses to which this can be put. I know I do. :}

So saith Ed, and I'll just add this:

Garen Thal's all-too-true comment about Volo ("As for the rumor that Volo made it up, well, plenty of people think Volo makes everything up...") notwithstanding, this isn't something Ed just sat down and invented for the Volo's Guide; there have been hints of it in our 'home campaign' play for years. You just know it's there, that's all. I'll say no more on this topic, though, because I have my suspicions about Ed's forthcoming Knights novels.

THO

October 19, 2004: Hello, all. Divers answers from Ed this time, as follows:

Blind Ranger, you're quite welcome. I get a lot of entertainment out of the Realms, too, in large part because you and other scribes ask me questions and lead me to revisit this or look up that or think about some topics either in a fresh way or for the first time. And for that, thank YOU.

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I think my earlier words about the CITY OF SPLENDORS novel, that our Lady Hooded posted here, do a pretty good job of answering your queries. I'll emphasize that we won't, so far as I know of this writing, be delving into Skullport. My primary goal in writing this project was to take the reader closer into Waterdeep, to impart the sounds of the city and of walking on its cobbles, the smells, and everything else needed to 'take you there.' Of course, rollicking adventure has to be a part of every Realms novel, but both Elaine and I prefer character-driven tales, and although a Waterdeep book can hardly ignore the Khelbens and Mirts and Elaiths, we wanted to show you some new characters, too, and let you peek at things you could re-use in your own campaigns, such as: What's it like to be in the City of the Dead at night? What does Piergeiron have for breakfast? What do nobles do for amusement? And should Waterdeep be ruled by masked, mysterious Lords, anyway?

Faraer, thanks for (as usual) hitting nails on heads in responding to MasterChow. I, too, was less than amused by Alan Neal's approach to the topic (after his producer assured me that he was an avid player and was "very much looking forward to" doing this topic on the show. I can't imagine an avid sports fan of any sort using a show on 'his' sport to belittle it, or those who enjoy or participate in it, in any way. However, his treatment was jocular rather than needling, and served the passing purpose of light entertainment -- and I've fared FAR worse on radio and television shows over the years (devout religious types thought nothing of asking me to "convert" or "recant" my "Satanistic beliefs" on air, without forewarning, or praying for me "to drive out the evil spirits obviously possessing" me, and so on. (I'm sure they would have been furious if I'd turned things around and asked THEM to do the same.)

WotC controls the rights to my Realms fiction, of course, and I'm not aware of any current plans on their part to do audiobooks. Blackstone (a California firm) releases all of my Aglirta books as unabridged audio cassette sets, and the last three have been narrated superbly by the expat-Brit actor and announcer Simon Vance. In my youth, I narrated many books onto tape for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (lots of people did, all as volunteers) and have been told several times that I'm pretty good at telling a story with rich inflection, etc. and character voices.

I will discuss doing a Realms short story, or something else that could serve as an intro to the Realms, with WotC as a free download from their site, or something of the sort. I think it's a great idea. However, they're an understaffed, working-at-frantic-pace group of people, these days, so even if enthusiastically received it might take some time to do, or go nowhere.

Thanks for ordering SUMMONED TO DESTINY; I hope the enthusiastic Blueblade hasn't oversold my tale therein. I haven't yet checked the edited version, BTW, to see if there are any changes I'm unhappy about, but I doubt there will be. You'll be getting 250 pages of fantasy fiction by eight writers, all about young folks coming of age. Michelle Sagara (maiden name) or West (married name; she writes under both) did a novella, and I did a novelette, and everyone else did short stories (we all got paid only for short stories). I hope it's not a disappointment. Nice cover, anyway. :}

No, I'd never heard of the BLUE ROSE rpg until I read your post in my e-mail from THO, and then trundled over to Candlekeep to follow the link and peer more closely. As a gamer and game designer, I'll certainly buy it (I love Stephanie's art, for one thing, and try to stuff from her at every GenCon Indy; this year I got a lovely original of elven archers in a forest). Thanks for bringing it to my attention; isolated from gaming stores here in my rural cellar of a garret, I do miss things unless I stumble across them at GenCon. It's certainly different from the fledgling days of the industry, when I had to wait hungrily for each new product rather than ever fearing I'd miss something by someone. (Must pop in my false teeth now, pick up my cane, and hobble back into the old sepia photographs of my youth.) :}

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Wooly, I trust you and Sirius have peeled yourselves off the endlessly-teasing THO by now. :}

None of Cormyr's Mages Royal have been all that forthcoming, down the years, about their parentage -- and I'm not telling, either. As of this writing, I'm not sure we can assume Vangerdahast, Amedahast, and Jorunhast have any more connection to Baerauble than serving in the same office and getting to peek at Baerauble's notes and spellbooks.

I CAN tell you that Caladnei was born in Turmish and all we really know of her parentage is what can be gleaned from the FRCS, my story in REALMS OF SHADOW, and in ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. If she's related to Baerauble, she doesn't know it -- and the possibility is certainly more slender than for her three predecessors you've asked about here.

I'd love to be more definite when speaking of this matter, but [NDA] and [NDA] and of course [NDA]. Sorry. [insert cheesy grin here]

So saith Ed. Hmm, I'm not sure which smiley fits "cheesy grin" best, so I'll just leave that stage direction 'as is.' Ed of the Greenwood will return with answers to some older Candlekeep queries from this thread (he's still stuck on Lathtar's Lantern for now, but will skip over it and deal with other queries from Page 31 onwards). As the long-ago Cormyrean bard Malthinglas once sang:

I sleep on a bed of bared blades called Patience,
My covers a scorching fire called Serene Calm,
I trade silence for my tongue too loquacious,
So soft stillness becometh my Balm.

(Yes, quoted from Ed's notes, and yes, it's trite crap. Most bardic roundelays are. This snippet survives today as a nursery admonishment in many a noble house of Cormyr.)

Now, where's MY warm bed of Sirius beneath and Wooly above?
THO

On October 20, 2004 THO said: Lashan, I'll forward your request to the ever-toiling Ed. I can, however, immediately confirm that there ARE roving portrait-artists operating all over the Heartlands, at least, because we Knights kept bumping into them. Some of them, BTW, make VERY good sideline income selling "porn" paintings and fake land/building deeds.
THO

October 20, 2004: Hello, all. A communication from Garen Thal to Ed hath brought forth these words from Ed of the Greenwood:

Garen has just raised a good point regarding Wooly Rupert's query about the lineage of the "-ahast" Mages Royal (that CORMYR: A NOVEL makes it pretty clear in various places that they are descended from Baerauble.) I should make things clearer. Anyone in Cormyr who thinks about such things "knows" all of the Mages Royal are descended from Baerauble, although the whereabouts of their upbringings and parentage are always mysterious (they "come out of the forest to serve the Crown").

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However, opponents of various Mages Royal, desiring to lessen the influence and power of the incumbent (these opponents have traditionally been nobles or courtiers) have repeatedly cast doubts on this 'common knowledge' of descent from Baerauble. Vangerdahast said he was directly descended from old Baerauble on several occasions, but opponents would call these "claims" or "self-serving lies" rather than truths.

So saith Ed.

Who's so busy today that I probably won't hear from him again until late tonight.
THO

On October 21, 2004 THO said: Hello, all.

From years in the home Realms campaign, I can tell you that Ed has always pronounced Vilhon as "VIL-hawn" and "Zhent" as "Zzent" (silent "h" slightly lengthens the 'z'). I'm forwarding your posts to him, and await further replies from the Greenwood.

THO

October 24, 2004: Hello, all. I bring some latest words of Ed of the Greenwood, on divers matters:

To echo and confirm my delightfully Hooded Lady, the pronunciations are indeed "VILL-hawn" (so, yes, The Wanderer, "i" as in "Indigo") and (for Faraer) "Zz-ENT."

Let me leap first to the lady Arivia's question: I'm afraid there's no generally-accepted Linnaean classification of either flora or fauna. Elves are well aware of what's a conifer or a fungus and what's not, and so on, but most of them simply don't think of 'pigeonholing' things (doing so is a more human characteristic).

There ARE crude "fur, scales, feathers" classifications, yes, but these revolve around "How close a match is Beast X to Beast Y, if I can't get Beast Y-hide for making clothes or boots, or Y-flesh for my stewpot, but I CAN get X?"

Druids of the Realms are interested in "what eats what" more than anything else (life cycles, balance of life, etc.). Druids study life around them and learn from elder druids (and divine servant creatures of their deities) these 'chains' of "the minnow eats the water strider, the brownfin eats the minnow, the river eel eats the brownfin, the fangfish eats the river eel, the fishhawk eats the fangfish, the peryton eats the fangfish, the fang dragon eats the peryton," and so on.

So, sorry, there's no widely-accepted classification system. The long-dead sage Astragus of Amn began a system that divided creatures and plants first by whether they were "of Amn" or "not of Amn," and then ignored the 'outlying life' in favour of concentrating on Amnian life, which was then divided into "sap" (plant) or "blood" (beast). The plants were divided into woody and "many-seasons," and "swift season," and then again by "greenleaf" and "eaters" (fungi, mosses, vines that lack leaves, and so on). The "greenleaf" plants were then divided into those that bore berries (which were subdivided into "edible" and "fell"), those that flowered but had no visible berry-like fruit, and those that seemingly did not flower. The "many-seasons" plants were divided into what Astragus called "daerlnor" (useful for carving and other lasting uses beyond mere firewood) and

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"duthlass" (useless), and the good sage then embarked upon a second layer of classification for all living things, outlying and Amnian, that sorted life for its medicinal usefulness - - a project far from completed when he died.

His servants, unpaid at his death, stole various portions of his notes and sold them covertly to various buyers, and much of what Astragus wrote was thereby lost (thus far).

Vanguard, it felt GREAT to write a superhero tale. I could barely squeeze into the old tights, and my leaping and swinging days are sadly behind me, but I can still launch the Laugh Diabolical ("The weed of crimes bears bitter fruit!") and put a Saintly smile on my face as I drift nonchalantly into a room, dark and dapper suit bulging more than a little over my evergrowing belly - -

Ahem. Of COURSE I'm willing to do more of them. For some years now I've been writing tales for various anthologies edited by Jim Lowder (former head of the TSR Book Department and author of PRINCE OF LIES, THE RING OF WINTER) and some other folks, too, viewing them as opportunities to write 'something new.' I did a zombie horror story that got me Honorably Mentioned in the Datlow & Windling Year's Best Fantasy anthology for THE BOOK OF ALL FLESH, I've done ghost stories and two-fisted pulp tales and period mysteries and Arthurian fantasies and lots of other fun stuff.

However, the Realms remains my first love and my usual date, both weekends and weeknights, and leaves me all too little time for other fun. I tend not to mention such things here at Candlekeep, where my favourite creation is the topic at hand, but I've written literally dozens of short stories that stray far indeed from the Realms. If you want to commission me, be warned: I'm booked up years in advance - - and to borrow a line from The Hooded One: I come easy, but I don't come cheap. All that often. :}

Ahem. She'll probably smack me for that one, so I'll move hastily on into another word or two for Beowulf:

I'm afraid no one is reckoned "the greatest artist in Faerun." The Realms simply lack the easy travel and flows of information that our modern-day real world enjoys. Not only are tastes broken up by races and faiths, few sages have seen non-mobile art in more than their own immediate area, and have the time and coin to magically peer at more distant areas in an organized, 'miss nothing' manner.

So art appreciation is left to those who can afford it: wealthy (often noble or royal) patrons, who commission what THEY want to see (or, having been entranced by something an artist did, want more of). Quite often the pieces they cause to be produced are for their own private enjoyment, to be shared only with select visitors and friends. Nobody is 'keeping score' as to greatness of achievement except within localized areas (Waterdeep, its environs as far afield as Secomber, and the places in Amn and Tethyr that Waterdhavian nobles and wealthy would-be nobles 'winter over,' is one such area; Silverymoon and the rest of the Silver Marches is another, and so on), and among such patrons, many artists enjoy only the brief popularity of 'passing fashion.

I can tell you that in Amn right now, the painter Albristaun (known for his large, grand, 'flattering' portraits of nobles) is popular, as is the 'wall painter' Malaharkos, who's much given to sensual depictions of dancing winged women, half-seen in misty blue moonlight, and has been hired to adorn many a tavern and highcoin-club wall.

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The foremost sculptor is probably Hanthos 'Bright Hammer,' a dreamy, almost trance-trapped man of frenzied activity, who sometimes bursts into streams of profanity and vivid descriptions of things only he can see, is known for his exquisitely-detailed little (slightly taller than the length of a long-fingered human hand) statuettes of armor-wearing human males and females of, ah, 'heroic proportions,' who always have some hint of strangeness about them (such as a tiny tail, or beast-talons, or an extra arm, or a long, horse-shaped head).

However, there are those who prefer Alais the Dancer, a nimble, athletic, and quite beautiful young half-elf lady who climbs along her carvings as she leads a team of grim, close-mouthed dwarves in crafting larger-than-life grand stone tableaux of family elders depicting in moments of battle-heroism, outside manor gates or in the courtyards of patrons' mansions. Her craftings are always handsome and strong of appearance, though they're said to sometimes little resemble the people they're supposed to represent.

As for your query about lines of "architecture and aesthetic sense" demarcation in the Heartlands and the North: aside from differences that arise from use of local building stone (different from place to place) and timber (or lack of same), and different cultures over the passage of much time (i.e. the fashion in Netheril differing from the styles of present-day Waterdeep), there aren't a lot of clear differences based on geography.

The Sword Coast North and the Moonsea North have been so lightly and so recently settled, by comparison with other areas, that many human builders have 'come from away' and brought their styles and ways of building with them -- and the beleaguered dearves have tended to build whatever they've been hired to build, adding their own touches but cleaving to their own preferences only in their own building and delving.

Your view of local inhabitants 'growing away' from each other is quite correct, but the influence of trade and migrations (especially those displacements forced by orc hordes and wars) has caused most places to have a hodgepodge of architectural styles.

There are exceptions, such as Silverymoon -- but many of these exceptions, Silverymoon being a prime example, are attempts to recapture the glory of previous times and societies, and tend to deliberately copy the architecture of those long-ago places. Climate dictates many differences between a hot, sunbaked southern city and a cold, wet northern city, yes, but quite often there's no 'look' of the sort you're envisioning, that can let a scrying-crystal user tell at a glance, "Ah, I must be looking at somewhere in Thay" or: "Thesk, beyond a doubt."

There are architectural DETAILS (downspouts, roof-tile patterns, carved adornments) that betray realm or region, yes, but I haven't the time or space here to start listing such things, sorry. I will toss out artistic tidbits from time to time, though, now that you've demonstrated the interest exists.

Mauricio, there are no silly questions about the Realms, really. Unfortunately, you won't be seeing the visionaries of Dawntree in the Wayerdeep novel, no. Fret is Bob's creation, and as far as I know, there's no "hidden lore" lurking in obscure print anywhere about him. Ask me anything, anytime. :}

So saith Ed, who's very busy crafting art of his own, as usual.

Keep those cards and letters coming, and thy faithful Hooded One, purring with each tug on her leash by Wooly, will endeavour to pry answers out of the depths of the Greenwood.

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love to all,
THO

On October 25, 2004 THO said: Hello, all. I can spin an answer of sorts for tauster, from my own experiences in the 'home' Realms campaign.

Ed always thought that gates (3e "portals") and battles for control of them, or battles against the activities of power groups who already controlled them, was a logical focus of high-level campaigning. If your PCs founded their kingdoms and their players wondered what to do with them next, and didn't rise to the bait of stumbling across strangely numerous and hitherto unnoticed gates, the users of said gates would start coming after the PCs.

That's where the "Forgotten" part of the name comes from: the idea that Faerun exists on a Prime Material Plane parallel to our own 'real world' (and that there are many other Prime planes, such as the fantasy settings of any fantasy authors a DM and group of players like, as well as the 'fabled' Planes of Existence such as the Abyss, Hell or the Nine Hells, and so on). This isn't a new idea; Michael Moorcock envisaged a Multiverse of parallel planes, and Philip José Farmer's World of Tiers series explored a battle between power groups for control of gates and the worlds connected to them.

Ed adapted some of these fictional concepts to the D&D game back in issue 37 of The Dragon (as the magazine was then called); I believe it was the first-ever DRAGON article with footnotes.

TSR, of course, didn't want the possible lawsuits a 'real-world connection' might invite, nor the design headaches of linking Oerth and Krynn to this new uber-setting, and so edited out almost all of the gates material from the early Realms products. Some of Ed's notes were later used (albeit in an almost unrecognizable form) in the Planescape line.

The Company of Crazyed Venturers got into plane-hopping (it was the only way Ed could justify inclusion of some of the science-fictional elements he swiped from the Barrier Peaks adventure for those PCs to encounter) briefly, and so did we Knights (even more briefly).

Interestingly, Ed always discouraged creation of new gates (3e "portals") in the Realms by postulating that they weaken the planar fabric, so that the act of opening a new one often causes rifts, temporary (or even worse, persistent and widening, if you happen to create a gate too close to an unknown/forgotten pre-existing one) that "leak" predatory otherplanar beasts of great power. In other words, BEEG trouble on thy hands - - plus, of course, the immediate interest of all sorts of existing Realms power groups ("Oooh, a new gate! To where? We must control it, and slay all who learn of it so that 'tis our secret, and ours alone!").

I do know that Ed has suggested doing Realms novels that involve such concepts on several occasions, and been firmly turned down by the TSR book publishing editors on every occasion. This even came up in discussion (uttered by TSR staffers, not Ed) at a long-ago GenCon Realms panel.

It's interesting to note, over the years, how strong the fascination of the idea is; it never really goes away.

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love to all,
THO

October 25, 2004: Hello, all. I bring you the latest replies from Ed Greenwood:

Hello, Simon. Hawkmantle is yours (and every Dungeon Master's) to play with; I introduced him as a 'never seen before,' deployable Harper. So his fate can be literally anything you want it to be. I'm hoping we (the collective Realms creatives) won't mention him in print again, so he can become whatever players want him to be in their campaigns (but then again, we failed everyone in our handling of Sembia, in this regard). I have ideas, yes, and if you really want suggestions (knowing it'll ruin the utility of the character as described above), I'll be happy to suggest some.

Lauzoril, as to your questions three:

1. Faerunian minotaurs are very rarely seen or mentioned for the same reason psionics was downplayed for so long; they're considered essential elements of another TSR/now WotC product line (minotaurs meant Dragonlance, psionics meant Dark Sun). So while they're in the Realms (the 'home of everything' for 2nd Edition D&D), we weren't allowed to feature them in adventures or novels, or make more than passing mention of them.

2. Many of the Zhentarim elite from before the Time of Troubles are still alive, but you've identified the Big Three from most published Realms products (in fact, there are many Manshoons left [with apologies to religious readers: at a GenCon Indy Realms seminar this year, Richard Lee Byers let slip that "In my Father's house, there are many Manshoons," so if you find that particular domicile, you might be in for a somewhat chilling surprise]). Hesperdan ('the Old Man of the Zhentarim') and Eirhaun Sooundaeril (The Maimed Wizard) are another two powerful wizard survivors from the early days. There are also beholder and priest survivors, but many of these are lying low so Fzoul won't find them -- or so they won't be caught in his fall, when it comes (and yes, he DOES seem to lead a charmed life).

3. There is indeed significance behind the 'Year of Much Ale' name mentioned in the Making of a Mage. It's a 'local' year-name, and the significance you seek must for now, I'm afraid, remain hidden behind the large and darksome ironbound door labelled "NDA." Sorry.

So saith Ed, in his latest missive from the lair where he squats toadlike over a flickering keyboard, cackling maniacally -- oop.

Uh. Huh-harrum. Wrong script, sorry.

love to all,
THO

On October 25, 2004 THO said: mauricio, I'll send your Silverymoon request to Ed, but as he's run into the NDA wall here before when asked about the Gem of the North, I suspect a lot of what he'd like to tell you will have to be omitted.

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tauster, Ed doesn't restrict gates to high-level play either. My Knights character was second level at first involuntary gate encounter, and the Realms is full of them; they're a staple of adventurers' colourful tavern tales, believe me. I meant that as a game designer, Ed considered that plane-hopping battles for control of gate networks (against various mysterious 'got there first' power groups) was an ideal focus for campaign play when PCs reached high levels. I know he expressed this on several occasions to TSR, and if I recall correctly, mentioned it in that classic DRAGON 37 article, too. The "Old Grey Box" Realms set has a gate linking the Halls of the Beast-Tamers with Undermountain, and Ed has many such unassuming, 'forgotten' gates awaiting the unwary, all over the Realms. However, like Capn Charlie, he didn't want them to become magitech 'all modern conveniences' elements. We Knights became one of the dangers of gate-hopping when the Zhents uncovered a few of them that would have made their Moonsea - Waterdeep run swift and easy... and we rapidly discovered that there were far more sinister and powerful forces trying to stop the Zhents than just one adventuring band out of Shadowdale.

love to all,
THO

October 26, 2004: Hello, all. I bring the latest words from Ed of the Greenwood:

Hi, kuje31. Diseases, now:

As for how I handle them, well, 'tis like this: I rarely foist diseases onto Player Characters unless they do something very dangerous -- drink tainted water, get parasites from food or contact with their open wounds where the parasites are carrying diseases, fight hand-to-hand (grappling) with monsters carrying diseases, and so on. I think it's just unfair and not all that exciting in terms of the entertaining adventure experience (consider this phantom near-immunity to be a side benefit of PCs being "exceptional" individuals).

Most diseases CAN be readily purged with magic (i.e. they're not immune), and casting spells to combat diseases provides most priesthoods with their bread-and-butter daily income. What I don't allow is spell-caused diseases to easily or swiftly spread beyond the spell effect (otherwise, all Faerun would have been laid waste long ago, and there'd now be no realms and almost no creatures left to write about).

To paraphrase some of what I've said earlier in this thread and to combine it with Faraer's lore-help and my notes:

Most civilized people in the Realms know that disease transferral works "sorta like this for shaking fever, like that for blacktongue," and so on. They disagree on treatments (aside from rest, care, bathing and purgatives, careful feeding of observed specifics), except for remembering what worked for them and their friends. The reasons for these disagreements are the various churches, most of whom do their level best to keep influence and control (and a continuing flow of coins for healings) by spreading misinformation (at the lower ranks, this is usually done unwittingly; the village priest knows no better, and is merely repeating what a superior has told him) as to precisely how this or that disease is best treated. As with real-world doctors, differing views on illnesses and their treatments often lead to heated professional disagreements.

"Bad hygiene" in the Realms means wash hair every four days or so and before special occasions, bathe "smelly areas" of one's body every night if possible, scented oil plus sand-scrub

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when bathing impossible-not reeking, filthy bodies, okay? "Unwashed peasants" is not the Realms norm.

Known Afflictions:

Fevers: blacklung fever, blacktongue, marsh fever, shaking fever

Diseases: darkrot, sallar (typhus), whitewasting (leprosy)

Plagues: featherlung, Spotted Plague, the Shaking Plague (Scardale)

Magical diseases: lycanthropy, mummy rot (flesh rot), green rot/scaly death (Talona)
heartstop (heart attack)

'winterchill fever' (pneumonia)

Also, we see examples in published Realmslore, but so far haven't gained Realms names for: various wasting and rotting diseases, cankers, and the mental illnesses of paranoia, kleptomania, nymphomania, pyromania, and delusions (hallucinations).

As for Talona, she's worshipped for appeasement by most folk in the Realms (i.e. "My Jhardath's going on a journey; by this prayer and offering, dread Talona, keep him from your embrace!"), although there are non-fighting types (the stereotype being the aged crone) who pray to Talona to bring diseases down on their foes ("Let sores burst in his mouth until he cannot swallow fast enough and his tongue become stuck, let shaking fever make him unable to walk or ride or hold things, let marsh fever make him spew up all he tries to eat or drink, and sweat out all the rest until his innards and all dwindle, let..." and so on, in like manner).

So there you have it.

I'll get to your greatnephew request, I promise! Must run now; am writing a humorous scene in a charity tale with great glee...

So saith Ed.

Who must be finishing the last Pentacon charity short story (well, actually, they've apparently all grown into LONG stories) now -- almost in time for THIS year's Pentacon!

love to all,
THO

On October 26, 2004 THO said: To kuje31 and all scribes patiently (and not-so-patiently) awaiting replies from the Great Sage, fear not: I'm not going to let Ed forget or ignore any queries you've put to him (that other scribes haven't helpfully answered on this thread). We're way back at Page 31 (that's where the oldest unanswered questions start), but please remember you're dealing with the world's busiest writer.

Believe me, most of us couldn't even keep up with Ed's daily e-mail, let alone WRITE anything. And it's harvest time out where he lives, and some farmers need pitch-in help, and Ed's not one of those neighbours who ignores those needs. As he put it once: "I feed folks' dreams, but these guys feed folks' tummies, and starving dreamers don't last long -- so they must come first."

Sometimes Ed can answer queries quickly and easily, and does so (so recent questions get almost immediate replies), and sometimes he can't answer due to NDAs. However, I can e-mail

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him and phone him... not to mention occasional surprise visits. (I sometimes slip into his bed and wait in the dark. Then, when he comes striding up to get another armload of books from his study, I can ask throatily from out of the darkness, "Aren't you FORGETTING something?" Not that he jumps when I do this, anymore. I do it all for you, fellow scribes.)

So patience, patience. After all, Ed's much easier to get hold of than, say, Elminster.
THO

On October 26, 2004 THO said: Hi, Faraer. There's lots more non-Realms Ed stuff. Just off the top of my head (this list is FAR from exhaustive), Ed's done three Castlemorn short stories; "A Slip Of The Knife" in the Kenzer sourcebook he did, Geonavue; three charity fantasy short stories that will only ever be published if their recipients wish; a collectible chapbook Band of Four story, "Where Only Madmen Hide" and several not yet published tales that are contracted but not yet announced (so I won't announce them here yet, either).

Then there's what's on my bookshelf. Again, lots of entries are missing from here, but this is a 'starter list.'

"Writhe, Damn You" (modern urban Lovecraftian horror) in NORTHERN HORROR (Canadian Fiction Anthology series) (Quarry Press 2000 trade 1-88052-266-7)

"The Shadow of a Sword" (Arthurian fantasy) in THE DOOM OF CAMELOT (Green Knight Publishing 2000 trade 1-928999-09-3)

"The Witch of the Dawn" (teen horror) in BE AFRAID! Tales of Horror (Tundra Books 2000 trade 0-88776-496-7)

"One Last, Little Revenge" (zombie horror) in THE BOOK OF ALL FLESH (Eden Studios 2001 trade 1-891153-87-0)

"All One Under The Stars" (space opera) in THE BAKKA ANTHOLOGY (Bakka Bookstores Limited 2002 trade 0-9731508-3-1)

"No Stars To Steer By" (space opera) in OCEANS OF SPACE (DAW 2002 mass market 0-7564-0063-5)

"O Silent Knight of Cards" (teen horror) in BE VERY AFRAID! More Tales of Horror (Tundra Books 2002 trade 0-88776-595-5)

"The Man In The Wall" (superhero) in PATH OF THE JUST (Guardians of Order 2003 trade 1-894525-82-5)

"The Secret In The Cellar" (zombie horror) in THE BOOK OF FINAL FLESH (Eden Studios 2003 trade 1-891153-78-1)

(The Bakka one, a collectible, has the same sort of bookflaps that SUMMONED TO DESTINY does. Google "BakkaPhoenix" on the Net to find the store's website.)

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Happy reading!

love,
THO

P.S. Quick Realms relevance (to elude the wrath of Alaundo): Ed has done at least two FR collectible chapbooks: "One Comes, Unheralded, To Zirta" and "A Dance In Storm's Garden." I can say no more about them right now, so please don't ask.

On October 26, 2004: Hello, Wooly dear, Lord Keeper Of My Leash. (purrr)

"One Comes, Unheralded, To Zirta" was published as a chapbook in 2000, as a giveaway at GenCon that year (that was in the days of only one annual GenCon, in Milwaukee). It's a reprint (with intro by Jeff Grubb) of Ed's 1987 (very minor) revision of his original Realms story from 1967 or so. This story was available on the WotC website as a free download for some years.

"A Dance In Storm's Garden" was a VERY limited-run chapbook published in 2003, as a special story for a fan. It's an original Realms short-short tale, and for now, at least, must remain a hard-to-get collectible.

love to all,
THO

A postscript to the above:

Every copy of THE BAKKA ANTHOLOGY was signed by all of the contributors, I believe, and several of Ed's tales have won Honorable Mentions in the annual YEARS BEST FANTASY & HORROR anthologies edited by Ellen Datlow & Teri Windling:

"The Witch of the Dawn" in the 14th Annual anthology (covers 2000)

"One Last, Little Revenge" in the 15th Annual anthology (covers 2001)

and:

"O Silent Knight of Cards" in the 16th Annual anthology (covers 2002)

love to all,
THO

On October 27, 2004 THO said: George, Ed's story was in the 1993 IBM (4 HD) diskette first release (by SSI) of the EYE OF THE BEHOLDER III ASSAULT ON MYTH DRANNOR, but not in the later Interplay "Archives Silver Edition" Forgotten Realms Archives Volume 1 compilation DOS CD-ROM.

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Specifically, it occupies about the first third (26 pages) of the paperback game "Rule Book" (of course), part number 511591.

Hope you can find it!

love,
THO

October 28, 2004: Hello, all. I bring the latest words of Ed, thus:

Hail, Talwyn! As fellow scribes have already pointed out and listed, yes, there are 'good' lichs in the Realms (archliches if human, baelnorn if elven). Their existence is tied to my answer to your second question.

A 'good' lich desires lichdom not for selfish purposes (to cheat death, or win time to finish magical work for personal satisfaction, power, or satisfaction), and not merely for revenge ("Last of the Haukren, I will abide beyond death, working tirelessly to bring about the doom of House Tannalar, until the accursed Tannalar are driven from these my family lands and exterminated where'er they swagger, to be but a forgotten name in old texts and no longer the stain on the land they now are!").

A good lich desires to exist beyond normal mortal lifespan to protect and defend a person, family, treasure, item, place, written records or lore FOR A WIDER GOOD (for the benefit of many, or as a guardian to prevent the unleashing of something harmful before its unleashing becomes truly needful).

So if your drow male necromancer has an avowed purpose or mission requiring lichdom for its successful performance, the priestesses of the Dark Dancer will overcome their natural distaste for unlife and its deliberate seeking, and their wary regard for male drow converts, and accept the character's desire.

Note this well, however: the purpose or mission must be life-consuming (literally, right? :)); in other words, it's the character's primary goal, overriding everything else. This USUALLY means a character that is best 'retired,' as there won't be much opportunity for adventuring for that character, henceforth. (In other words, we don't all get to guard artifacts that are conveniently stolen and whisked around the world so we have to spend years giving chase and fighting the folks who now possess the artifact.)

The clergy of Eilistraee will magically look into the character's mind, and make VERY certain there's no deception on the character's part, the character isn't under any magical compulsions, and the character's er, 'character' means they can't change their mind or 'fall away' from their mission after attaining lichdom.

The goal of: "I want to exist for centuries more than I would normally have done so because I'm a necromancer and so mastering lichdom would be the ultimate achievement for me, and it will also allow me to have centuries upon centuries to study and experiment with magic, so as to grow very powerful as a servant of Eilistraee AND perhaps even devise some new spells, which of course I'd freely share for the benefit of all servants of the Dark Dancer!" is NOT an acceptable,

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The logo for Candlekeep, featuring the word "Candlekeep" in a stylized, yellow, gothic font with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

selfless goal, it's merely a "I wanna be the best, oh, and here're my rationalizations as to why you should allow it" argument.

Most baelnorn, for example, sacrificed a LOT to enter their lichnee state (giving up happy and active lives, social prominence, mobility and close enjoyment of nature, and so so). Their preservation of family vaults, treasures, and lore wasn't really about maintaining family pride and power, it was about preserving things a beleaguered race and culture could use for its survival and improvement in the ages ahead.

So only in such specific circumstances is striving to attain lichdom an acceptable act to the Church of Eilistraee. The word of the character isn't going to be trusted -- it's going to be the desire of the goddess herself to make certain of the character's innermost nature and intent, and so senior clergy will make VERY certain. If the character resists or disputes any of that process, it's a "falling away from Eilistraee," with appropriate treatment by the dancing priestesses.

Hello again to the Blind Ranger. Faraer has pointed out the lore reference already. Let me just add some mentions of real-world pieces of music that can be used to try to evoke or imagine the 'sound' of some Faerunian music.

Minstrels usually play lutes and harps, using bells, foot-stamping, sometimes sticks (the wooden equivalent of 'spoons,' played for rhythm against one's knee or thigh), and occasionally 'pipes' (handmade hollowed wooden instruments closer to what we would call penny-whistles or even kazoos than pan pipes or flutes) when travelling from inn to tavern, entertaining with ballads.

A strong voice (such as that possessed by Maddy Prior) is prized in such work, and the Steeleye Span renditions of the folk standards "The Prickly Bush" on their CD entitled TIME, "The King" on PLEASE TO SEE THE KING, and "Who Am I?" from Maddy Prior's solo disc FLESH & BLOOD are good 'general examples' of what most good ballad singing would sound like.

Listen past the lyrics to the tune and musical performance of Jake Thackray's "Isobel Makes Love On National Monuments" to hear the rhythm and sound of a 'standard' tune a minstrel night set topical ribald words to ('jokes of the day' singing).

More typical (Dock Ward 'low-tavern') singing would sound closer to Ben Jonson's "Paggington's Pound" as performed by The Musicians of Swanne Alley on the CD entitled IN THE STREETS AND THEATRES OF LONDON/Elizabethan Ballads and Theatre Music, or Ann & Nancy Wilson's rendition of "My Thing Is My Own" on THE RENAISSANCE ALBUM.

Moving up a rung, "Dawn of the Day" from Steeleye Span's TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT and "Reynardine" from Maddy Prior's ARTHUR THE KING are good examples of what intimate balladry performed for high-paying patrons (nobles in Waterdeep or Cormyr, in their parlors or private chambers) sounds like.

Monastic religious singing in the Realms is usually plainsong chanting, often accompanied by instruments playing a 'drone' (long-held notes, somewhat akin to real-world Gregorian chant when accompanied by lone organ notes). A good example of this can be heard on the CD entitled SALVE REGINA by the Benedictine Monks of the Abbey of Saint-Maurice & Saint-Maur, Clervaux. At its most gentle and elaborate (the clergy of Eldath, for instance), such performances sound very close to Enya's "Isobella" (most easily found now on the ONLY TIME 4-CD collection).

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Revels hosted by the wealthy in Waterdeep, Cormyr, Sembia, Amn, and Tethyr tend to employ lutists (alone or two lutists in duet). Try Paul O'Dette's ROBIN IS TO THE GREENWOOD GONE disc for a taste of the general 'feel' of this. Those who hear the Peter Sellers comedic rendition of the Beatles "A Hard Day's Night" and listen past the vocal to the musical accompaniment will hear what the grandest instrumental pieces played for the wealthy sound like.

Most upper-class revel or court dance music sounds VERY close to Terry Tucker's "Overture To The Sun" on the soundtrack of the movie CLOCKWORK ORANGE.

The closest thing to symphonic music heard in the Realms are the triumphal marches and court pieces, and one cinematic piece captures their sound closely, EXCEPT that in the Realms you'd not hear as much 'swirling strings' carrying the rising melody (it would be sung or played with horns): "Promise Me" from Jerry Goldsmith's soundtrack for the movie FIRST KNIGHT. Realms fans who attended Azoun's funeral at GenCon some years back may recall this last piece as our processional music on that sad occasion.

I should contrast such glorious grandeur with the work song or soldiers' march, which often sounds very like "Rogues In A Nation" from the Steeleye Span PARCEL OF ROGUES disc.

Please note that I'm not just giving you personal 'evoke a mood' favourites (or I'd be sneaking in Clannad, some of the Excalibur soundtrack, a lot of the LOTR movie trilogy soundtrack, and divers Jethro Tull and Genesis pieces), I'm trying to communicate the overall character of music in the Realms as I've imagined it down the years. I hope this helps.

So saith Ed. I know he owns all of this music; he's played it often down the years, usually as 'background sound' before and after play sessions, and during our 'chips, chip-dip, tea and chatter' break. So if scribes want label and catalogue number information, I'm sure I can poke him into spitting it out. Ed has a huge, eclectic musical collection, by the way. He's perhaps the only man I know whose house I can walk through and hear, as I pass from room to room (playing QUIETLY on separate music systems), Brahms, Bonzo Dog Doodah Band, Flanders & Swann, the Kipper Family, Barenaked Ladies, Pink Floyd, Blackmore's Night, ELO, Procol Harum, John Fahey & His Orchestra, Rush, the soundtrack of Brideshead Revisited, and half a dozen medieval and renaissance instrumentalists.

Yes, he has that many rooms in his house. And books in ALL of them.

love to all,
THO

On October 28, 2004 THO said: Hello, all.

I have an oops. When cut-and-pasting Ed's e-mail to post here, I somehow dropped a sentence:

Slow court dances sound very much like "O Mistris Mine" as performed on the Dorian compilation disc ELIZABETH'S MUSIC.

Sorry.

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Ahh, Karth, what a LOVELY Realmslore question. I'll pass it on forthwith. Ed has a stress echo test (annual heart checkups) in Toronto today, and so will be 'away' from all computers (except the doctor's :}) most of the day, so expect an answer late tonight or tomorrow.

love to all,
THO

On October 28, 2004 Garen Thal said: As regards the possibility of elven blood coursing through the veins of human Cormyrean nobles:

This is one of those "hands off" topics among the nobility, because Cormyr is a human nation, with human nobles, whose titles pass to human heirs. While it's okay to have elven blood in the family line "back in the beginning," for a non-human to claim a title in the present day would require that the claimant be the only legitimate heir to the title. The Crown and the family both have a say in who gains a family's title, and this decision includes not only legitimacy (a human noble marrying an elf would be a rather public occurrence in Cormyr). Half-elves can be granted titles or marry into noble families, but the expectation is that their offspring will be human, not elven.

That said, in reality there's something of a dual nature to having elven blood. On the one hand, any suggestion that one's heritage is "less" than human is something of an offense to a noble. On the other, elven skill in music, craftsmanship, dancing or singing, or having a "fae look about you" is a compliment. It's alright to have elven blood in you, but you're supposed to be quiet about it. It is a contradictory view, to be certain, but for the most part, that's how Cormyrean's are with elves: they enjoy their cultural contributions, their beauty and their skill, but don't want elven nobles and lords because of the longevity (and consequently, the perceived power) elves enjoy. Once the elf-blood is diluted enough that it loses the possibility to create an elven noble (at least two generations removed) people tend not to talk about it at all, because nothing "bad" can come of it, and the "good" only reminds them of the disaster averted.

As for which families might have some elves in their lineage, it would be spoiling the fun to share that bit. I can say to look closely for references to the XXXXX, XXXXX and especially the XXXXX families in the future, in addition to the XXXXX. (Sorry, GDTNATA*)

*GDTNATA= Gentleman's "Don't Tell Nobody A Thing" Agreement. If I say too much, I will spoil all of Ed's fun in telling you himself.

October 29, 2004: Hello, all. Hearken, please, to the latest words of Ed:

Well, I survived my annual run on the treadmill and the ministrations of beautiful lady nurses and techs (and the T-shirt I doffed to let them clip on the heart monitor was my gamers' "Resurrected" shirt, of course :}), so I'm here to answer some more Realmslore.

I echo the words of my beautiful Lady Hooded: please don't think that because I leap to swiftly answer a current query that I've forgotten the older ones, okay?

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kuje31, regarding children and religion, please tell Tempus665 and everyone else interested, thus:

As in our real world, how parents involve children in their worship varies, of course.

Remember, please, that the vast majority of Faerunian children have "work to do" (even if this "work" is being trained by elders) from a very early age. Only in communal (and such communities are often faith-based, like Goldenfields), wealthy (i.e. folk who can afford many servants, such as nobility, royalty, courtiers, and wannabe-noble wealthy merchants), and guild-related (apprenticeships, usually in cities) situations are the children "apart" from their parents.

So children sneak off to play, especially with other children, but their parents are usually nearby. Babes and infants hear their parents praying and performing simple (household) rituals, but the clergy of most faiths in Faerun (with exceptions, such as when a small child portrays the 'innocent god' or represents the virginal state in a ritual) don't want to see children participating in elaborate temple rituals when they're too young to understand fully (and therefore choose for themselves).

Chanting and praying without really knowing what one is doing and believing in it is just empty noise, not power for the deity.

Therefore, most churches have a 'coming of age' process of instruction, presentation to the priests or congregation, and oath-taking induction (sometimes with tests), and this is generally at or after puberty (or, upon the death of one or both parents, when a child is forced to act in a community as a full adult).

It's very important that gamers not follow their real-world (usually monotheistic) thinking when considering Faerunian situations: the Realms is pantheistic, and "everyone knows" ALL the gods (at least of one's own race) "really exist." Unlike our real world, there's no denying that the folk praying to another god next door aren't just as correct as "we" are, because often "we" will also be praying to that other deity soon (if only for appeasement). The faith lies in believing this or that personal, dream-vision-induced, or priestly interpretation of the deity's will or intentions or prohibitions, not in believing the god exists.

So young children often pray and participate, and more often watch and learn, their own beliefs deepening as they watch adults emotionally moved by veneration, divine manifestations, and life crises.

Where children ARE often involved in religion is hearing (over and over again) 'tales of the gods,' told by minstrels, village elders, parents, priests, peddlers, and so on-and noticing the different ways these stories are slanted by this teller and that. Such tale-telling is universally encouraged (not this slanting or that version of a story, mind you, but the act of passing on the stories) as a way of educating the young about all of the gods-who governs what in daily life, why they are the way they are (or rather, various mortal rationalizations about why a god is angry or happy or beautiful or whatever), and how some gods befriended -- or came to hate and oppose -- others.

Karth, Garen Thal has given you such a complete, accurate, and superbly-worded reply that he's left me almost nothing to say.

So, of course, I'll find something. :}

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As Garen's answer intimated, darn near EVERY 'oldblood' noble family of Cormyr has (and quietly claims, without saying a thing: it's just "understood") elven blood, so no, it's not a means of possible blackmail or loss of status. Moreover, NDAs forbid me from replying to your question about Filfaeril-other than to say, "MY, you're a good guesser!" (Ahem.)

Ah, the tales I hope to have the opportunity to tell, some day.

As for a half-elf showing up to claim a noble title, 'tis like this:

1. If the family has already (apparently) 'gone extinct' some time ago, the title and lands left (after all debts are paid) revert to the Crown (who in recent reigns have shown no interest whatsoever in handing out such lands to neighbouring nobles hungry for more), so the claimant really faces the task of convincing the Court (read: Vangey until he retires, and Laspeera working with Alaphondar, Dowager Queen Filfaeril, Alusair, and various Highknights -- like Rhauligan -- after that) of his or her own legitimacy. Note that they'll use magic to mind-ream (more covertly than the scenes in *ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER*; it'll probably be a day of hard questioning in the Palace, then a sumptuous meal and a luxurious apartment in the Palace for the claimant, and spells cast into the claimant's sleeping mind), and will be inclined to simply dismiss claims more distant than direct (bastard or legitimate) offspring of the 'main line' lineage of the family (i.e. if an aunt of the heir sleeps around and gives birth, her offspring, or a descendant of that offspring, will have to really worm their way into the heart of a royal, or offer some valuable service to the Crown, or something of that sort for their claim to succeed). On the other hand, even if four generations have passed, the son of the eldest son of the eldest son of the long-lost brother of the heir of the day WOULD be recognized, because that's 'main line.'

2. If the claimant is trying to step into the lordship or become heir of a noble family that's still very much in evidence, things get far more messy. The Court tends to try to step back and let the family members try to sort it out, and in most cases said family members use the claimant as a bargaining chip or weapon against each other. Other noble families (especially those feuding with the noble family of the claimant, or claiming to be creditors of a member of that family) may try to 'use' the claimant. Most such claimants meet with fatal "accidents" (food poisoning, or an unfortunate fall from the castle battlements, or hunting mishaps involving errant arrows), and the Court seldom does more than an "embarrassment investigation" (that is, War Wizard and Highknight questioning designed to achieve this: "We know you did it, you murderous noble scum, but we can't really prove it, so we're just going to make sure the whole kingdom knows what you're really like; every success on entering into trade deals from now on") into the affair unless the claimant somehow survives the murder attempt.

And you're welcome for the Realmslore. I, too, hope to keep it coming your way for years, you and all the good scribes of Candlekeep. I don't have time to do a proper job, and my Lady Hooded knew that quite well when she purringly persuaded me into this, but she's made it possible. Ah, if only I could have a house full of such beautiful, intelligent, persuasive secretaries... (not that my wife would probably be all that pleased :}).

One more musical note (sorry, bad pun) for The Blind Ranger: although there aren't really symphonies in the Realms, as we real-world folk know them, there ARE song-cycles: extended stories told by ballads being sung in a particular sequence. Most of these are 'later inventions,' concocted by a minstrel or bard stringing together their personal favourites (or tunes that they could perform well, and that were popular with paying audiences) into a story of sorts, and then knitting them together with altered lyrics, additional linking songs, and sometimes short spoken-word orations, into the tale of one hero's life, or a romance (often between a male human and a female elf, and often doomed by the resistance of their families or communities), or the reign of a

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villainous king, or the saga of a fearsome dragon or other predatory monster (and its eventual defeat).

Capn Charlie. I like both of your minotaur isle ideas, and yes, I have always included a FEW intelligent, refined minotaurs, though most are brutish, barbarian-level "grunting beasts." I've always treated lizard men the same way; most are tribal warriors with much cunning but not a whole lot of inspirational intellect (i.e. they can learn a new weapon, trap, or battlefield danger in a hurry in a fight with PCs, but don't lead lives of complex culture), but a few are every bit as intelligent and accomplished as most humans. This usually means that they're smart enough to keep isolated and largely hidden from humans. :}

In fact, my players will tell you that I always love to run individual monsters that differ in alignment or skills or abilities from the norm, just to keep PCs guessing. Hack an orc on sight, and you just slew a trusted agent of your king or priestly confessor or closest ally...

Ah, I'm bad.

So saith Ed.

Not that I agree with him about being 'bad.' I'M the bad one around here!

love to all,
THO

On October 30, 2004 THO said: Points well taken, Beowulf.

I don't think Ed was taking a shot at folks who believe their god is the One, True, and so on.

I think Ed was 'getting at' gamers keeping in mind that multiple priesthoods of multiple gods (all of whom are known to be real to the general populace) means less "control" of religious instruction (or the daily behaviour of believers) by any particular priesthood (and so, a lot less time wasted on 'the devout of god X' arguing or fighting with 'the devout of god Y', regardless of how much individual priests may try to foment such strife), and everybody of Faerun being aware that their younglings have a LOT of information to digest and sort out.
THO

October 31, 2004: Whew. Gentle, fellas, gentle. If flaring tempers awaken a desire to flail anyone, flail me. I *LIKE* it.

Ahem. Hello, all. I bring Ed of the Greenwood's latest answer:

mauricio, I'm running into NDA trouble answering your questions, but let me try to be brief and thus 'sneak through' the minefield:

1. How many hours do students spend in class everyday?

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It varies. For lower-level students, there's usually some formal instruction in the midmorning, then time for dining, relaxing, and study (spell memorization) through the middle part of the day, and then casting practise and instruction in the late afternoon and early evening, and then the evening is for experimentation and study, as assigned. Higher-level students depart from this routine depending on what they're doing and who's teaching them (for instance, days on end might be devoted to spellcrafting and experimental castings).

2. Is each school of magic taught in separate classes or do they have some kind of "integrated" classes? Are there any other disciplines worth mentioning [except for the history of the Art which is mentioned in "Silver Marches" and "The North"]?

There are integrated classes in some minor disciplines: defenses (an approach to magic that combines wards, mythals, shieldings, detection, traps, double-spell locks, and deceptions), 'building the will' (learning how to concentrate despite mental weariness, physical discomfort, and distractions), and Weave Theory (trying to understand the interactions of natural energies harnessed by spells, and the implications of castings [for example, the "weakening the planar fabric" effect of opening too many portals near to each other, and how the presence of some spells cause others to decay, in mythals or just nearby]).

3. Is it possible for students to attend to workshops in the lines of "Ask [insert the name of a powerful mage here]"?

Yes and no. There are no formal workshops along such lines, but students can request private audiences with particular mages present at the school (or ask 'masters' [instructors] to "intercede" for them, introducing them to important mages who are visiting Silvermoon but not present at the College (most mages make a point of avoiding the College because they don't want to face a barrage of student audiences; when such wizards do grant interviews (and note: these will almost always be conversations with perhaps light refreshments, NOT 'how to' spellcasting sessions), they tend to allow all interested students to come at once -- the only occasions upon which several students will end up meeting with an important mage together.

4. Is Vihuel still the Headmaster, as mentioned in "The North"?

No. Vihuel resigned his position to become High Master Emeritus, meaning 'retired Headmaster still resident at the College as a researcher assisted by students.' This sort of burn-out isn't unusual, and there were cordial private voting moots among the faculty to choose a successor. The new Headmaster is the kindly, grand-voiced, whimsical and craggy-faced old man Avalann Phondras (LN hm W16), who prefers to be a friendly guide rather than an authoritarian. He's old and isn't expected to remain Head of the College for long before he, too, retires.

5. And finally... could you mention the names of a few teachers?

Interestingly, my notes tell me that there are two haughty male gold elves among the faculty, named [NDA] and [NDA], who are carrying on a long-running feud with a female moon elf of greater magical accomplishments who's incredibly beautiful (so most of the students and a few of the faculty, too, are helplessly in love with her). Her name is Thaeluvae Aunglimmer, and she's a CG of W19 who loves to teach and rarely sets foot outside the College.

The faculty also includes two crotchety male human ex-adventurers (in looks and manner, think 'Hoggle' from the movie LABYRINTH) who teach novice students the basics in a worldly, gruff

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manner. They try to one-up each other with fanciful "Now, when *I* was an adventurer" boastings, and are Belloz ("Bell-OH-ss") Flamdurn (NG hm W9) and Handur Skeldyn (LN hm W8).

There's also "the Vulture" (though few dare call him that to his face), a master of illusions and battle-magic hight Lyland Blackrune, a tall, darkly handsome black-robed "I'm oh-so-important" type (LN hm W12) who loves acting mysterious when he's not snapping orders and looking disapproving. He provides much of the daily discipline around the College, and tries to make both faculty and students scared of him. To his way of thinking, awed and frightened persons are respectful persons.

So saith Ed.

You now know rather more than we Knights ever learned of the faculty: we got to deal with some frightening Auditor/Dementor types on the one occasion we tried to sneak inside!

love to all,
THO

October 31, 2004: Hello, all. I bring some words of Ed of the Greenwood, in reply to a patient scribe:

Well, kuje31, it's a long story. I'll try to give the short version, okay?

So, here's the hitherto hidden lore concerning Elminster's mysterious great-nephew. Bear in mind that aside from Elminster, Mystra, and other servants of the goddess of magic, NO ONE in the Realms knows what I state hereafter.

"Very brave, but a little empty in the attic," Elminster describes his great-nephew. Note that the Old Mage was very careful not to name him. El never does, because he doesn't want half the evildoers in Faerun to descend on the poor lout, seeking a bargaining-pawn with which to do ill to one Elminster of Shadowdale.

Careful readers will also note that Elminster drops a hint as to at least one activity his great-nephew has engaged in: monster-capturing.

So how did this mysterious relative come to be? (Flourish of harpstrings, please. Let's go back beyond your childhood... childhood... childhood...)

Elminster's parents, Prince Elthryn Aumar and Amrythale Goldsheaf, were married in 210 DR, and had a daughter, Narrune (named for Amrythale's grandmother) in early 211 DR.

When she was four months old, Narrune vanished from her cradle one night without her parents being awakened. When they did rise, come morn, they found much blood and her torn swaddlings, and the attic hay-hatch (through which rural folk forked hay to feed their horses and oxen through the worst deep-snow months) forced open. Unlikely though it was that any stealthy forest creature could slink past the village dogs, climb one of the taller cottages, and tear apart a stout wooden barred-from-within hatch, that's what had obviously happened: Narrune had been devoured and lost.

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A wolf had been raiding the village that winter, and Elthryn tirelessly hunted it all the rest of the year, until he finally slew it as the snows came again.

By then, Elthryn and Amrythale (in the way of hardy folk, in those perilous times) were done grieving. Their son Elminster was born in 212 DR, and his parents never spoke of Narrune to him, so for some centuries thereafter, El never knew he'd even had a sister -- until Mystra herself informed him that "one of her servants" (she never told him who, though El has suspected for some time that it was Azuth) had spirited Narrune away scant moments before a poisoner sent by Elthryn's brother Othglas (the person who with needle-saws so quietly forced open the hay-hatch) entered the cottage. That servant's spells snatched the poisoner halfway across the Kingdom of the Stag, into a swamp where he perished in the jaws of watery predators.

Mystra originally intended to return Narrune "with portents and manifestations suitable to impress Elthryn that the goddess of magic desired him to obey her." Her commandment to him would have been to withdraw from Athalantar and dwell elsewhere in hiding, until the coming strife-of-mages was over, so that the realm might endure as a place friendly to wizards, not turned against all workers-of-Art by the fell Magelords.

However, she then reconsidered: holding a royal heir of Athalantar might prove useful in refounding the kingdom. So Narrune was never returned, but instead was magically disguised to closely resemble another infant girl, and substituted for that child.

Darondblas ("DAIR-ond-blaz") and Mareetha Sparcastle were a happy couple, and minor mages both. They dwelt in the rolling forests of what is today called the Border Kingdom, relieved to have escaped the politics of the Vilhon (where workers-of-Art were being impressed into the service of this or that petty ruler of the time, for use in covert 'shadow wars' of slayings, coercion, and oppression). A daughter, Unethe ("OO-nethh") had been born to them, but had sickened of a fever. Unethe died the very night Narrune was stolen from Athalantar, and the one babe was substituted for the other without the exhausted Sparcastles being any the wiser.

Narrune Sparcastle grew to adulthood ignorant of her true heritage. She lacked great beauty but also any touch of ugliness, and had a pleasant disposition. Like her mother, she became a good cook and seamstress, and in the fullness of time wed a local farmer, Oblyn Taetyn.

From the view of sages or enthusiasts of warfare and adventure, their life together was uneventful. They had a son, Moebur ("Mmm-OH-blurr") Taetyn (named for Oblyn's father), who in time inherited their farm. Like his parents, Elminster's nephew had no aptitude for magic.

What he did have was a restlessness. He travelled Faerun constantly as a caravan guard, peddler, or simply a vagabond wayfarer. When word came to him that his mother Narrune had died and the farm was now his, he returned to it only long enough to sell it, and set forth again.

In time he came to Iriaebor, and hired on as a cellarer there (intending to stay only long enough to fill his belly and stay warm during the winter months) in a tavern. Whilst rummaging for long-forgotten bottles in an udnercellar, he found a loose stone behind which was an even deeper cellar. Being Moebur, he had to explore it without delay-and so found a long-hidden Netherese tomb.

And its traps found him. Caught in a spell that was either Phezult's Sleep of Ages or a close equivalent that renders its victims invisible, he simply "vanished" as far as the tavernmaster (who hadn't known where Moebur had gone, and himself never went down into the "flooded several

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times over, so everything there must be ruined" undercellar) was concerned -- but in truth was frozen in stasis.

There he remained for over a thousand years, trapped at age twenty-six while the Realms aged around him.

Moebur Taetyn was freed in 1337 DR when the spell failed (for reasons unknown -- at least to him, the only witness and a man entirely ignorant of matters magical), and found the world much changed. Bewildered, coinless, and hungry, he departed the city (where even a bed to sleep in costs something) and eked out an existence not far from its walls as a hunter and then a hired shepherd (for brigands preying on road-trade were then a problem, and persons willing to tend sheep, a ready food source, all too few). Favoured by Tymora all his life, Moebur survived even the slings, arrows and cudgels of brigands, and in time married Araedy Welve, the daughter of his employer. They had a son, Rakrune, who joined his father in hunting and wandering. After Araedy died in a street accident (run down by a panicked cart-team of horses), father and son seldom returned to the city -- and the increasing grimmer Moebur became reckless, challenging even wolves with nothing but a dagger and a snarl. Wounded many times and seemingly seeking death, he lasted only a handful of years before he died in Rakrune's arms, torn apart by one too many challenged beasts.

So Elminster's great-nephew is a hardy man who calls himself "Rakrune of Iriaebor."

Rakrune is a tall, thin, 'battered-handsome' (he has the hawk-like Aumar nose, but also a large chin and fierce black eyebrows) adventurer who's been making a very good living for some years now hunting down and capturing monsters (or harvesting their 'parts') for clients in Elturel and Scornubel. Rakrune is strong, quick, cunning, and fearless, but he has NO aptitude for magic, knows little history (and cares less), and isn't all that shrewd in dealings with people. He doesn't have to be: he's a ranger who spends almost all of his time in the wilds, dealing with clients through several 'go-between' agents.

Merry of disposition and kindly, Rakrune makes friends easily. He's come to lead a band of young human and half-elven adventurers of both genders who know their chosen territory well, have established several caches and 'hideholds,' and are good at living rough off the land, even in winter. He doesn't know he's related to Elminster (whom he regards as a seldom-seen friend, after Elminster and some Harpers came unexpectedly to his aid against wolves some years back), and Elminster has no intention of telling him.

So there you have it: Elminster's great-nephew. A character who could easily star in his own novel or two. (Novels I'll probably never have time to write, mind you, though of course it's up to the good Books people at WotC if anyone else gets the chance to take up Rakrune's saga. He could be VERY useful in a secret project that NDAs forbid me even hinting anything about.)

So saith Ed.

Who's done it again: made the Realms seem like a real place he's just reporting on, and not a fictional creation.

But I see ANOTHER e-mail from Ed has just popped up in my inbox, so... swords bright for now, fellow scribes!

THO

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October 31, 2004: Hello, all. Ed wasn't done spouting Realmslore this morn. I bring you his latest:

To properly answer your query, Karth, I must direct you to the map of Suzail found in the 2nd Edition Realms boxed set (specifically, on page 54 of "A Grand Tour of the Realms"). On many, many occasions I've sent "street keys" to TSR for various cities of the Realms, but because they make maps so cluttered, they usually get dumped (or largely omitted).

So I'm using the boxed set map because of its keyed buildings, which allow me to locate features without a lot of "See a squiggle shaped like a flying banana? Well, about the width of my fingernail from it" nonsense.

Find the warehouse of the oil and perfume dealer Ilmur Jhassalan (feature 73) and Blackgorgons, the tower of the wizard Baskor (feature 74). To the east of both buildings, defining the easternmost boundary of the 'blocks' they stand in, is a street whose northern 'end' is a Y-junction, and whose southern end is a T-junction. That street is Swordstars Lane.

The Society for Stalwart Adventurers stands on the west side of Swordstars Lane, three buildings south of the Y-junction. In other words, it's the L-shaped building five building-fronts 'up' from Jhassalan's warehouse.

The westfront-Swordstars buildings in between, by the way, are (going north from the warehouse):

-- Vardrim's (an always-full rooming-house for carters and crate-makers and warehouse workers, owned by the elderly, energetic, and irascible Bardra 'Battleaxe' Vardrim, who lives on its ground floor). Bardra has two sons in the Purple Dragons, who dine with her weekly, and 'take care' of rowdy tenants or visitors. Vardrim's has a rickety back stair [fire escape] where many roomers grow edible plants, which several local low-coin girls use for concealment of sorts while entertaining clients (roomers who let them use "their" stretch of stairs get serviced for free).

-- Jharko's Coffers and Crates (a rat-infested firetrap of a decaying former warehouse now owned by the shrewd, miserly Ustal Jharko, who's filled the place with secondhand strong chests, coffers, travel-boxes, crates, coffins, barrels, handkegs, and every other sort of sturdy container. He repairs them and sells them all for a copper under "new" prices (and buys such things, no questions asked, for about a quarter of new pricings). If one needs containers in a hurry, Jharko can provide. Most of his containers have hasps, but Jharko has few locks to sell. He charges VERY dearly for hinges and hasps, for those who just want to buy such hardware.

Between Jharko's and the next building north (Montalar's) is the main cart-alley into the center of the block. Traffic to and from the warehouses is heavy enough to keep it clear of the usual refuse.

-- Montalar's Happy House, a popular local eatery. This dawn-to-dusk place shuts its windows every night and turns out diners "to seek drunken entertainment elsewhere," as Bhaerusk Montalar puts it. Up until then, however, Bhaerusk, his four daughters, his wife, and her two sisters keep bustling, serving forth hot cider (except in warm summer, when it's served cold), weak ale, weak but sweet berry wine (beloved by many thirsty workers in the area), and 'happy helms.' Helms are circular pastries about the size of a small man's palm, pinched flat around the edges but filled with a fry-mix of ground meat, diced vegetables, and strongly-spiced brown sauce. They're portable food, and can be bought hot and fresh for dining on the spot (the vast

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majority are sold this way, many of them sold right out a front window to hungry buyers standing in the street) or cold (cooked, allowed to cool, and put in a stoppered second-hand clay fry-oil jug or salvaged bottle, to keep) for eating at home, later. Helms are sold two for a copper, and most find them tasty and filling -- though many whisper that the strong sauce makes one buy thrice as much drink, and could conceal the taste of, say, none-too-clean chopped rat.

The family Montalar lives on the floor above their eatery, and discreetly rents out apartments on the floor above. There's also a cellar below, and folk murmur that jovial Bhaerusk Montalar rents out space in it for all manner of mysterious items, no questions asked. The cellar and the eatery both have rear entrances usually screened from view by heaps of discarded crates and a hanging curtain of runner-vines (edible beans) grown every year by the Montalars (their laundry lines adorn the gently-sloping roof of the building).

-- Talarkgates, the once-grand but slightly decaying home of a retired wool- and ale-merchant who still engages in moneylending and property investments in Suzail. Umbran Daerith is elderly but in robust good health. He's rarely seen out of doors before dusk (when his coach calls for him, to take him to this or that nobles' feast) unless attending business at Court or in one of the clubs along the central Promenade where wealthy merchants talk trade and make deals. Daerith is hard-headed but mellowing as age creeps up on him, and is increasingly seen in the company of beautiful young ladies he hires by the tenday (it's thought they spend less time in his bedchambers than such 'ornaments' usually do, but most of their time simply being his friendly chattering escorts). Daerith has many ties to Sembian trading-partners, and it's widely whispered in Suzail that some of his beautiful lasses are really War Wizards, keeping an eye on him.

The house is surrounded by a high, spear-topped wrought-iron fence, enclosing a narrow, overgrown-by-untended shrubs walkway all around it. Its name came from its builder and former owner, the long-dead merchant-fleet owner Indrith Talark.

Scribes, I was happy to answer this query, but PLEASE don't take it as license to deluge me with "Oh, so what's THIS street? And where's THAT building?" requests. Not unless you can be patient until around February, when I might have some time to deal with them. For time slips between my fingers, and the novels sit unfinished...

So saith Ed, who added that Jim Lowder, creator of the Society (which Ed LOVES) should be interested in this, if he chances to read it.

love to all,
THO

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