Realmslore
from Elaine Cunningham

Taken from The Candlekeep Forum

Collated by Bradley Russo

Candlekeep

More on moonblades

-- Jul 2002
When time permits, I'm going to have to take a long, hard look at third edition moonblade rules. At present, here's my thoughts on the matter.

These swords were designed so that each would have a unique set of powers, a set corresponding to the composite strengths of a particular elven family, created in response to the challenges those elves faced. The fitness of a family to rule was therefore judged not only by the ability of a long line of elves to wield a moonblade, but by the powers with with they imbued their hereditary sword. The moonblades present a test not only of strength and courage, but also of resourcefulness and creative problem solving. Over time, a pattern emerges, and a sword acquires a skill set that is almost
akin to a personality. Arilyn's sword comes from a long line of solitary adventurers. It is well suited to her needs and nature, but it is not a sword that would qualify its wielder for the elven throne.

To some extent, a compiled list of "acceptible powers" defeats the purpose of the moonblades. These swords have histories and, occasionally, destinies, that are entwined with the families who wielded them. They should be much more than a collection of randomly acquired powers.

But I understand that these tables and charts are helpful to gamers and DMs who wish to incorporate moonblades into their campaigns. This is one of those example of how different novels and games can be. Not everything is readily translated from one medium to another. Moonblades seem to be one of those things. People in both creative endeavors -- books and games -- do their best to reconcile that which cannot be completely reconciled, and sometimes, that's as good as it gets.

My personal preference would be for moonblades to have no part in the game materials. They were created for a specific purpose, one that is clouded and distorted by their game use. But it's a shared world, and a flexibility is a necessary mindset. On the one hand, I sometimes wish that people who want a magic sword would create their own; on the other hand, I'm pleased that this concept caught so many people's imaginations.

That said, I'd intended to write a history of the moonblades, a one-stop reference for readers and gamers who are interested in these artifacts. At present, I think I'd rather move on and create something new.

[…]

-- Mar 2003
First, as has been pointed out, Moonblades were created in the novel
Elfshadow. They were later translated -- badly -- to accommodate those who wished to employ them in their RPG campaigns. Please note that I am not complaining about the quality of the game designers' work, but rather pointing out that translation from one medium to another does not always capture the original intent. Books and games are very different storytelling forms, just as books and movies are different. Some things translate well. Others don't. Moonblades, IMO, are among the latter.

Each moonblade has a unique history and a unique set of powers, which developed over centuries in response to its wielders' strengths and circumstances. Because they are hereditary, it stands to reason that they will develop a SET of powers, rather than a random selection. It's entirely possible that these powers could be related in complicated ways: Power B corresponds to Power A,

and C corresponds to B, and so on, but F and A work well together only under specific circumstances, and the ability to wield both G and A requires an unusual combination of skills. After a while, moonblades became almost impossible to wield. Whether or not an heir can claim a sword has less to do with his overall "worthiness" than his potential to master the disparate powers of that particular sword. Heirs are chosen not merely because they are the next of kin, but because they are likely to be a good match. They will then be rigorously trained in the skills needed to claim the blade. It's not a casual or a random process.

There are circumstances, however, in which an elf claims a sword without this sort of guidance. Arilyn is one example. She was only 15 when her mother died, and she knew next to nothing about the moonblade. None of the elves expected her to claim it, and when she did, none expected her to survive -- and with good reason. No half-elf had ever wielded a moonblade. Those who have read Arilyn's stories realize that the purpose behind this bit of worldbuilding has more to do with character than plot. Arilyn has been accepted as elven by one of the most potent symbols known to the People, yet she is rejected by the elves in general and her mother's family in particular. Her total identification with what the sword is shown by her choice of last name: Moonblade. It's her none-too-subtle way of proclaiming,"I'm an ELF, damn it!"

Elaith Craulnober is another example of how moonblades are NOT supposed to work. Most of his family was wiped out in a raid when he was a baby. An aged grandfather was his only link to family lore, and this elf was not the blade's wielder. The sword was held in trust for Elaith because he was the last of his line. In such cases, if the only surviving member of a family is not well matched to the blade, the sword's task is considered fulfilled and it enters dormancy. But Elaith is not without arrogance -- a common failing among the People -- and although he knew the history and powers of the Craulnober blade, he was certain he was equal to the task. There was no one to tell him otherwise.

In other words, the sword and the wielder have to be well matched. The more wielders a sword has, the lower the probability of finding another wielder who can handle ALL the sword's powers -- not to mention all the permutations thereof. Such nuances are entirely lost when you say, "Okay, this PC gets a moonblade. Roll to select powers from a table." This is completely backwards from the original intent, but imagine the tedium of starting with an existing moonblade and rolling up one character after anyone until you come up one who's compatible to all the sword's powers. ::shudders::

Second, the moonblades' purpose was to select a ruling family for Evermeet, NOT to find a single leader to unify all elves. Amlaruil Moonflower is NOT the ruler of all elves, but of Evermeet. Many other groups of elves regard her with respect, but not all consider her "their" ruling monarch. To acknowledge royalty is not the same as declaring fealty. The lore is very clear on this, going back to the old gray boxed set.

Third, the moonblades have accomplished the task for which they were created: they chose a royal family. The Moonflowers are the ruling family of Evermeet. Game over. Period.

A few moonblades still remain active. These will be used in the service of the People until their wielders see fit to lay them down. Some of them have very interesting powers, and many interesting stories and campaign hooks could be created around these swords, but none of these moonblades will ever develop into a new "king sword." Moonblades are relicts of a past time. They are relevant only for the service they and their wielders are capable of providing the People. A few swords might have developed tasks of their own, tasks that have not yet been completed. The

Craulnober blade is one such sword.

Finally, there is no single "chosen" ruler of the moonblades. There is a royal family. That was the whole idea behind the moonblades: out of the original 100 moonblades, several swords would develop sets of powers that would both aid and define a ruling family. Eventually, one such family would prove themselves stronger than all others, both in power and in their ability to provide a long-standing, unbroken succession of worthy heirs.

Even if there was a "chosen," (someone has been watching Star Wars Episode I a few times too many...) Arilyn wouldn't be it. (Her midoclorian count is too low, for one thing...) Ahem. Sorry -- back to the point. That would be illogical, both in terms of
Forgotten Realms lore and her established character. A half-elf ruler of all elves would be a hard sell; in fact, I suspect that the KKK would be about as likely to elect a Jewish woman of African-American descent as their Grand Wizard as the elves would be to rally behind a half-breed. And nothing about Arilyn's portrayal has suggested this eventuality. Arilyn is essentially a loner. She's heir to an offshoot of the Moonflower family, a line of solitary adventurers and other slightly out-of-step elves. There is nothing in her personality, abilities, or stories to suggest that she's a potential
ruler. The fact that Elaith has decided to regard her as his princess says more about him than it does her: he might have exiled himself from Evermeet, but he was once captain of the royal guard. His deep-seated loyalty to the royal family has never changed; on some level, focusing that loyalty on a slightly disreputable half-breed is consistent with his own self-image. Perhaps Arilyn is the closest to royalty to which he feels himself worthy. A complicated elf, is our Elaith.

Just a few thoughts on the subject.

On Elaith, his son, Amnestria, and Evermeet

-- Dec 2003
Elaith Craulnober. No doubts there. I even have a story in mind. An incident is referred to in the book Evermeet in which the princess Amnestria leaves for the mainland to stop Elaith, who has hooked up with a band of evil human adventurers, from raiding an ancient elven burial ground. That's when Amnestria meets Bran Skorlsun, Arilyn's father. Lots of action, a couple of double crosses, elf lore, a love triangle, some heartbreak, a frenzy of dark despair--the teeny little Julie Andrews who lives in the back of my head just burst into a chorus of "These are a few of my favorite things."

[…]

That's discussed very frankly in EVERMEET. A furious Amnestria is packing to go to the mainland and confront Elaith, who left Evermeet and her the day he claimed the Craulnober blade. Remember Lamrual pointing out that her belt was notched looser than usual, and asking her "what manner of leave-taking" passed between her and Elaith? At the time, Amestria was already pregnant. She and Elaith were betrothed, and the child was conceived when Elaith still thought of himself as an elven noble, captain of the king's guard.

The next part of their story has never been told. Amnestria went to the mainland. She sided with Bran Skorlsun, a human ranger and Harper, to keep Elaith from despoiling an ancient elven burial site. Amnestria was willing to give Elaith another shot, but the elf considered himself unworthy of an Evermeet princess and very

pointedly rebuffed her. Shortly thereafter, she fell in love the Bran, who, before this episode, considered Elaith to be a
friend. Elaith viewed this as a double betrayal, even though -- or perhaps, especially because -- he himself chose a path of alientation from his elven past.

Elaith was never to learn of Amnestria's pregnancy. Only a handful of peopleknow this well-kept secret: Bran, Prince Lamruil, Khelben and Laerel (who were friends of Amnestria and Bran during their early married life), and now Danilo. As the epilogue suggested, Khelben repressed the manuscript that became the novel EVERMEET. People in our Prime Material Plane can read it, but rest assured that this book is not on the shelves of any library in the Realms.

On *Thornhold*

09 Feb 2004
Here's the story, adapted from the FAQ page of my website:

In writing *Thornhold*, my mandate was to create continuing shared-author characters -- Bronwyn and Ebenezer Stoneshaft -- and introduce a conflict/conspiracy that would be continued in other novels and game products. The intention was that this was to be a PIVOT novel that would introduce changes to the Harper organization, not a conclusion to the series. Unfortunately, the editorial direction changed while the book was being written. More unfortunately still, no one thought to inform me. Thus, Thornhold was left with a head-scratching conclusion and a lot of loose threads. The ending would have been fine, if the book included a preview for the next story following it. As things stand, however, the story's ending is definitely perplexing. Am I happy about this? Well, no. But on the positive side, I had a great time with the Ebenezer and the dwarves, and the experience really impressed upon me the need to write self-contained stories, even within a series.

I would love to write a follow-up to the story entitled DARKHOLD, which would delve into Zhentarim politics, the full story of the Holy Order of the Knights of Samular, and Khelben Arunsun's dark secrets. Damn -- that litany just set off the little Julie Andrews who lives in the back of my and occasionally bursts out singing "These are a few of my favorite things..." Pivotal to this sort, of course, would be the dwarves' struggle to hold Thornhold, and the young paladin's quest to redeem his reputation and, in the process, redefine his faith.

On the possibility of a solo Danilo novel

10 Feb 2004
"Completely solo" brings to mind an episode of M*A*S*H in which Hawkeye suffered a concusion in a jeep crash. He kept himself awake by talking non-stop to a Korean family, who had no clue what he was saying. By the end of the episode, I almost envied them.

In other words, it's very difficult to pull off an intense focus on a single character. I suspect that *Elfsong* came as close to a solo novel for Danilo as we're going to get.

I've been lobbying for another book in the Songs & Swords series for... I don't know -- years, but the folks at WotC had other ideas. It would probably be even more difficult to get the go-ahead for a project including just ONE of the S&S characters.

On pacing the tone in stories

13 Feb 2004
Pacing helps to set the tone. Toward the end of the story, I usually go to shorter scenes, quicker switches between characters, and narrative that leans more to action than description. The pacing in *Daughter of the Drow* was a deliberate choice. As for timing, the manuscript was turned in on deadline and within the required word count. (Ah, those were the days...)

Organising Evermeet

13 Feb 2004
First, thanks for the kind words. Organizing material for Evermeet was quite a project. My goal was to review every significant reference to elven lore in the Realms, and to synthesize as much of it as possible into story form. There are many ways this could be done, but I decided to organize the material around three concepts: 1) the book as a collection of short stories gathered by a human bard who wished to pay tribute to his half-elven love; 2) the narrator's view that the current-day events -- the invasion of Evermeet -- was a result of elven attitudes and decisions; and 3) a history of the Moonflower family, with Amlaruil as the focal character. These somewhat disparate parts were unified by the underlying, and often unseen, perspective of the fictional "author." Danilo had an axe to grind. He selected the stories and shaped the narrative accordingly.

It was an interesting experiment, but in the process I learned something rather distressing: Danilo is a better writer than I am.

On the similarities between names Elaine and Elaith

13 Feb 2004
Sheer coincidence, or, at the most, serendipity. I borrowed the character from Ed Greenwood, who created and named Elaith long before he knew my name. Do I relate to Elaith? None of my characters are autobiographical, but let's put it this way: I understand Elaith better than I'd like to.

On the Elven language in FR novels

14 Feb 2004
I'm no expert on copyright law, but I suspect that incorporating Tolkien's invented Elvish languages into the Realms would constitute an infringement. (Any lawyers or Tolkien language experts here?)

The bald truth is that FR writers usually make up "Elvish" words on the spot. ("Hmmm.... Yeah, this sounds like something an elf might say...") You can try to make the invented word look and sound consistent with previous invented words, but there is no real Elvish language resource for FR writers. Sure, there are "dictioneries" here and there, but these are mostly compiliations of randomly invented words from previous books and game products, plus some newly made-up stuff. Language requires grammar, syntax, vocabulary, logic and cultural context. Collections of cool-sounding words don't even come close.

Middle Earth was created by a linguist, and one of its most notable characteristics is the elaborate invented languages. Forgotten Realms was created by an extremely well-read librarian with a non-stop imagination and a puckish sense of humor. Considering all that the Realms has to offer, I've seldom felt the lack of formal

linguistic systems.

For elven names, I do one of three things: 1) use nicknames such as Foxfire, Ferret, or Thorn; 2) adapt or borrow Celtic references, such as Tintagel; or 3) try to follow the patterns of nomenclature established by Ed Greenwood.

Speaking of which, here's an observation about FR names, elven and N'Tel'Quessir alike. In the future, I'll be leaning more toward the EG style. Over the past year or so, I've observed or participated in several online discussions about real-world names in the Realms, and I've come to agree with those folks who feel that these references damage the reader's ability to suspend disbelief and detract from the distinctive feel of the setting. So any new characters I might create will not be given real-world names such as Ebenezer or Bronwyn.

On Bronwyn

16 Feb 2004
Bronwyn (or its varients, Bronwen, Branwen, Branwyn) is a popular Welsh name, but since it's not frequently used in the US, it sounds Realmsian enough for most readers. That said, there's no telling when a name will become trendy. Not long ago, names such as Caitlin, Heather, and Ashley (which until recently was considered a man's name) were uncommon in this country. Who knows? In a few years, we could have a bumper crop of little Bronwyns, and people who read moldy, yellowed copies of *Thornhold* will think, "Sheesh! She might as well have named the character Kate or Susan."

I'm very fond of Celtic mythology, and I liked the various aspects of the name Bronwyn. (See below) Her brother's birth name was Bran, which was also a nod to the Celtic mythos. It made sense to me that a paladin would name his children after aspects of a war deity.

The names also incorporated some supliminal references to plot. Bran means "raven," while one possible meaning of Branwyn is "white raven." The contrast of black and white with the common element of the raven suggests siblings in opposition.

Yes, I spend far too much time thinking about this stuff.

Branwen — (BRAN-wen or BRAN-oo-wen) "white bosomed," or "a girl with black hair and white skin"; from Welsh bran "crow" + gwen "shining, holy". In Mabinogi, Branwen is Bran's sister. They are male and female aspects of the Celtic war deity. Popular name in Wales.

Bronwen — (BRON-wen) from Welsh bron "breast" + gwen "shining, holy"; also a variant of Branwen. Bronwyn.

BRANWEN f Welsh, Welsh Mythology
Pronounced: BRAN-wen Means "beautiful raven" from Welsh bran "raven" and gwen "fair, white, blessed". In the Mabinogion, a collection of tales from Welsh myth, she is the sister of the British king Bran and the wife of the Irish king Matholwch.

On Elaine's naming technique

17 Feb 2004

Interesting question, but I'd have to say no, the Tor book hasn't been the influencing factor here. Other creative outlets are important, but I have been writing outside of the Realms for years --mostly short stories, published and unpublished, plus articles, reviews, essays, poetry, music, and first drafts for two book-length manuscripts. (Don't ask.)

Quite simply, I came to agree with the reasoning put forth by Ed Greenwood's fans. Your arguments, Faraer, were particularly compelling, but I've been coming to this conclusion for a while. While working on the Halruaa trilogy, I did a rough pronunciation guide for established common nouns. It became obvious that the names worked best if each letter was given time and weight -- which is precisely what Ed intended for ALL Realms names. That moved me toward EG-style nomenclature. Finally, I'm writing a book with Ed, and the Realms is so obviously and emphatically his world. How can anyone NOT honor that, in every way possible? I've always tried to be true to the lore and the tone of the Realms, but for some reason, I didn't consider nomenclature to be part of that tone. Now I do.

On the Moonshaes

17 Feb 2004
The Moonshaes definitely have a Celtic influence, and the names reflect this: Deirdre, Robin, Tristan. But the Moonshaes are not Ed Greenwood's creation: they were added to the Realms, and have a feel quite distinct from the rest of the world. That said, it seems reasonable to use Nordic-sounding names (Wulfgar, Hrolf, Hronulf, Byorn, Dagmar) for northern barbarians, and names with Greek or Italian roots (Matteo, Andris, Tzigone) for Halruaa and other southern lands.

Elaine's references to ravens

17 Feb 2004
I like ravens, and not just for the part they play in so many cultures' mythologies. They're extremely intelligent birds -- the Einsteins of the avian world. I started reading about them in relation to wolves (back when I was researching wolves for a book I never finished.) They're capable of very complex social behaviors; for example, ravens scout for wounded animals and then call wolves to the kill. The wolves, in turn, allow ravens to eat alongside them. Pretty nifty arrangement for all concerned, with the exception of the entree.

Ravens and crows will also interact with humans. Occasionally they'll imitate human behavior (such as helping gardeners pull weeds.) Sometimes they're willing to cut a deal. I've got one going with the local "raven mafia." They always gather on trash pickup day, but in exchange for some "protection bread," they'll leave my trash alone and even chase other birds away from it. And it's not because they fill up on bread -- they still go through the neighbor's trash. I tried to explain my theory of raven mafia to a neighbor. She obviously thought I was crazy, but she gave it a try and was astonished to learn that these birds really do seem to recognize and honor a reciprocal arrangement.

If you don't believe this, offer a gift to a raven or crow and observe its response. (They're especially fond of peanuts still in the shell.) Chances are, they'll find an interesting way to reward you for your generosity.

On Danilo, Arilyn, and Elaith

17 Feb 2004
Danilo, like Arilyn, lives in two worlds and is not entirely comfortable in either. Despite his highly social personality, he is at heart something of a loner. He and Arilyn are kindred spirits at a very deep level, despite their superficial differences. Arilyn was initially drawn to him because he offers her things her elven heart needs, but her pragmatic human nature lacks: music, laughter, an appreciation for beauty. They've also got a chemistry thing going, and who can explain the sense and logic of that? Ever notice that sometimes you meet someone who, on paper, seems perfect for you, but you couldn't ignite a spark between the two of you if you used gasoline and a blowtorch? And then, sometimes, unexpected lightning hits. The same thing happens with characters. Or doesn't, as the case may be.

As for what Elaith said to Arilyn? ("Quefirre soora kan izzt?")
Elaith's first words to Arilyn translate to something like, "Amnestria, can it really be you?" At first glance, he mistook Arilyn for her mother, who many years earlier was Elaith's betrothed.

On Zoastria

18 Feb 2004
Or here's another possibility: remember Zoastria, from *Silver Shadows?* She is now at rest among the forest elves of Tethyr. At the end of *Dream Spheres*, Elaith met and fought in common cause with a band of these elves. If he had reason to visit the elven community in Tethyr, and if by chance he happened upon the sleeping warrior and learned her story and heritage, wouldn't that raise a few interesting questions in his mind?

[...]

19 Feb 2004
Quick summary: Zoastria was one of Arilyn's ancesters, a former wielder of her moonblade. Her body remained in a sort of magical stasis, and through some unknown course of events, eventually ended up as a novelty item in a rich man's treasure trove. She was returned to life when her elfshadow was called from the sword. This story is told in *Silver Shadows*.

FYI, this is not a power inherent in all moonblades, and it would come as a surprise to Elaith. But it might also get him thinking about OTHER former wielders.

Backing up a couple of books. Amnestria, who at the time of her death was known as Z'beryl, was killed in Evereska. Her family came from Evermeet for her funeral, which was a very clandestine affair. At the beginning of *Elfshadow*, an adolescent Arilyn mourns her mother at the foot of a statue of Hannali Celanil -- NOT at her grave, which would have been a logical choice, if indeed that choice were open to her. Elaith might well put all these threads together and think, Hmm, I wonder where Amnestria's resting place might be, and what I might find there...

On sunlight and Drow weapons

19 Feb 2004
The first two books of the (Starlight and Shadows) trilogy were written several years ago, under second edition rules. According to 2nd ed, sunlight destroyed a drow's innate magical abilities, spells, and magical items. Third edition reversed this, which basically negated the underlying premise of the first two books: that Liriel needed to find a way to take her drow magic to the surface. My choices were to finish the

trilogy with 2nd ed rules and ignore the rule changes, use 3E rules for the third book and say to hell with internal consistency, or work a bridge event into the plot. I decided upon the third option.

Elaith and Kymil

20 Feb 2004
Although there's much to be said for pain and suffering, Elaith would ultimately regard this as a crude and insufficient revenge. The only thing that would be truly satisfying is take from Kymil the one thing that matters most to him in the world. And that might be a tall order, since Kymil's passion is centered in elven politics.

Alas, there is no perfect solution in an imperfect world.

On Paladins and *Thornhold*

23 Feb 2004
I didn't try to portray the mindset of a paladin order, per se. The main question in *Thornhold* is not "What is a paladin like?" but "What would it be like to be the CHILD of a paladin?" There's a huge difference, especially considering some of the tough choices a paladin must make. The old 2nd edition handbook, *The Complete Guide to Paladins*, indicates that very few marry and have families, partly because of their short life expectancy, but largely because duty and family present conflicting demands.

Writing *Thornhold* was made both easy and difficult by my strict religious background. I understand the paladin mindset extremely well -- well enough to know that the religious life isn't as simple as game rules want to make it. I used to teach history, so my view of the paladin order was also shaped by the real-world history of the Crusades, particularly the Knights Templar and Knights of Malta. History teaches us that life is messy, and choices are seldom black and white. The young paladin Algorand, a good man and a skilled fighter, found that life outside the monestary presented challenges for which he was sadly unprepared. *Thornhold* explores the complexity of moral issues, and the reality of tough decisions that frequently have mixed results.

On genasi

23 Feb 2004
A water genasi has a minor role in *Windwalker,* but I really haven't given any thought to such characters in future stories -- mostly because I have no idea what I'll be doing next!

On half-races

24 Feb 2004
Truth be told, I'm not particularly interested in this new round of half-somethings. In recent years the Realms have acquired a good many new races, most of them hybrids of some sort. If a new creature happens to fit into a developing plot, fine, but I wouldn't go out of my way to create a storyline to include one.

For example, the introduction of "star elves," one of last year's new elven subraces,

into the area around Rashemen explained several things about Sharlarra, a character in *Windwalker.* Because this new bit of lore served the plot and characterizations already in progress, I incorporated it into the story. But I'm far less likely to read an article in DRAGON and think, "Oooh! Ghost elves! Gotta write a book about them..."

To each, his own. Most likely there are some FR writers who are fascinated by the deathtouched and can't wait to write a dark, compelling tale about them. But that's not where my interests lie.

On dreaming drow

25 Feb 2004
gave this question a considerable amount of thought when I started writing *Daughter of the Drow.* Despite research and inquiries, I did not find a single, definitive answer, so I had to find an explanation that made sense to me.

It seemed logical to me that dreams--the flotsom of the subconscious--would not provide any sort of restoration to the ever-scheming drow. It seemed likely that any Underdark drow who did experience dreams would probably be driven mad by them. I postulated that natural adaption would result in other solutions, but also assumed that their elven natures, including the ability to enter reverie, were fragmented by their environment. So I left the issue unresolved, describing various drow in different situations. Some drow slept, some entered a form of Reverie, and some, such as Gromph, could not sleep at all. (It also occurred to me that the drow would likely have developed some sort of brief but deeply restorative meditation -- a very useful skill for warriors, priestesses and wizards who, for whatever reason, cannot afford to take their eyes off their enemies for long.)

This reasoning is not part of canon lore -- it's just the thought processes behind my handling of the matter in the Starlight & Shadows trilogy.

I don't know whether or not 3.5 addresses this issue or offers a definitive answer, but there are references in the earlier lore to support these possible options: dreamless sleep, sleep with a dream phase, elven reverie.

On romance in novels

28 Feb 2004
I have no knack for the genre; in fact, a friend and true romance fan read a manuscript and offered this critique: "Girl, you don't have a romantic bone in your body. Face it: you're weird, so maybe you should write science fiction or fantasy..." The very next day, I saw an ad in the Writers' Digest magazine for the Harpers open call. Thus inspired, I wrote the proposal for the book that became *Elfshadow*

I'm certainly not a romance novelist, but relationships are usually an important part of my stories. Arilyn and Dan are my favorite couple, and Liriel and Fyodor probably my most overtly passionate pair. Amlaruil and Zaor had a love story that went on for centuries. Maybe because of my rapidly advancing age, I've been trending toward long-term love affairs, such as Khelben and Laerel, King Zalathorm and Beatrice. There's lost love -- Elaith Craulnober still pines for his princess. There are also a number of deep, non-romantic friendships: Bronwyn and Ebenezer, Matteo and Tzigone.

Sword & sorcery novels, by their nature, lean toward action. Relationship issues are important to character development and plot, but they seldom BECOME the plot.

On novel/game continuity

01 Mar 2004
Richard makes a good point about novel/game continuity; namely, fiction writers need to acknowledge the existence of resurrection spells, while providing a reason why they shouldn't be used. (In fact, one of the challenges of writing in a magic-rich setting is finding ways to AVOID easy conflict resolution through powerful spells and people.)

Since many of my stories feature elves, I advanced the theory that disturbing the afterlife is an elven taboo. That was consistent with the existing lore of elven culture, and explained why many of my characters will not consider raising their fallen companions.

In Liriel's story, the only diety to whom she could pray was Lolth, so she had a very good reason not to seek resurrection. She knew that an evil goddess's "gifts" tend to come with a very large price tag.

That said, I've frequently been tempted to include a resurrection in a short story or novel, just to show why this *shouldn't* be done. People IRL who have near-death experiences often find that their lives are profoundly changed. It doesn't seem likely to me that a Realms character could return from death and pick up without missing a step. Surely there would be lingering effects, unforeseen consequences. It seems to me that all magic has a price -- and we're not just talking about the thousands of gold pieces needed to buy a resurrection spell.

Resurrection shouldn't be a cheap and easy solution in fiction. It should be rare and difficult, and *because* it's rare and difficult, it might occasionally become a useful characterization tool. For example, the elven afterlife is such a wondrous thing that disturbing it strikes me as an incredibly selfish act. It reminds me of something I saw in a gardening catalogue -- a little memorial stone with the following sentiment: "If tears could form a staircase and grief could forge a chain, I'd build a path to heaven and bring you back again." Not only is this dreadful doggerel, it's also incredibly self-centered. To paraphrase: "I miss you, so I would drag you out of Paradise if I could." Seen in this light, resurrection could be a powerful characterization tool, revealing the character seeking the resurrection spell as a self-absorbed git only concerned with his own wants and needs. Conversely, it could demonstrate that a cause is so important to the survivors that they consider the resurrection of a powerful ally more important than their own personal moral codes, or the deceased's eternal happiness.

But however resurrection might be used in fiction, it should never be as easy as a bi-weekly resurrection of Knuckles the thief and his +11 hackmaster sword.

On illustrations of Arilyn

02 Mar 2004
None of them are quite like Arilyn as I picture her, but the Fred Fields painting on *Elfshadow* is probably the closest. (Of Arilyn, but most decidedly not Danilo.) The FRCS illo strikes me as less problematic than the fact that Arilyn left the Harpers several years before this game supplement was released.

On hardcovers and *Windwalker*

02 Mar 2004
Every now and then you'll see a hardcover reprint, but it's certainly not the norm. In fact, when I first started writing *Windwalker*, I was told that it would be released as a paperback original. I'm not sure why the decision was made to upgrade to a hardcover release. Either way, the situation with hard/soft books, old/new covers makes getting a matched set a little tough for long-time readers. It's like koshur hot dogs and buns -- the packaging is such that it's hard not to end up with one extra of something.

For new readers, however, it's no problem--just wait for the paperback of WW and you've got a set of matching paperbacks. In fact, I've been waiting for the paperback (just got my author copies yesterday!) so I could send a matched set to a reader who named his daughter Liriel.

On how elves regard humans

02 Mar 2004
Arilyn puts forth the saying, "how [brief] their flame, yet how bright they burn."...

That's my way of explaining how some elves regard humans. As far as I know, that view was not previously expounded in Realms lore.

On elven genetics

03 Mar 2004
This "fact" of elven genetics has been part of Realms lore for a very long time -- it comes right from the old gray boxed set. I suspect that the creators were addressing the endless permutations, and the resulting muddling of the elven subraces, that would inevitably arise from the mingling of elven races.

Anyone who games has probably run into players who mistake quilting for creativity -- you know, a patch of this, a piece of that, and you end up with players who proudly announce, "My character is a quatroon: a quarter each drow, sea elf, firbolg, and were-unicorn. He's also a druid paladin of Sune, but he wears plate armor and carries two scimitars..."

::shudders::

Again, on moonblades

04 Mar 2004
Oh, don't get me started on moonblades...

I know this is a shared world, but should that preclude an occasional foray into originality? Dozens of magic swords are described in the lore, and endless possibilities exist for self-created swords. There is no reason for a half-orc/half-water-genasi ranger who lives a life of monkish contemplation in the Anauroch desert to wield a moonblade, an artifact created to -- wait for it -- *help select the elven royal family.*

Pounding my head on the table doesn't cover it.

[...]

She (Arilyn) AND moonblades were introduced in the novel *Elfshadow.*

On moonblades

09 Mar 2004

Volo puts out as much misinformation as information, which necessitates the occasional footnote from Elminster to contradict some of his claims. I treat Volo's work as entertaining tavern tales, some of which may be true. It is my opinion that the Starym Moonblade is one of the more fanciful tales, and that this sword does not, in fact, exist. The notion of a gold elf blade "gone bad" is simply too contradictory to ring true.

[…]

No, you're right: the original creators of the moonblades had the moon elf race in mind. Nearly every wielder of these swords has been a full-blooded moon elf. The exception is Arilyn, a half-elf. A possible future exception is Azariah Craulnober, who takes after her mother, a gold elf and who may or may not be able to claim the sword Elaith holds in trust for her.

Of course anyone may change Realmslore to suit his or her campaign, but the following reflects my understanding of moonblades.

No new moonblades will ever be created, with or without the blessing of the elven gods. They have served their purpose; their time is past. This doesn't mean that new swords with similar powers can't be created, but they will not be moonblades.

Sirius is correct in saying that only three swords have been named. (Keep in mind that I'm discounting the Starym moonblade as apocryphal lore.) So, how many moonblades are still out there?

When Zaor was chosen as king, there were twenty-five living moonblades. That was quite some time ago, and I doubt there are more than eight or nine in active use. Its possible that a few others retain their magic, but have become so powerful that any attempt to claim them is virtually suidical. It seems likely that these too-powerful swords will go dormant in time. Each sword that retains its powers probably has a significant role to play in the history of the People.

It is impossible for an adventurer to find a living moonblade in a treasure trove and add it to his weapon collection. Anyone who is not of the direct family line will be slain when he attempts to draw the sword.

It is possible to use a dormant moonblade as if it were any other well-made elven sword. Those who contemplate this course of action, however, should keep in mind that elves would consider this a mortal offense. He should expect to be challenged by the first elf he encounters. If he relinquishes the blade willingly, the matter might -- MIGHT -- be resolved without bloodshed. No elf would carry a dormant blade belonging to another clan -- that's extremely taboo. Few elves would carry their family's dormant blade, for obvious matters of pride. Elaith carried his in *Elfsong,* and this revealed both his resolve and his sense of estrangement from elven proprieties.

[…]

I'm not sure "dual personality" is quite the right way to describe the Craulnober blade. More accurately, Elaith is capable of handling every power but one.

I can't really get into that power right now, mostly because I haven't completely defined the Craulnober moonblade, and I'd like to leave that open in case the opportunity to tell Elaith's story arises.

On Arilyn's and Bran's relationship

14 Mar 2004
They did develop a relationship, but it's somewhat tentative.

Before I say much more, I should check to see what, if anything, has befallen Bran in the game lore. A while back, there was a possibility that he would be involved in the problems with Hellgate Keep, and I don't recall offhand what became of that.

On Bran and Danilo's and Arilyn's relationship

16 Mar 2004
Technically, Arilyn and Danilo aren't married -- or to be more specific, the wedding has not occurred in any published book. But I agree about the family complications.

Bran was the natural choice for catalyst, since he and Khelben have some (unspecified) issues that go way back. As for the end result, do not get me started about the demise of the story thread started in *Thornhold!* Hopefully that story will be told someday.

But to answer Sirius Black's question, this story will *not* be told in the upcoming Greenwood/Cunningham Waterdeep novel. The editors wanted the book to focus on new characters in a current time. So that's what it is. It's intended to be a fun, fast, swash-buckling romp.

On the *Waterdeep* novel and thoughts about what a "Candlekeep" novel might be like

16 Mar 2004
Years ago, when Ed and I first started talking about this book, that was what I had in mind. But by the time WotC got around to saying, yes, we want this book, the "Rutherford historical novel" story pattern was no longer on the table.

On a sort-of-related note, I think Candlekeep would be another interesting setting for a historical novel. The adventures of various "collectors" could make for an interesting framework for a story that catalogues not only the development of the library, but the changing political/social climate of the Realms. The acquisition of books might sound rather tame to those of us who order from amazon.com, but consider the history of the Book of Kells. Those who read Irish history might recall the Battle of the Book, a brief war fought over an illegally copied manuscript. In a world where scrolls can unleash spells and words quite literally have power, this could be one hell of a novel.

On Kymil's actions

17 Mar 2004

Kymil does not think of his actions as wrong. In his opinion, they are means to a worthy end: the re-establishment of the Council. He sees himself as a revolutionary who wishes to overthrow the monarchy in favor of a republic. He is further incensed by the fact that that royal family are moon elves, who he sees as less worthy than -- indeed, inferior to -- the gold elf race. For much of the history of Faerun's elves, power has resided in the hands of the gold elves. Kymil seeks a return to past glories.

Real world history teaches us that people are willing to accept very strange allies and do terrible things to reach ends they consider worthwhile. I don't see Kymil repenting any time in the near future.

I don't have a story in the pipeline that includes Kymil as a character. It's possible that he might show up in another book or game product, but I haven't heard any rumors to that effect.

On non-Realms projects

24 Mar 2004
I have ideas, certainly, but I don't think they will become published stories --at least, not any time soon.

At present, I have two FR stories in the pipeline: "Gorlist's Dragon," the short story in the upcoming anthology *Realms of the Dragons,* and the Waterdeep book. That's all I have in the planning stage at this point. I'm not sure what I'll be writing for the Realms after the Waterdeep book.

I do have several outside-of-the-Realms projects lined up, including a new series of contemporary mysteries with dark fantasy elements. The heroine is darker that Liriel Baenre -- in character, not complexion. It seems that elves are alive and well and living in urban New England, and they have more in common with the Sopranos than with Tolkien tree-huggers. The first book is *Shadows in the Darkness*, and it will be out this fall. I'm also talking to another publisher about possible involvement in a terrific shared-world series, one with a lot of potential for fun, fast-paced adventures. The central character will be a bard, and I've already started work on original music to go with this project. (Gives me a good excuse to dust off the music degree and upgrade the midi equipment.) And I've got a historical novel in progress, and an Arthurian novel in the planning stages. I'm also world-building a setting based on African mythology, with a young adult fantasy novel in mind (with promotional d20 material and ready-to-play adventures available as free downloads.) And next month I'll be doing website construction -- rebuilding my own site from the ground up, getting the drow art gallery online, creating websites for a couple of writer buddies. So with one thing and another, I keep busy.

On editorial guidelines

24 Mar 2004

According to the editorial guidelines, the Realms books are supposed to be "PG-13." Not G, but certainly not R.

There are a number of reasons for this. One involves the books' demographics, as well as the age of many gamers. Readers usually discover the Realms between the ages of ten and twelve. Yes, there are readers in their thirties and even forties, and these readers want adult content. I would argue, however, against the notion that

"adult content" only refers to explicit sex and graphic violence. Hopefully older readers will keep coming back for the characterizations, the story, and the writing.

Fantasy readers are an unusually voracious bunch, and most of the readers I know enjoy a wide range of books. It's possible for an adult to read and enjoy the Harry Potter books (a representative of the US publisher said in an TV interview that as many as 67% of the readers are adults) and still read stories by G.R.R. Martin, Anne Rice, and China Mieville. Explicit sex and graphic violence might not be healthy fare for children, but neither do most adults desire a steady, uninterupted diet.

On book themes

25 Mar 2004
Yes, there is an "elf" and "shadow" theme going on in Songs & Swords. I can see how it might be confusing. If you seek clarity, there's a list of my published stuff on the Bookshelf page of my website, http://www.elainecunningham.com/.

And yes, the publishers usually pick the titles. In my case, that's probably just as well. The working title for *The Floodgate* was "Watergate" for several weeks before I figured out why that just didn't sound right. Similarly, I wanted "Moonshadow" for my first book (*Elfshadow*). The way my editor tells it, for several days after I suggested that title, the TSR staff went around humming Cat Stevens songs and cursing my name. I've learned since then that, generally speaking, it's a good idea to avoid "moon" in a fantasy title: there are probably more moons in a row of fantasy novels than in a busload of drunken frat boys.

Opinions about her own books and her personality relating through her characters

25 Mar 2004
Each book has its own challenges. Each has things I'm happy with and things I wish I'd done differently. It's hard to point to a single book and say, "This one." Nor can I say that *Elfsong* flowed easily, though it's always good when people get that impression. I wrote it shortly after we'd moved to Los Angeles (which I hated), working mostly late at night and during my younger son's nap times. I was seriously sleep-deprived during the entire process and further slowed by a bad case of mono. One of the challenges in writing is to keep your personal life OUT of the books.

There are some commonalities. My ethnic background is primarily Slavic, and Slavic folklore was part of Fyodor's "voice" from the beginning. I don't think the book is a personality indicator, though, except to say that Fyodor's personality -- a mixture of fatalism, humor, melancholy, and fervent nationalism -- is familiar to me. He's not based on any person I know, but his portrayal is consistent with *people* I know.

I'm not sure that books are good indicators into the personality, life styles, and belief systems of the writers. One of many reasons I shook the dust of the WotC forums off my feet is that so many people there think it's okay to comment on Ed Greenwood's personal moral code, simply because some of the characters in his fantasy novels take off their clothes. I have from time to time been amazed at what people infer about me from my stories; for example, *Thornhold* convinced a number of amatuer reviewers that I have no regard for authority and do not respect those who choose a religious life -- a sweeping judgement on my value system from people who wouldn't be able to pick me out in a crowded elevator.

But people make assumptions. A WotC promotion person recently sent me an email interview to do for the company website. It contained at least three questions about how much of "me" is in various characters and their experiences. Which character am I most like? Do I have Danilo's sense of humor? How does Liriel's experience mirror my own? The answer was, repeatedly, "None of my books are autobiographical."

Of course, books do reflect the writer's interests and, to some extent, values. One of the themes that can be seen in almost every plot element of *Thornhold* is the complexity and the importance of family. *Elfsong* is about the power of music and the important of understanding history -- coming from someone who has taught both, and has seen how our educational system (and our society as a whole) denigates the study of both. *Windwalker* is about cause and effect: actions have consequences, which are sometimes unexpected and far-reaching.

About possible tales in Rashemen

26 Mar 2004
There are definitely stories to be told in Rashemen. If the tale of Liriel and her new-found elven sisterhood picks up, it would be set in that area. Sharlarra's people -- star elves -- are just emerging from the plane of existence to which they withdrew many years ago. Apparently there's some great evil or danger brewing there that's driving them back into the Prime Material Plane. (This info is based upon the new elven race detailed in the recent game product -- brain blip on the title -- that focuses on this region.)

I think that Silverymoon would be a great setting for a novel, particularly one that features bards. The recent political unheavals and the re-establishment of the barding college would create endless plot possibilities, and the setting itself would be interesting to explore.

Alas, I wouldn't "expect" Elaith to find out about his son any time soon. The folks at WotC have been more interested recently in new characters than in revisiting established characters -- with notable exceptions, such as Drizzt and Elminster. But I ~~keep nagging~~ remain optimistic, and perhaps future stories might eventually trend in that direction.

On elven decorative gardens objects and elven folklore

26 Mar 2004
One of them, the elven armada landfall, is described in the novel *Evermeet.* The other two -- birth of the sea elves and the Green Island dragonswar -- have not, to the best of my knowledge, been told in FR lore.

I have often thought that a collection of folk tales about gods and heros -- old stories beloved by elves, halflings, dwarves, and so on -- would be a great addition to Realmslore. *Realms of Folklore*, or some such. I can see, however, how such a project might be problematic; some gamers would puzzle endlessly over whether or not a tale about a dwarven god was "factual" or even "canon." Some gamers can be more literal-minded than fundamentalists. You would not believe some of the questions that arose from the elven mythology section of *Evermeet.* "Hey! Elves and orcs sprung up from the blood shed during the battle of Grummsh and Corellon, but you say there were elves BEFORE this battle!" Another favorite: "Did one elf/orc come into being per each drop of divine blood spilled, or was it some other ratio?"

Kermit the Frog: "It's a myth, I tell you! Myth! Myth!"
Lisping waitress: "Yeth?"

::Ahem::

All things considered, it seems unlikely to me that elven folklore will become part of the official lore. On a related issue, I find to my regret that the focus of my Realms tales has been increasingly shifting away from elves; in fact, the folks at WotC specifically requested that my Counselors & Kings trilogy should avoid them. (I did, however, manage to sneak in an elven villain...)

On not writing about elves anymore

26 Mar 2004
No reason, but I assumed at the time that this request was based on the desired setting. The folks at WotC wanted a trilogy set in Halruaa, and since there are very few elves in the area, a story about humans would be more representative of the culture.

Alas, I doubt I'll be returning to FR elves any time soon, since there are elf-related projects by other writers currently in the pipeline. With this in mind, I'm found other outlets for my elfin inclinations. I won't go into these here, but I'll post details on my website when I update in April.

On elven subraces

26 Mar 2004
Yes, the elven races did undergo a chance with 3E. The FR elven races under second edition rules were as follows:

Gold elves (aka high or sun elves)
Moon elves (aka silver or gray elves)
Green elves (aka wood, forest, or wild elves)
Sea elves
Drow
Avarial*
Lythari**

*Some second edition FR lore gave stats for avarial, other sources suggested that this race was extinct.

**The lythari were introduced in the old gaming accessory *Elves of Evermeet.*

Under second edition rules, the terms green, wood, forest and wild were used interchangably. Third edition, however, created a division between wild elves (aka green elves) and wood elves, which as also called copper or sylvan elves. Edition 3.5 added star elves and ghost elves.

This can cause confusion to folks who read (and, frankly, those who write) the novels.

I have mixed feelings about the tatoo issue. Yes, facial markings would provide better camoflauge in a woodland setting, and yes, elves have a strong inclination toward artistry in personal adornment. I can envision them painting themself with plant-based dyes. Think in terms of the henna-painted designs women in certain

cultures in India paint on their palms. These designs are beautiful, complex, symbolic -- and temporary.

"They Call That Monk Alaundo..."

29 Mar 2004
::Two aged monks, wistfully viewing a shelf of lore forgotten by younger monks and left to molder...::

Do you see the dust, Alaundo?
I remember long ago the treasured volumes on this shelf.
In the candlelight, Alaundo,
You were thumbing crumbling pages, reading softly to yourself.
I could hear the ancient tales
And sounds of distant song, like memories of an elf...

There was beauty that could make you weep
In Candlekeep, Alaundo.
It was shining there for you and me
Eternally, Alaundo.
Though I never thought the past could fade
In dust and damp,
If we have to write it all again
We will, my friend, Alaundo. . .

About Writer's Associations

31 Mar 2004
Does SFWA membership prompt editors to give your submissions a more timely or thoughtful perusal? I've heard mixed opinions. Some insist it helps, others sneer at cover letters that point out "SFWA Member Since 1998." I incline toward the middle: SWFA membership indicates that you've made one or two professional sales. After you've been writing for a while, however, you're more likely to emphasize your work than your affiliations.

I was a member of SFWA, but left the organization for reasons Jim has already stated. I joined HWA last year in anticipation of my dark fantasy novel's release, but my involvement so far has been limited, and I can't offer an informed opinion of the group other than to comment that their email newsletter has a LOT of info, and the southern New England chapter is very active.

Back in my pre-published days, I held brief membership in RWA (Romance Writers of America.) I attended a few meetings of the Washington DC chapter, and found the atmosphere there to be the antithesis of SFWA. RWA is is a support group, fan group, and social club in one. I also attended one -- count 'em, one -- convention, sponsored by the New Jersey chapter and I can see how some people might find membership very helpful and lots of fun. But it wasn't for me.

On readers

01 Apr 2004
When some people fall in love for the first time, they are convinced that no one has ever felt this way before. When a young mother holds her first baby, it seems impossible to her that any child in the world could be half so precious. There's a

certain passionate self-focus in new discoveries, and what Winterfox quoted above strikes me as the outpourings of a Book Virgin -- someone who just experienced the joy of reading and the power of storytelling for the first time. There's no use trying to dissuade such passionate advocates, any more than it's sensible (or kind) to inform that new mother her infant is NOT the most beautiful, charming, and magical progeny in the history of humankind. (It is to be hoped, however, that this proud mama keeps her opinions mostly to herself. . .)

Bob Salvatore's books have hooked thousands of young readers. Not all of those will continue to read, but I'm guessing that many will, and some will look back on the Drizzt saga with the same affection I feel for L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gable books -- a series with a strong sense of time and place, and memorable characters who became friends. Drizzt faces a lot of issues confronting young people -- painted in broad strokes, yes, but recognizable and relevant. There is considerable storytelling skill in these books, and older readers can find much to enjoy in them. Of course, the style and tone isn't for everyone, and I understand that the (seemingly inevitable) comparison to Tolkien is bound to raise hackles.

Still, I'm of the opinion that new readers should be welcomed, not scoffed at or even debated. To a comment such as Winterfox quoted, I'd be inclined to say, "Great! Glad you liked that trilogy. Here's a few suggestions for future reading..." And I'd start the list with Bob Salvatore's Corona books, which are similar in tone and pace to the Drizzt books, but longer, more complex, and more nuanced.

Very few young readers will become hooked on fantasy by reading Brian W. Aldiss's Helliconia series, or Walter M. Miller's *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman*, or Seamus Heaney's brilliant translation of *Beowulf.* Bob Salvatore is a talented writer who's exceptionally tuned in to the rhythms and imagery of popular culture: movies, music, video games. His Drizzt books provide an accessible doorway to young readers who might find Tolkien's prose too unfamiliar and his pace glacial.

Stylistic considerations aside, a good story is a good story. The popularity of the Drizzt books proves that stories written with young readers in mind can have a broad appeal.

On a possible new Bronwym novel

02 Apr 2004
No plans for a novel, but thanks for asking! I'd love to write "Darkhold," a sequel to *Thornhold*, which would detail the related struggles for control of these two fortresses. Algorind's story would be resolved, as would Cara's future.

The Curious Past is still a going concern, though Bronwyn spends less time in the shop these days.

On Elfsong

02 Apr 2004
I can save you a bit of time. The scene is actually in *Elfsong*, not *Elfshadow,* and it can be found on pages 280-281 of the Swords & Swords reprint. It's a short sequence, and it goes by quickly, but it's the sort of thing that takes a while to write. Lots of reference to maps, checking to see if an elf with Elaith's dexterity could make certain jumpts, and so on. I didn't think anyone would actually take out maps and follow Elaith's progress, but then, I didn't think anyone would realize that the spellsong was composed to scan to the tune of "L'homme arme" (very popular

medieval melody.) There's always someone who will appreciate the extra layers, which balances out that other truth: there's always someone who will catch your every mistake!

When you're dealing with "historical novels" -- which is what I consider the Realms books to be -- getting the details wrong can throw people right out of the story. Not long ago I picked up a historical novel about Mary Queen of Scots. I opened it to a page depicting a scene between her and her husband, Henry Lord Darnley. He was playing the lute and singing, "The Bonny Earl of Moray." At that point in time, the song did not exist. It was composed about thirty years later. Historical novelists simply can't afford to make too many mistakes like that, not if they wish to earn the respect of a knowledgeable audience. And the Realms audience is certainly that.

Elfsong was a lot of fun, but I went a bit overboard on the research and background. I went through probably twenty books on riddles (history of riddling, as well as collections) to develop a tone for Vartain the Riddlemaster. And the singing sword's little ditty is actually a fully composed piece of music. I scored it for harp, viol da gamba, hand drum (preferably a bodhran), and obligato instrument (flute, low whistle, recorder, what-have-you.) Since I'm playing Celtic harp these days, I recently took a stab at rearranging it for harp and solo voice, just for my own amusement. I don't know whether or not an active involvement in "bardcraft" comes though to the page, but it makes the writing process more fun.

On Elaine's position with WotC and Bran's view of the Moonstars

03 Apr 2004
Bruce, even though this is a very interesting topic and one that is certainly dear to my heart, I'm going to have to pass on answering, since doing so involve an entire philosophy of bardcraft in the Realms. I'm not currently involved in this aspect of FR, not as a writer and certainly not as a game designer. As I've said before, it is *extremely unlikely* that I'll ever write FR game product. Also, there's a quartet of bard novels in the works. I am not involved in the process -- I don't even know who's writing -- and I don't want to say anything that might step on someone's toes down the time.

Bran's view on the Moonstars is another topic I have to leave alone, for fear of stepping on other writers' toes. In this, I'm assuming that WotC will eventually get around to telling Khelben's story.

On sharing music with Danilo and Arilyn

03 Apr 2004
What immediately comes to mind is a vivid dream I had after attending a performance of Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro." Danilo and Arilyn somehow teleported into the middle of a performance. Arilyn's response was "whom do I have to kill to get out of here?" bemusement, but Dan was quite taken with the whole idea, entering into the fun and doing all of his lines in recitative. Very odd dream. But yes, I think Danilo would appreciate Mozart's comic opera, especially Figaro and The Magic Flute.

On Danilo's musical eduation

03 Apr 2004

As for the other groups, bear in mind that Danilo had a rigorous "classical" music education, starting at an early age, and studying with the best bards Lady Cassandra's money could hire. I doubt he would gravitate toward the light and fluffy, though he would appreciate the occasional bawdy tune. He would probably find Mozart a kindred spirit, and he'd appreciate the role that the best of "movie music" plays. He'd probably like R&B much more than jazz, and could appreciate certain types of rock, pop, and club music, primarily as a background for dancing.

Some backstory from *Evermeet: Island of Elves* and Arilyn's thoughts on receiving Danilo's manuscript

03 Apr 2004
She hasn't received it yet.

In the Epilogue, Khelben thanked Danilo for sending him the manuscript for review and mentioned that he was sending it to an elven scribe -- and that Danilo shouldn't expect it back any time soon.

Part of the backstory -- stuff not included in the novel -- is an agreement Danilo had with Khelben and with some of the elven contributors that no one would see the manuscript or know of its contents until it received certain approvals. This collection of stories contains several revelations about the Moonflower family that Arilyn will find exceedingly interesting -- for example, it'll be news to her that she has a half-brother. I suspect that when she finally gets the manuscript, she'll be a little unhappy with Dan for holding back this information for so long. But she understands the concept of honoring your word once it's given, and she'll no doubt get over it.

An even more interesting question is how Elaith will react when he learns he has a son -- and than, when he learns that Danilo has been aware of the hidden prince's existence since 1371.

On agents

04 Apr 2004
Agents play several roles, but their primary one is that of a salesman. They need a marketable product, which means either a completed manuscript or an author with a proven track record. And even then, the Brand Name Author must have a new and viable product to sell. (For example, an agent could most likely seize an editor's attention with an opening such as, "I've just acquired J.K. Rowling as a client. Would you like to see a proposal for her next series?")

Sometimes you *can* sell a book from a proposal. This is especially true in shared-world writing. *Elfshadow* was accepted from a proposal in a situation very similar to Kameron Franklin's. I was offered a Star Wars novel on the strength of Bob Salvatore's recommendation. After writing fifteen shared-world books, I'd probably have an easier time moving into another shared world than an aspiring writer would have of breaking into that same world. Ditto with "book packaging," in which a writer does an original story based on someone's story concept -- very similar to shared-world writing. In such circumstances, a finished novel probably isn't going to help you land the job. A good proposal, a writing sample that shows talent, flexiblity -- that's what shared-world writing requires. I've received many emails from aspiring writers eager to sell their trilogies to WotC. Continuity control, a good balance of stories, conflicts with or duplication of ideas already in the pipeline -- these are just a few of the reasons why this approach is unlikely to get the WotC nod.

But for something other than shared-world fiction, I wouldn't submit a proposal and sample chapters. Completed manuscript only. Milage may differ, but here's my POV.

If I were an editor, I wouldn't automatically assume that someone who writes sword and sorcery can pull off a convincing historical novel set in 16th century Scotland. I'd want to see a manuscript. Same thing for "original fantasy." A sensible editor would think, Okay, this woman has written 16 short novels in someone else's setting, but that doesn't tell me if she can create an intriguing original setting, or for that matter, handle the pacing of an epic-length tale.

On the origins of the Knights of Samular and Thornhold

06 Apr 2004
The Knights of Samular and Thornhold were created for the novel.

Admittedly the odds on ever seeing "Darkhold" -- the sequel I'd like to write to *Thornhold* -- are very low, but I'd like to keep that options open. The full powers of the rings would be a big part of that plot.

You're right about the siege tower. For further amplification, here's an analogy: it's a battery-operated device, and the rings are the batteries.

On Elaith and magic

14 Apr 2004
Elaith knows the value of hidden weapons, and in most of my stories he regards magic as one of them. He does cast spells, but the reader doesn't "see" him doing it. For example, in *Elfsong* he surprises Lucia Thione in her bedchamber after having disabled all the magical wards on her home. He also uses simple pick-pocket spells to remove a ring from Danilo's hand. He also collects magical items, which provides him a cover for those times when he uses magic but doesn't wish to be known as a mage. The most overt example of spellcasting is in the short story "The Great Hunt," published in DRAGON magazine. Elaith took on wolf form to outwit a band of Grumsh followers. Since he didn't intend for any of the orcs to survive, subtlety wasn't a concern.

As Eric pointed out, Elaith has always been considered a fighter/wizard. I have no idea why the folks at WotC decided that the 3E Elaith was a rogue rather than a fighter. Possibly because he was frequently described as a "rogue elf," and the designers didn't want to confuse readers?

Erik's suggestion of "eldritch knight" works much better, both in defining his skills and his personality. Elaith grew up in the courts of Evermeet, and rose to become captain of the king's guard. For this position, he would need skills in both fighting and wizardry.

On Elven Houses and Coats of Arms

14 Apr 2004
Evermeet's heraldry has not, to the best of my knowledge, been addressed in FR lore. It's possible that each elven house has a coat of arms, but it's my (completely unofficial) opinion that elves are amused by this decidedly human affectation. ("Ah, yes - another jumped-up merchant who can trace his lineage back *two hundred years. . .*")

In response to the characters in Elaine's *Realms of the Arcane* short story

15 Apr 2004
This story is very different from most of my stuff. (Short stories are a great place to experiment.) This is a meta-story -- a story ABOUT a story -- in which a wemic loremaster, captured by curious elven adventurers, tells them a legend from Realms prehistory about the creation of the sahuagin by an Illithiiri necromancer. It's a grim tale, meant as a rebuke to his elven captors. Whether or not it's historically factual (within context of the Realms...)is not stated. The wemic dismisses this concern as irrelevant: Truth, he claims, is more easily found in myth than in history.

On characters with artificial (Baelam the Bold) hands grasping active moonblades

16 Apr 2004
My guess would be that the moonblade would respond to the entire person, not simply the appendage touching it. If anything, I suspect the metal would amplify the shock.

Otherwise, you'd have evil necromancers and orcs with deep pockets shouting, "Bring me the hand of a noble elf!" (Consider Roger Zelazny's good-vs-evil millinium competition in "Bring Me The Head of Prince Charming...")

On caper stories in the Realms

24 Apr 2004
Would you be interested in reading a "caper story" set in the Realms? Think in terms of recent movies such as "The Italian Job" and the remake of "Ocean's Eleven."

My first FR book was a mystery in a fantasy setting. That suited the characters involved. Recently I was talking with my husband about my desire to write a book focusing on Elaith Craulnober. He suggested a caper novel, and that struck me as exactly the right sort of plot for this character, especially if he were pitted against a really worthy opponent. A caper story would allow Elaith to strut his stuff, it has room for the sort of moral relativism that defines Elaith's decision-making process, and it could have larger, hidden, more personal stakes that would provide interesting opportunities for character development.

Offhand, I can't think of any FR books that have used this particular plot type. Any comments or observations?

On the Waterdeep novel

27 Apr 2004
The upcoming Waterdeep book is not a sweeping history, but a tale set in current day. My original desire was to write a Rutherford-style book in the Evermeet/Cormyr vein, but this was overruled by the Powers That Be.

On elven lore

28 Apr 2004
After writing Evermeet, I had extensive notes that collected just about every scrap of elf-related lore then published in the Realms, (including the old Spelljammer comic books!) as well as a thick file of email discussions among various Realmslore scholars such as Eric Boyd and Stephen Schend. To my great regret, this file disappeared during the move from Maryland to Rhode Island. I no longer have the information I used to write that section, and unfortunately I lack the time at present to reconstruct it.

In fact, the "Realmslore elf center" in my brain has been moved out of short-term memory to a file in one of the "back rooms." When the folks at WotC assigned me a trilogy set in Halruaa, they specified that it was NOT to focus on elves. My next book was about a drow, but had very little to do with drow culture, much less elven culture. There were two elves in secondary roles--Thorn and Sharlarra--but both were solitary elves, cut off from their kind. My current project is set in Waterdeep, and all the major characters are human. (Elaith has a minor role, but he's a rogue elf functioning in a human society, and certainly not typical of his race or class.) So it has been quite a while since I pondered FR elves in terms of history or culture. I have no idea whether or not I will not be writing about FR elves in the future.

Lacking an outlet for things elven, I started a new (non-FR) series that involves developing an elven culture and history. Because I want this project to be different and distinctive, I've deliberately continued the pattern set by my recent assignments, and distanced myself from FR elven lore.

Regarding that series, the first book, *Shadows in the Darkness,* will be out in September. I'll be starting the second book next month, with a late-summer of 2004 deadline in mind. (That gives a year's lead-time for book 2, which will be published the FOLLOWING September...) More info to follow on my website--as soon as I have the time to update it!

More on agents

28 Apr 2004
To my ear, both blurbs still sounded a bit too much like breathless, back-cover copy. Additionally, they give very little real information. The example RLB gave provides the genre, the premise, the conflict, and the tone. It hits exactly the right note, and in doing so, presents his manuscript as the work of a seasoned professional.

It seems to me that you're putting too much weight on the cover letter. As RLB pointed out, there is no magic ingredient that will seize an agent's attention. Your cover letter should give the basic information in clear, error-free prose. The best way to convince an agent that you're a "talented author with a great story to tell" is to tell a great story. The agent is going to spend a lot more time on your manuscript than your cover letter, and in the end, that's what his decision will be based upon. He's a salesperson, and he's looking for marketable product. If his goal was to find you a job in marketing, he'd be more concerned with your ability to write a compelling sales pitch.

When looking for an agent, it's important to define what you expect from the relationship. To this end, I strongly recommend Richard Curtis's book *How to be Your Own Literary Agent*. Getting the wrong agent for you can be worse than having none at all.

[...]

A query letter can help agents screen potential clients on a number of levels. If the letter is riddled with errors, there's little reason to believe the manuscript will be any better. That alone probably weeds out more than half. On the next level, the agent can ascertain whether or not the proposed story is the sort of story he or she represents; for example, many agents don't represent young adult fiction. I'm guessing a lot of writers don't bother checking. Then there's the story itself. Perhaps the premise is simply unworkable--a vampire with HIV, for example--or too obviously derivative to be marketable. Judging from the number of emails I've received from aspiring writers who are writing their own tales about moonblade-wielding elves, agents are probably innundated with tales about perky female bounty hunters (inspired by Janet Evanavich's very successful Stephanie Plum series), good-aligned dark elves (the Drizzt books), and so on. These would be fairly easy to weed out. These criteria probably disqualify seven or eight submissions from every ten.

Agents will evaluate interesting story ideas by a number of other criteria, such as recent buying trends. For example, Arthurian fiction seems to go in cycles, and your manuscript might catch the wave and it might not. Anti-heroes seem to come in and out of favor. At present, a lot of fantasy is taking a darker tone, and a Smurfette-meets-unicorn lovefest is probably not an idea whose day has come. (Except as parody, which has possibilities...) You might have the misfortunate of proposing a story that's very similar to one a major publisher is on the verge of releasing. The preferences/needs of editors also comes into play. If an agent knows that a particular editor is looking for a hefty trilogy to market as the next big epic, he's going to read a proposal for such a tale with that particular opportunity in mind.

So yes, agents can learn a lot from a cover letter. That's why I believe letters should be concise, professional, and informative. Purple prose takes up space that could be used to convey valuable information--which is what the agent will use to make a decision.

[...]

When to get an agent?

It depends. If you're working in the shared-world sub-genre, you can get along for quite a while without one. The world of game-related fiction is a small one, and publishers are aware of who's writing what. Once you've started writing for one company, it's not too difficult to make lateral moves. There isn't much room for negotiation in most work-for-hire contracts, and some writers feel the potential benefit doesn't balance the 15% agent fee.

If you wish to expand from shared-world to "mainstream fantasy" (a designation which IMO is much akin to "jumbo shrimp," but let's not go there), an agent becomes more important, but not necessarily essential to publication. I think there's a point at which the value an agent adds is greater than the fee, but that point is different for everyone.

I chose my current agent based on my desired career path. I plan to continue writing shared-world fiction, but I am also working on other projects, including a historical novel I've been researching and writing (off and on) for over two years now. My previous writing credits won't be much help in placing a historical novel, nor do I have contacts at houses that publish such novels. At this point, I need an agent who has clients and contacts in both fantasy and historical.

One more point that is not as obvious to many aspiring writers as it might seem: don't start looking for an agent until you have a ready-to-read manuscript. I've made this mistake myself, pitching a project that was only partially completed--one that, alas, I was never able to complete. Not all good ideas evolve into good stories, and

it's a Very Bad Idea to put yourself in the position of having to say, "Umm, never mind...."

On novel cover art

30 Apr 2004
Most of Fireheart's comments are consistent with my experience. It's certainly true that authors have very little input into cover art. It's also true that artists seldom have a completed manuscript in hand before they begin work. Some of them have far less information than they'd like. On the other hand, some of them simply aren't interested in depicting the characters as they are described.

On the far side of the spectrum is a very fine artist who did the covers for *Evermeet* and *Cormyr.* I met him at GenCon, and he told me he deliberately avoids reading anything about the book and characters, as he does not want anything to interfer with his own personal vision. That attitude is certainly correct for most artistic works, but it seems to me that an illustrator ought to, well, "illustrate."

TSR/WotC usually asks for "art notes," with a description of the characters and suggestions for a scene. The artist may or may not take these into account; in fact, several years ago one of the TSR editors told me that among their artists were those who refused to read even the one-page art notes. I'm inclined to believe this. For the original cover of Daughter of the Drow, an editor called me and asked for an "iconic image" that would tie the cover painting to the book. The artist knew he needed a human male and a drow female, so he painted himself and his significant other as Fyodor and Liriel, then added her spider-in-amber necklace so there would be some reference to the story. This was NOT because he did not have a detailed description--I was asked to write one and I did, including as always my contact info in case the artist wished to discuss anything. Either the artist was not given these notes, or he elected not to read them. In marked contrast to this approach is Todd Lockwood's: he was the first artist to contact me and discuss in detail the characters and their development. Some of the WotC artists might not contact authors with question, but they obviously read the art notes. Brom's depiction of Bronwyn was very close to my description.

Regarding drow skin tones. Color is a property of light, and the ebony skin of drow will show different highlights depending upon the light source. Assuming their skin does NOT change color when they're on the surface, it will still look very different viewed by moonlight as opposed to, say, the glow of Underdark lichens.

On Elaine's reading habits

01 May 2004
My reading habits are highly eclectic, and it's hard to point to a single author, or even a single genre.

I've been researching and writing a historical novel (off and on) for over two years now, so I read stacks of 16th century history. Ditto for Arthurian novels and lore. I read historical fiction, mysteries, literary fiction. Recently I've been reading Andrew Vachss--very dark subject matter, very bleak prose, but exceedingly well done. For fantasy, I'd definitely recommend Greg Keye's *The Briar King* and Neil Gaiman's *American Gods.* Rob King's Arthurian trilogy was marvelous, especially the third book, *Le Morte d'Avalon*. I read a considerable amount of folklore and mythology. The most recent acquisition was a collection of Sicilian folk tales. After the Waterdeep book is

finished, I'll be writing a short story about the Linchetto, the mischievous "night elves" of Sicilian folklore, and I wanted to get a feel for the flavor and pacing of the folk tales. (This story is for an anthology of tales about non-Tolkienesque elves.)

In fact, a lot of my reading is research. I read several books for the recently-published article about Richard III in Renaissance Magazine, and did considerable research into the Bohemian king Wenceslas for a short article about "Good King Wenceslas," the hero of the old Christmas carol. I've also been asked to write an article about female pirates, which is right up my alley anyway, since I've been researching the life and times of Grace O'Malley for ages.

In the Realms, I particularly enjoy the short stories by Rob King and Jim Lowder. The Finder's Stone trilogy was lots of fun, and the reason I started writing in the Realms can be summed up in three words: *The Crystal Shard.*

About *Elfshadow*

01 May 2004
The setting came first.I starting reading the FR books and game materials before I had a story idea. In fact, much of the plot evolved from intriquing, unrelated details in the lore. When reading the old gray boxed set, I noted that parts of Evereska were established about the same time that King Zaor of Evermeet died. I starting thinking about a possible connection between thess two things, and eventually came up with the idea of a magical gate to the elven island that could be moved, but not closed. The need to isolate and protect that gate would explain the fairly new elven community. A half-elf protagonist provided a bridge between the human world and the elven culture.

Waterdeep was an important part of the story, so I got familiar with that city. I also spent a lot of time with maps for such things as terrain, place names, and travel times. The various monstrous compendiums were helpful, as were the spell compendiums. Back then, I pretty much read everything that was printed in the Realms--ALL the books, ALL the game materials, comic books, DRAGON articles, you name it. While writing *Elfshadow,* I collected and read most of the material that had been published up to that time.

There were other influences, of course. The two-layer plot--the mystery of the Harper assassin as a cover for the political machinations of Kymil Nimesin--was a personal choice, since I'm fond of mysteries and wanted to write a mystery in a fantasy setting. Danilo was inspired by the classic adventure tale *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. I read this book as a child, and was intrigued by the notion of a hero who was far more than he pretended to be. Danilo's persona, however, owes more to Oscar Wilde than to Lord Percy. Rupert Everet's performance in the recent movie version of "An Ideal Husband" absolutely nailed Danilo's court persona.

On *Elfsong* and *Silver Shadows*

09 May 2004
The books describe important events in the lifes of two characters during a time they were apart, which is why I started the books with the same scene told from different points of view. You could think of *Elfsong* and *Silver Shadows* as TV shows that run during the same time, but on different channels.

On *Realms of Dragons*

17 May 2004
The story in RoD will be "Gorlist's Dragon," and will focus on an episode in Gorlist's early life, back when he was an arena fighter in Chad Nasad.

I pitched two other story ideas to Phil Athans, the project editor, one of which was a story about Zz'Pzora set in Skullport during the timeframe covered in *Daughter of the Drow*. That story, tentatively titled "Discuss It Amongst Yourselves," is a comic romp similar in tone and style to the story "The Direct Approach" in the anthology *Realms of Magic.* When Zip got to Skullport she was ready to party, and the story describes some of the mischief she and Liriel get into during a girls' night out. The title refers both to Zip's split personality, and also to the three floating skulls that appear at random moments to mete out punishment to miscreants. One insane deep dragon with two personalities plus three pissed-off magical skulls presents a significant challenge to Liriel's ability to think on her feet. I started this story years ago and would like to finish it some day, but given my current work load I seldom have time to write something just for the fun of it. If a market for that story opens up, I'll be all over it. I'm not sure what project would best suit it--*Realms of Slapstick*, perhaps.

About story creation

17 May 2004
Hmmm. My last couple of posts make it appear that I complete only a small percentage of the stories I start. Lest that create a skewed and unduly flakey impression, I should mention the importance of a journal, which in my case is a computer folder labled "Ideas."

When a story idea comes to mind, I open a new file and dump the thoughts into it, which preserves the ideas for possible future development and clears my mind to focus on the project at hand. Sometimes these ideas develop into a book or story, sometimes they don't. Sometimes a file might be a short description, i.e., "a story set in Roman Britain in the city of Aquae Sulis (currently known as Bath) dealing with the prayers to the goddess Minerva (prayers that were frequently curses) engraved on pewter sheets and tossed into the sacred hot springs." Sometimes it's a lengthy file that developes in bits and pieces over time, and includes plot elements, new characters, pages of dialogue, and even whole scenes. An example of this is "Restoration," an Arilyn/Danilo/Elaith story I hope to someday write, much of which came about during a fantasy con in Germany that was characterized by a freak heat wave and serious jet lag. I never knew when to sleep, and none of the hotels had air conditioning so it was too hot anyway. So I created Hamish the dwarven butler, a protocal savant with a very dark sense of humor.

Writing has three main sets of tasks: promoting stuff that's already written, writing new stuff, and lining up future projects. Obviously most of your time has to be spent on the actual writing, but if you don't think about what's coming next until you're ready to start writing it, you end up with too much down time. It's a juggling act, and I'm still trying to get the hang of it.

On what Elaine would like to write for WotC

17 May 2004
If I could chose FR projects, in order of preference, here's what I would do:

1) "Restoration," the Arilyn/Dan/Elaith story, which would take place directly after

the events of *Dream Spheres* and be set mostly in Tethyr. It could deal with the restoration of Tethyr's monarachy, and would deal with some of the issues raised in the last Songs & Swords book. At the end of *Dream Spheres*, all of the main characters were at a point of transition. That's not where I want to leave them, and I'd like to do a book that wraps up the S&S series--not one that would preclude the possibility of future stories, but one that would move these characters to a different and more satisfying place.

2) A story focusing on Elaith, either a caper novel or a revenge story (the primary object of his vengence being Kymil Nimesin). In either story, he would learn about the existance of his son, the firstborn child of Princess Amnestria (Arilyn's mother.) The story would be set in the present, and would not delve into Elaith's path, so that he could retain much of the mystery that currently defines the character.

3) "Darkhold," a story focusing on the Zhentarim and tying up some of the loose threads in *Thornhold*: the fate of the young paladin Algorind, the problem of a fallen paladin within the ranks of the Knights of Samular, the true purpose of this holy order and the REAL POWER of the rings (the seige tower was simply somthing the rings animated: think of them as a battery, and the tower as a flashlight...), the custody battle over young Cara which pits Bronwyn against her brother Dag Zoreth and both of them against the elven sorceress Ashemi, the establishment (or not) of a dwarven stronghold in the fortress of Thornhold, the skeletons in Khelben's closet that put him at odds with the Knights of Samular, and the reason why Danilo has such a dim view of paladin orders. I'd also like to tie in some of the story threads into the hidden past of the Pereghost, who is rumored to be a fallen paladin and who for many years has commanded troops in Darkhold.

Yes, I'm definitely in closure mode.

[…]

18 May 2004
People frequently ask what stories I'd like to write next, or what my idea of a dream project is, and I don't see any harm in talking about such things, but I definitely don't want the folks at WotC to think I'm doing some behind-the-scenes campaigning for pet projects. In fact, one FAQ on my website is the perennial question, "If we really want to see a particular book, what should we do?" Since "Damned if *I* know...." didn't strike me as a judicious response, I expressed my uncertainty about the effectiveness of letters and emails, and my consequent reticent to advise people to spend time on them.

I might be wrong about this; after all, Ed Greenwood routinely tells GenCon attendees to write to WotC with their requests, then recites the mailing address. I'm not about to argue with the Creator, and that tactic may very well work for him. But he's Ed, and I'm not, and there, IMO, the matter ends.

It's "common wisdom" that most of the folks on message boards and mailing lists are hard-core fans, and not necessarily representative of the readership. Avid fans of Realms lore might express great enthusiasm for an obscure tale about some little-used race set in a remote corner of the Realms, which would cast light on an intriquing tidbit of lore; in short, something that would prompt the general readership to stay away in droves. That's where the marketing people come in--they attempt to balance the enthusiasm of the few with the tastes and interests of the many.

Over the years I've gotten much more ~~resigned~~ philosophical about such matters. I don't pretend to know what sells, so I leave such matters to the folks who do. My

task as a shared-world writer is to find a story that interests me within the given perameters of setting, stats and rules, editorial direction, and reader interests.

A few points

20 May 2004
The name of Zip's mother never came up in the Liriel stories. I'm always hestitant to disseminate unofficial lore, but feel free to come up with your own!

I'm not involved in a D&D campaign, unless you count supplying snacks for my sons' gaming groups. I always had in mind that Sylune was trained in Rashemen, even before I started the Starlight & Shadows novels, because this seemed a reasonable explanation for her title "the Witch of Shadowdale." References to witches are rare in the Realms, and seem to be specific to Rashemen. Regarding the Waterdeep book, Ed is wonderful, funny, and unfailingly gracious, but he's not "right with me." In fact, we live in different countries, so we've discussed ideas over the phone and sent chunks of manuscript back and forth via email.

On Elaith and the Craulnober moonblade

20 May 2004
In answer to your question, there are no books in the planning stage focusing on Elaith Craulnober. He does, however, have a small role in the upcoming Waterdeep book I'm writing with Ed Greenwood (release date August 2005.)

Myst, I make it a point not to comment on official gaming stats for characters from the novels. The game designers need to keep the overall picture in mind, and stats have to reflect a balance between the obscenely powerful characters and those who are merely insanely powerful.

To make matters more difficult, complex characters such as Elaith seldom fit neatly into classes and alignments, so it's all an approximation. Then you have characters such as Danilo Thann, who runs around acting like a low-level kind of guy and then, boom, he casts a spell than can move a magical gate from Evereska to Blackstaff Tower. Or he's able to cast spellsong, a complex music-based magic that, as a human, he shouldn't be able to touch. Dan specializes in being more than he appears to be. It's pretty tough to nail down a character like that in stats. If people saw stats that reflected what Dan can really do, they'd want to know why, and then I'd have to explain his backstory and how he got to be what he is. That's not something I'm prepared to do.

Basically, when it comes to describing the novel characters in stats or, conversely, keeping a novel character in line with his or her stats, novelists and game designers do the best we can. It's never perfect--games and books are too different for that--but we try to come close.

Yes, I'm aware that Elaith is dual-classed with higher wizard stats. You don't see a lot of his magical abilities in my stories, because I prefer to have Elaith do most of his magic "off stage," in keeping with the whole mysterious villain thing he's got going on. One example is when he shows up in Lucia Thione's bedchamber after disspelling all the wards and "giving the servants the night off." Elaith likes to keep a few hidden weapons and a few tricks up his sleeve, and he doesn't want people in Waterdeep to think of him as a wizard. He already has enough wealth, power, and contacts to make people uneasy. If it became common knowledge that he was a spellcaster of considerable power, I think the Waterdhavians would be less inclined

to tolerate his presence in their city. He hides some of his abilities for the same reason Khelben Arunsun took on the identity of one of his descendants: so people won't realize he's as powerful as he is. As for the knives, Elaith thinks death ought to be up close and personal. Plus, knives are so nice and shiny . . .

FYI, Elaith does more magic in the upcoming Waterdeep book than we usually see him do onstage. In part, that's a response to the characterization in the FRCS 3.0. See--we do try . . .

I doubt the story of the Craulnober moonblade will ever be told. The sword is being held in trust for Elaith's daughter Azariah (please pronounce this ah-ZAH-ree-ah, NOT az-ah-REE-ah, which sounds too much like an intestinal disorder for my peace of mind...), who is being fostered on Evermeet. I'd love to do a book that's a series of novellas, one for each moonblade wielder, (or a series of graphic novels, one for each moonblade wielder!) but the Craulnober blade wouldn't be a good candidate for such treatment. (Arilyn's sword would be, though!) Azariah is still a child, and it will be many years before she comes of age and attempts to claim the family moonblade. Keeping continuity in a world as detailed and sprawling as the Realms is difficult enough when everything is written in present time. If we start setting stories in the future, we run the risk of establishing "facts" that future authors and game designers might find hard to live with. Then there's the very real possibility that anything we write about the future might be negated by rule changes. (Drow magical power and items, anyone?) At the current rate of time passage and rule revisions, it's likely that Azariah would come of age under D&D edition 47.5 or thereabouts.

On Liriel and general comments about working with the Realmslore

24 May 2004
You're correct about the cover of *Daughter of the Drow*--that's Fyodor with Liriel. The second book, *Tangled Webs*, is my favorite of the bunch. It depicts Liriel with Hrolf the Unruly, a Ruathymaar pirate and a kindred spirit to the mischievous drow. He also became a surrogate father to Liriel, and I love the way Todd Lockwood's painting captures the relationship between Hrolf and Liriel.

[…]

There was a time under TSR when game designers would consult authors when game products dealt with the characters these authors created. I recall in particular Dale Donovan sending out pertinant sections of the old Heroes' Lorebook for author perusal and comments. Steven Schend was also terrific about such matters, and always contacted me in matters concerning "my" characters. But Dale and Steven are sterling examples of professional courtesy and attention to detail, and for that matter nifty human beings in general. WotC cannot be faulted for the decline of civilization in general, and the fact that they just don't make men like those guys anymore! Oh wait--::cues spectral voice of Obi-wan:: **"There is another."** Freelance game designer Eric Boyd is wonderful to work with, and during my 14-year association with the Realms I've never met anyone, excepting only Ed Greenwood himself, who approaches Realmslore with more affection, respect, and attention to detail.

If my experience is typical, the level of contact and cooperation between game designers and authors varies widely. I haven't attempted to deal with games for a while, so I couldn't tell you what the current zeitgeist is. (And if it *wasn't* a positive atmostphere, I wouldn't tell you anyway....)

Kuje is correct in saying that Elaith Craulnober was created by Ed Greenwood. Elaith's stats originally appeared in the old game accessory *Waterdeep and the North.* I kept those stats in mind while writing *Elfshadow,* but since Elaith was a) a mysterious character and b) a minor character, his few scenes in that book did not reflect the full scope of his abilities. More details were added in subsequent books and stories, which, as Kuje pointed out, have begun to flesh out Elaith's history and personality. I do not have my own "rival stats" for Elaith, and I wouldn't publish them online if I did. I'm fairly careful not to disseminate unofficial Realmslore, and I will not contradict anything in the game lore. The exception to this rule is the occasional outright error, an example of which would be listing Arilyn Moonblade as a Harper scout in FRCS, when she left the Harpers five years before the time frame covered in this source book. But it's one thing to say, "Oops--this small fact doesn't jive with the novel characters," and quite another to say, "Since I don't like the official version of X, here's another..."

I'd hoped to create 3.0 (this was a while back) stats for newer characters and conversions for characters who'd already been statted, send them to the folks at WotC for revision and official approval, then post them on my website as a resource for gamers. But the high-level WotC guy who approved the project moved on shortly after, and at that point I didn't have the time to figure out the new chain of command and start the approval process from scratch. An enthusiastic group of readers and gamers hashed out Liriel's stats on a designated thread on the WotC message board, and the results were slightly edited by WotC and posted on the website. It was a good process, and I'd thought about working out the characters in similar manner, one at a time. (Now, of course, on some forum other than the official WotC website...) Perhaps I'll be able to find the time to pick up this project some time in the future, but right now I've booked solid, and I've got a number of related projects--website construction, including the drow art gallery on my website--patiently waiting to suck up stray moments.

On Liriel and the windwalker amulet

28 May 2004
One of the benefits of the Windwalker amulet was the ability to store a number of spells, including more than one casting of a particularly useful spell, to be recalled at will. During her sea voyages, Liriel spent quite a few of her waking hours learning spells, committing them to memory, and then "downloading" them in the Windwalker. This would explain the occurrence of spells more frequently than allowed in D&D stats.

And yes, we should have included fireballs in her stats. That was an oversight on my part. If this write-up is used for another source, and if I'm consulted on the matter, I'll make sure to correct this point.

About Thorn and Sharlarra

30 May 2004
When Windwalker ended, Liriel had found two new companions: Thorn, a lythari warrior referred to as a Champion of Eilistraee, and Sharlarra, an elven thief and apprentice wizards. Careful readers of the recently-released game supplement The Unapproachable East picked up on the clues about Sharlarra's identity: she is a "star elf," a subrace of elves originally from the Rashemen area who long ago retreated from the world into a demi-plane. These elves now face some sort of unspecified danger in their adopted home, and have been tentatively exploring a reentry into the Prime Material Plane. They are characterized by their gold-flecked violet eyes, a

nighttime increase of their powers, and a certain affinity with spirits. (This is a vastly simplified summary: see the game product for more detail.)

Here's a bit about Sharlarra's history: during one forray into the the Prime Material Plane, her family was slaughtered by slave hunters and she was captured and sold. She eventually ended up in Skullport, where she was rescued from slavery by Qilue's followers. Sharlarra made her way as a thief until she met Laerel Silverhand, who took her to Waterdeep as an apprentice wizard. Sharlarra's experience with drow made her inclined to help Liriel, whom she quickly recognized as a kindred spirit.

There is something in Sharlarra calling her back to her ancestral home, which is another reason she so quickly decided to follow Liriel and Fyodor to Rashemen. Indeed, Fyodor, who knows the old tales of his homeland, had heard tales of star elves, and he invited Sharlarra to return home with them. (Did anyone catch that passage? When he commented to Sharlarra that she would find a welcome in Rashemen, where tales are told of elven maidens with violet eyes?)

General points

01 Jun 2004
News in brief: Thorn's a lythari and Sharlarra is a star elf.

The walking hut in the Starlight & Shadow's trilogy is Baba Yaga's hut, a standard feature from Slavic folklore. There was once a gaming module by this name, as well--first edition, if memory serves.

Valondil, the novel with Ed Greenwood is a stand-alone book. There are no plans at this time for me to write a novel set in Bob Salvatore's Demon War setting. FYI, the model for Danilo on the cover of Elfshadow was a guy who worked in the mapping department of TSR at the time. Fred Fields is a very fine artist who does amazingly photo-realistic paintings. This portrait doesn't depict Danilo as I envision him, but it's an effective cover all the same.

Arion, I frequently incorporate character traits into names. "Arilyn" is an invented name that brings to mind "Ariel," which is the name of a sprite in Shakespeare's play and which in Hebrew means "lion of God." These seemed like good connotations for a fighter who wields a blade dedicated to the service of the elven people. The dwarf in Thornhold is Ebenezer, which means "corner stone" in Hebrew. A good, solid name. "Tzigone" is a Hungarian name related to the word for "gypsy," and definitely fitted the character. But in the future, I'm going to stay away from real-world names, and stick to Realms-specific names that follow more closely the patterns of nomenclature Ed Greenwood has established.

On what would happen if Drizz and Liriel met

01 Jun 2004
I received in this morning's email a note that quoted a post from the RAS board, something I wrote in response to the perennial question, "What would happen if Drizz and Liriel met?" For those who might be interested in my take on the matter, here 'tis:-

Liriel: (Oo! Cute little drow toyboy! Thank you, Eilistraee, goddess of the butt-neckid moonlit dance.)

Drizzt: (Danger! Matron-in-the-making! Strengthen me, Mielikki, whose unicorn

favors the chaste and virtuous.) ::draws his two scimitars::

Liriel: ::sniffs:: "Put away the cutlery, honey, and take a look at THESE twins..."

::At this inopportune moment, Catti-brie walks in, and the ensuing catfight makes the season three showdown between Buffy and Faith look like a sorority tea party.::

Does Liriel know of Drizzt

01 Jun 2004
To be honest, I really haven't decided. Drizzt was born in 1297 and Liriel was born in 1322, and their lives took very different paths. He went to the fighting college, she was in fosterage with the female Shobolar wizards. He left the city while she was still quite young. She would have heard of the destruction of Drizzt's house, and it's possible--possible, but not likely--that she knows one noble survived.

But if that's the case, she understands that by Menzoberranzan law, that surviver has the right to call for the destruction of the attacking house--House Baenre. Drizzt's very existance is a danger to Liriel and her family. In theory, he could return to Menzoberranzan, demand that justice be administered, and probably find enough ambitious drow that would happily seize an excuse to destroy the First House and move themselves up a notch.

With this in mind, I don't know how widespread the knowledge of his survival would be. It's the sort of thing the ruling members of Baenre would want to keep under wraps, and it's unlikely they'd share this knowledge with every member of the family--particularly someone as far out on the fringes as Liriel was.

Faerun is a big place, and information tends to remain regional. It's hard for people who are bombarded by several 24-hour news channels to imagine that Liriel may not have heard of Drizzt since she came to the surface, but that is most likely the case.

On elven aging

02 Jun 2004
I assume that elves have a different aging process, one that does not correspond proportionally to humans. It's my understanding that drow tend to mature physically at a faster rate than elves (though I'd have to look for the specific reference in the lore), and an "early" adolescence makes sense, given the hazards of their environment.

The novella "Rite of Blood" depicts Liriel's coming of age--the predictably twisted drow version of the Bat Mizvah, if you will. She was in her early twenties at the time, and I envisioned her as being in early adolescence, perhaps the equivalent of a human girl at twelve or thirteen.

During the trilogy, Liriel's physical and mental state could be compared to a seventeen or eighteen year-old-girl. And yes, this did color her actions. She's impulsive, and frequently acts with the recklessnes born of the unstated belief the young have in their own immortality. She can plot and scheme, but that ability hasn't yet translated to the understanding that actions have consequences. Adding to this volatile mix is the fact that, at this relatively tender age, she has more than 40 years of intensive magical studies behind her. Drow can amass a huge amount of knowledge and acquire formidable skills before they reach a corresponding level of emotional maturity.

The human lifespan seems to be marked by several "passages." It's my personal opinion that elves must go through many additional layers of change during their long lives. I think a centuries-long lifespan would become a burden if it wasn't marked by a complex, subtle pattern of change, and the constant development of new insights and interests.

Danilo's familiar

02 Jun 2004
And while on the topic, I keep a file of bits and pieces for another Arilyn and Danilo book, to which I've been adding to for years. Since I really enjoy the tart interplay between Dan and Khelben, I'm playing with the idea of having Khelben send Dan a familiar to keep him at his magical studies: an ascerbic talking cat who is very much like the archmage in his attitudes and way of speaking. Dan is very fond of the cat, and unaware that the cat is so unhappy with his new assignment that he spends his free time plotting his escape--in short, the usual human/housecat relationship. (The cat's escape attempts are usually foiled by Hamish, the dwarven butler. It seems to me that cats and dwarves are natural foes.) I know the feline familiar is a fantasy classic, but they say you should write what you know and love.

Sundry topics

23 Jun 2004
Arion, the story of Prince Lamruil and the kingdom he established has not yet been told. I rather doubt it will be. The emphasis is currently on the establishment of an elven presence on the mainland. The Retreat is over, and talk of a hidden kingdom is. . . out of fashion, for lack of a better term.

[…]

While I'd love to write a novel about Arilyn, Danilo, and Elaith--not to mention a cat familiar for Dan--I really don't see it happening, at least, not any time soon. Folks at WotC have expressed a lack of interest in "going back to the same old wells." If the zeitgeist changes and a story is requested, great, but I no longer have the time or inclination to pitch stories over and over in hope of keeping them on the radar.

On witches and Shakti's and Liriel's agreement

28 Jun 2004
I was thinking more in terms of an attunement than a creation. The Witches work together in circles, and it seems to me that a powerful magical item should be attuned to all, with one Witch, the wielder of that particular object, being the focal point.

[…]

What you have in this scene is two drow doing what drow do--plotting, trying to out-manuvere each other, setting up Plan B and C contingencies.

Here's how Liriel was thinking: Shakti has told Gromph that Liriel is dead. To all appearances, he accepts this as truth. It's to Liriel's benefit to encourage this tale, since it removes the likelihood of pursuit. If Gromph starts asking too many questions, Shakti has the option of impersonating Liriel, and claiming the sort of

return that brought Quental Baenre back to Menzoberranzan. But Liriel knows something Shakti doesn't: without the ability to cast wizard spells, Shakti doesn't have a chance of pulling off this deception. The Windwalker, had it still been hoarding Liriel's spells, would have given her a shot at making the deception work, but without it. . .

From Shakti's point of view, impersonating Liriel was a contingency plan, one unlikely to be used or needed. As long as Gromph doesn't seek either Liriel or the Windwalker, this high-risk plan won't have to be put into action. Of course, since the Windwalker's magic is spent--Shakti didn't know this during the events of the book--there really won't be much of a point. If Gromph wants the Windwalker, Shakti can simply hand it over, since at this point it's nothing more than an antique charm.

This deal between the two of them has a strong element of irony. Shakti believes her ability to walk away from her long-desired vengeance is proof of her newly-acquired strength and focus. She does this from a perceived position of power, because she has every reason to believe she has gotten the better of Liriel. When she gets back to Menzoberranzan, however, she'll soon realize that the Windwalker is worthless. Without it, Shakti loses the ability to impersonate Liriel, so the mask isn't worth much, either. Yes, Shakti has grown in ways that will serve her well, but she isn't as far along as she thinks she is. Liriel outmanuvered her, plain and simple. Liriel's ending comment--that Shakti would become a great matron mother--was also heavily ironic. At the time, Shakti thought it this comment to be grudgingly admiring concession of a defeated rival. She's going to be one pissed-off drow once she figures out she's been had.

But what can she do about it? She has already told Gromph that Liriel is dead, and she certainly doesn't want to be caught in a lie. Any attempts to get together a search party to find Liriel is certain to come to Gromph's ears. Furthermore, Triel has enlisted Shakti to help ensure that word of the changed status of drow magic on the surface is kept quiet for as long as possible. Liriel realizes all of this, and she understands that Shakti has a personal stake in making sure that Liriel is dead to Menzoberranzan.

The bottom line is that Liriel is safe--as safe as any drow on the surface can be--and Shakti has to let this old rivalry go, as much as she might like to pursue it.

On FR fiction

06 Jul 2004
If I'm the Elaine being quoted above, I can guarantee that I didn't express this sentiment. In fact, it's the antithesis of my fundamental description of FR fiction, which I view as historical fiction, with the game lore and other novels as the "history" which MUST be followed.

I've been accused more than once of "not respecting" the setting, though, like most shared-world writers, I make every effort to be true to the established lore. As has been pointed out, the Realms is not a static world, and the game rules have changed considerably over the past dozen or so years. Since the application of 3.O rules, I've received emails from confused readers who note that I refer to the elves of Tethyr variously as green, wild, and forest elves. Back when the book was written, these were all names for a single elven subrace. The 3.0 shrinking of the map inflicted "continuity errors" on previously written fiction. Travel no longer takes as much time. Isolated areas, such Ten Towns, are now readily accessible to major coastal cities.

Sometimes rule changes can create a serious dilemma for writers. Shortly after I

began writing WINDWALKER, I learned that the rules for drow magic on the surface had changed--again, I might add--and that this change invalidated the fundamental plot premise of the first two books. I had to choose between internal consistency and adherence to the most recent game rules. My editor encouraged me to finish the trilogy according to second edition rules, reasoning that readers would understand what was going on. I decided to try a third and rather risky option: writing the game rule change into the story.

Rule changes aside, take into consideration the fact that ALL history is "fictitious," in that it is a narrative shaped by a point of view, and by the selection and omission of facts. Read any three history books on the same topic, and I can almost guarantee you'll find more contradictions than you'll find in FR lore, and between FR lore and novels.

Myths are far more variable than history. I've been severely criticised for the "factual accuracy" of the mythology section in the novel EVERMEET, even though what is presented in the book is a synthesis of the somewhat varied lore to be found in the sourcebooks. Myths--stories about gods--are like that; for example, you can find two versions of the creation story in the book of Genesis.

Hmmm....

On the dates of Elaine's novels in the Realmslore and other topics

13 Jul 2004
The Starlight & Shadows trilogy takes place in 1361, starting in early spring and ending in mid autumn. The main events of Elfshadow also take place in 1361, and Danilo enters the story shortly after his last contact with Liriel. Dream Spheres takes place in 1368. For more detail on chronology, here's a link to a page on my website: http://www.elainecunningham.com/chronology_of_fr_stories.htm

[...]

You're quite right about Arilyn and drow. She holds the typical elven attitude toward their dark kin, and she would not be amused to learn of Danilo's dealings with a drow wizard. Nor would she be pleased to learn that Dan recognizes Liriel as something of a kindred spirit. Arilyn simply couldn't understand this--she's too much of an elf. Elves are not overly burdened by political correctness.

[...]

There is no shortage of elven magical swords in the Realms, and it's not at all unusual to encounter one kind and not another in any given setting. Moonblades were forged for the specific purpose of designating a royal family. I'm not familiar with the history of the storm swords--you may want to post that question to Ed Greenwood.

[...]

I always hate to skeet shoot someone's flights of fancy, but I can almost guarantee this won't happen. Bob Salvatore isn't going to write about one of my primary characters, and I'm not going to write about one of his. The only way this scene could be written is if WotC hires a third writer to do it.

There's mention of Jarlaxle in the novella Rite of Blood, but not by name, and only with Bob's permission. That, by the way, was an interesting phone call. "Hey Bob--is

it okay with you if Jarlaxle deflowers Liriel and teaches her to throw knives, both at her request, and not necessarily in that order?" His response was along the lines of, "Hey, I don't think he'd mind a bit."

This development seemed in character for both Liriel and Jarlaxle. He would appreciate her free-spirited approach to life, and since she's a Baenre, he isn't exactly obligated to follow her wishes, but he'd need a very good reason to turn her down. Liriel at the time was a young teenager, curious about life and lacking outlets for her fun-loving nature at House Shobolar. She sneaks away from her Shobalar tutors to a tavern, makes friends with the most flamboyent and life-loving drow in the place, and, when she learns that he is connected to the Baenre household, realizes that he can be trusted--at least, to the extent that ANY drow can be trusted.

But even though this bit of backstory fit the characters, even though I had Bob's go-ahead, I didn't portray Jarlaxle onstage or even mention his name. It's enough that careful readers picked up on the reference. Working in a shared world involves sharing, but it's also important to respect other people's territory. Yes, WotC owns the copyright to all the characters and stories set in the Realms, but just because you CAN do something, it doesn't follow that you SHOULD.

This is probably more information than you were looking for, but the boundaries of sharing in a shared world are not immediately obvious.

On fighting styles

17 Jul 2004
It's up to the authors. I didn't attempt to portray various fighting styles in the Songs & Swords books. If I write another book in that series, I will, because learning a new style of fighting to deal with new circumstances will be a big part of Arilyn's story.

There is no official WotC guide to writing about combats. Authors use their own research, training, experience, and imagination to portray battles.

On *Thornhold*, Elaine, and other topics

17 Jul 2004
I'm glad you enjoyed Thornhold. It's a rather problematic book, since it was not written as an "ending" to the Harpers, but an introduction to a new series--a notion that was dropped while Thornhold was being written. For that reason, a lot of readers found it an unsatisfying and inconclusive end to the Harper series. Quite a few readers took exception with my depiction of paladins, and did not agree that "good intentions do not always bring unmixed results." Obviously, more time should be spent studying the Crusades during high school history classes. Desite the snafu, I really enjoyed writing about the dwarves. Ebenezer is one of my favorite characters, and I would LOVE to revisit Tarlamara, his younger sister.

Julianna Margales would be a decent choice for Arilyn, and yes, Danilo likes Arilyn to wear blue. He keeps giving her sapphires and blue topaz, even though she doesn't wear much jewelry, and occasionally strews the bed with petals from the blue roses he had shipped over from Evermeet, just for the pleasure of seeing them entangled in her hair. He's a bard. What can I tell you.

I do not know whether or not Lloth had children with K'Narlist, but I suspect not. Even if there was offspring, I would sincerely doubt that all the drow are literally descendants of Lloth.

Hi, Sarelle. Thanks for the lovely biography. My household is ruled by two cats, Siamese siblings: Gizmo and Basel. (If you can figure out how to put an umlaut (two dots) over the "a" in "Basel," you're doing better than I am.) Appropo of nothing in particular, I wanted to name the male Beltain, since they were born on April 30--an old Celtic holiday--and the female Bast, after the Egyptian cat goddess, but I was overruled by my kids. They also vetoed "Luke and Leia." Kids these days. Speaking of whom, the only change I'd request in the bio is to leave out the names of my kids. "Two teenaged sons" is probably enough information for the general public.

On *Evermeet*

19 Jul 2004
An online ebook could have enormous potential for annotation; for example, when a town or forest is named, click on the title for a link to a map. Characters could be linked to character sheets, artwork--whatever. In a world as vast and long-lived as the Realms, layers of information and lore could be added to an online novel.

Some books would benefit more than others from annotation. A straight-forward quest novel or a story that focuses on the machinations of the drow wouldn't be a prime candidate, but consider the possibilities in a novel such as *Evermeet*.

That book was the synthesis of just about every scrap of elven lore I could find, and Realms buffs might enjoy "footnotes" listing FR and D&D sources. For example, the mythology chapter showing the battle between the elven and orc gods could have been linked to a page that summarized the various creation stories, with reference and pages for each. The chapter on spelljamming ships could have had lore for those Realms fans not versed in that particular magical technology. Events referred to but not depicted, such as the Crown Wars, could be illuminated by a brief history. Names of gods could be linked to a page about the elven pantheon. Characters that have appeared elsewhere could be linked to a list of other books and stories. And it would have been really, really nice to have a timeline.

I don't see this sort of thing happening any time soon, but I still find the possibilies intriguing.

On Elaine's writing sample for the open call

19 Jul 2004
It was a later scene--the battle against the lizard men in the Marsh of Chelimber. For FR books, you need to show you can create interesting characters, vivid narrative, and battle scenes. This ten-page chunk had both action and dialogue. It put the personalities of Arilyn and Danilo in sharp opposition, introduced Arilyn's moonblade, and hinted that there was more to Dan than he let on. I tried to find a scene that would cover as many bases as possible.

On gnomes being comic relief characters in novels

27 Jul 2004
For what it's worth, I've written two short stories (the same event told through very different perspectives) in which gnomes played an important part: "Speaking With the Dead" from the FR anthology *Realms of Mystery*, and "Stolen Dream," from *DRAGON* magazine #259. They ghomes depicted therein are most definitely not

comic relief, nor do they create mechanical items, raise giant space hamsters, wear red hats, or hang out in front yards next to the pink flamingos.

On *Evermeet*

04 Aug 2004
1. How do you envision Evermeet's affairs now, two years on?

That's not really something I can comment on. Ed can create Realmslore that is canon until contradicted by published material, but I'm usually very careful not to post lore that hasn't been reviewed and approved by WotC staff. But I understand that Richard Byer's new book will deal with this issue.

2. How successful were/are Lamruil and Maura with their kingdom?

3. How dead is Ilyrana? Is there no way that her warrior form could be brought back to her body?

See above. Answers to these questions would be creating Realmslore, and I'm not in a position to do that.

4. If you can tell me, who is the child of Elaith and Amnestria - I assumed it was his daughter, but it clearly mentions a son. What is he up to, and will Elaith/Amlaruil ever learn of him?

Okay, this is a question I CAN answer--at least partially. Arilyn was not Amnestria's firstborn child. Amnestria bore a son in secrecy, and placed him in secure fosterage. Only her brother, Prince Lamruil, and her human husband, Bran Skorlsun, know the identity and the location of this hidden son. Whether or not Elaith learns of his son's identity is completely up to WotC. I've often expressed my interest in writing a book about Elaith, and this would be a likely plot element.

On the title of *Waterdeep: A Novel*

05 Aug 2004
More accurately, WotC has so named this novel.

It is neither Micheneresque nor Rutherfordian in style. It's set in near-current time (1372) and has mostly new characters. It has no pretensions of going the way of Evermeet or Cormyr. That was the original plan, with Khelben's long life the focal point of the plot, but the Powers That Be decreed otherwise.

I think readers will enjoy the story more if they think of it as "a" novel of Waterdeep, not "the" novel of Waterdeep.

On Liriel's future and the WotSQ series

09 Aug 2004
There are no plans to continue Liriel's adventure at present. I would certainly not be adverse to doing so, but I suspect that now that the "Year of the Drow" is over and the WotSQ series drawing to a close, the folks at WotC will want to give drow a rest.

It's my feeling that Lolth was thinking her future long before the events told in WotSQ, and she was looking into how this unconventional young priestess might fit

into her plans. (The Starlight & Shadows trilogy takes place about 11 years before WotSQ. Liriel involvement with the Windwalker definitely aided in expanding the drow's potential power base, but I suspect Lolth will not see much future benefit in a continued "relationship." She's moving on to other things, and Liriel is finally free of the Spider Queen's domination.

On the *City of Splendors* novel

09 Aug 2004
FYI, Waterdeep does NOT follow the same pattern as Evermeet and Cormyr. It's a stand-alone adventure set in near-current time (1372) with mostly new, young, low-level characters. The title chosen for it is "City of Splendors: A Novel of Waterdeep," and it will be marketed as part of the Cities series, with a similar cover design.

On that WotC Crinti article

27 Sep 2004

Actually, that article was written by Thomas Costa. He graciously sent it to me for perusal before submitting it to the WotC website.

For the record, I would advise that you completely ignore the article on Crinti history I wrote for the WotC website. This article was apparently removed from the website archives, and I assume that WotC has had second thoughts about the content. (I emailed several people at WotC and asked about this, but never received a response. That's usually a pretty good indicator.)

But this is for the best. I have a mild case of dyslexia and occasionally will transpose numbers and directions. That resulted in some continuity problems, as has been pointed out.

On music

27 Sep 2004
Kasehase, I'm a former music teacher and musician who still dabbles a bit, so I have very definite ideas about the music in Elfsong.

The ballad sung by Danilo's singing sword is a fully composed piece of music. Its title is "Elminster's Jest," and it includes a stanza with a rather bawdy punchline--so bawdy that I didn't even bother to include it when I submitted the novel. (Editors:-->) I originally scored it for harp, viol da gamba, hand drum (such as the bodhran), and obligato instrument (such as flute or recorder), but I'm currently scaling it down to a voice and harp arrangement. I've composed the melody for "Moonmist Maiden," but not the lyrics.

I envision the music in Waterdeep taverns to be similar to the popular music of real-world European cultures during the Renaissance. It's hard to describe this to someone who's not familiar with it. Think in terms of the dance music in the wedding scene in "Braveheart:" very rhythmic, with simple, rollicking melodies. Bawdy songs were VERY popular in the Renaissance, so there's definitely a tradition there.

I'm very fond of traditional folk music, and in my "mind's ear" much of the music of

Waterdeep is a fusion of Near Eastern, gypsy, European, and Celtic elements. Loreena McKennit does some nice fusion music. Not quite what I envision for Waterdeep, but it gives you an idea.

Because I'm interested in traditional folk music, I like to include less familiar instruments. For an idea of what Wyn Ashgrove's hammered dulcimer sounds like, listen to any recording by Maggie Sansone. It's hard to find good recordings of a hurdy gurdy, which sounds like a cross between a violin and a bagpipes.

At one time, I was also very interested in early music (Medieval and Renaissance), so I use instruments and styles from both the popular and "art" forms. The lute was the most popular and widely played instrument, much as the guitar is today. It sounds similar to a guitar, but it has more delicate sound--the tones are not as resonant and the notes fade more quickly. Danilo's lute playing would be somewhat similar to the music of John Dowland and Thomas Campion. I've included references to some real-world music--mostly fairly obscure stuff that won't distract most readers. For example, the spell poem was written to be sung to "L'homme arme," a popular medieval melody that was used as the basis for many motets, madrigals, and even polyphonic church music.

I really enjoyed this aspect of Elfsong, and I'm looking forward to an upcoming (non-Realms) project that has a bard as a central character. More details to follow as things fall into place.

The missing stanza from Danilo's singing sword

28 Sep 2004
No problem. The lyrics were posted on my website for a while, and one year at GenCon I even handed out sheet music to anyone who was interested (and, most likely, several people who couldn't care less but were too polite to point this out...)

For the record, I got Ed Greenwood's okay for the title.

ELMINSTER'S JEST
Attributed to (read: "blamed upon") Danilo Thann

There was a knight who longed to wield a more impressive lance
To carry into battle, and to aid him with romance.
A wizard overheard the knight and granted his request.
The knight at first was overjoyed to see how he was blessed.

Chorus:

Hey there, ho there,
A lesson's coming through:
Be careful what you ask for--
For your wishes may come true.

The knight went to a revel with his weapon thus enhanced.
The lance made dining difficult and tripped him while he danced.
The next day at the tournaments he won the jousting meets,
For all who faced his fearsome lance fell laughing from their seats.

Chorus

The knight romanced a lady who admired his staff of oak.

They'd scarse begun their gentle joust before the staff had broke.
The knight sought out the wizard, who replied when brought to task,
"Your wish bespoke how long it WAS, and not how long 'twould LAST!"

Chorus

Repeat chorus if possible, run if necessary.

On Chindra's hairstyle

12 Oct 2004
When you think about it, it's a very practical attitude. All those thick, flowing white locks provide a very convenient handhold for your opponents. Chindra, a professional gladiator, was more interested in winning/surviving than in getting the shampoo endorsements.

There's a disturbing notion, by the way: what sort of products would outstanding drow athletes endorse?

And here's another disturbing notion: when you realize that drow aren't into rampant commercialism, and consider that your average Menzoberranzan drow can go about his day without being bombarded by advertisements, you realize that some aspects of their culture compare favorably to our own.

But be that as it may. Glad you enjoyed the story. It was fun to dive back into the mindset of devious, multi-layered drow agendas.

Expanding on the *Evermeet* novel

12 Oct 2004
On the other hand, I'd be very interested in doing an expanded, updated, non-leatherbound version of Evermeet to incorporate third edition rules, expand the final battle by about 10,000 words, account for some of the "lost princes of Evermeet," and add an extensive section set during the Crown Wars. A "director's cut" version, if you will. Big ol' honkin' thing.

And for an epilogue, let Arilyn and/or Elaith get hold of Danilo's manuscript....

Sundry topics

17 Oct 2004
Regarding Raven Stormwalker, the title character of The Radiant Dragon:

I've never received any indication from WotC that they intend to revisit any of the material or characters from the Spelljammer series. I personally have no plans to write more about this character. A radiant dragon is specific to the Spelljammer setting, and its size and power is scaled for its environment: "the Void." A dragon of celestial proportions would have problems turning around on Evermeet without knocking down significant acreage of ancient forestland.

Regarding Myrin Silverspear:

Good eye! Yep, the elven innkeeper is indeed King Zaor's old buddy. He is a very old

elf--not that it's easy to tell such things--and although he feels that his days as a soldier are behind him, he takes his current posting very seriously, and he keep Queen Amlaruil (who, by the way, has already tired of her recent experiments with dark hair and has returned to her natural red-blond...;)) aware of developments in this important elven settlement.

What draws me to the Realms?

The feeling I had when reading the old gray boxed set: This is a rich, detailed world that's well worth exploring. I love the sense of history inherent in the Realms. Every now and then I get the feeling that I'm working to uncover hidden lore, not making up new stuff.

More sundry topics

16 Dec 2004
No, Kymil is not associated with the Eldreth Veluuthra. His current whereabouts is unknown to Realms sages, but you can safely assume that wherever he is, he's not having much fun.

[...]

19 Dec 2004
Yes, Arilyn and Dan were both in the 2nd edition Heroes Lorebook. To my knowledge, there has been no official 3.5 conversion. I was working on adaptions of my characters with the goal of having them approved by WotC and posted on my website as a reference for readers and gamers who are interested in the stats of novel characters. For a while that looked promising, but the project hit a couple of brick walls. I don't plan to try again.

On character edition conversions

21 Dec 2004
I have no problem with fan conversions of 2nd ed. characters to 3.5 stats; in fact, I think the gamers at the WotC site did a great job with Liriel's stats. Where my website project broke down was not in the creation of stats, but the approval process. For a number of reasons, I don't think it's a good idea to post non-official information on my website, so I'd hoped to have the character sheets reviewed by WotC for approval. That way, readers/gamers would have a "canon" source available, and the folks at WotC would have the material on hand in case they planned to do something with it (such as inclusion in a game material, web content for the book pages of the WotC website--whatever.) But the VP who thought this was a good idea left the company. Subsequent inquiries fell into various black holes. Since I have a limited amount of writing time, and even less to devote to promotions, I can't afford to spend a lot of time on a project that's unlikely to go anywhere.

In short, I've given up on the creation of 3.5 character stats for my 2nd ed characters.

There's another consideration; namely, the viability of spending time on characters who are unlikely to appear in future novels or game products. The last time I spoke to a WotC editor about the possibility of revisiting old characters, he was quite emphatic about "not wanting to keep going to the same old well." It's always possible that things may change--after all, nearly seven years passed between books 2 and 3 of Liriel's story--but I'm not counting on it.

On novel sales

21 Dec 2004
I'm not going to give sales numbers, but it's safe to say that sales of the Forgotten Realms books across the board have dropped over the last twelve years, with the exception of Bob Salvatore's books. Elfshadow's initial print run was significantly higher than those of Dreamspheres, the Counselors & Kings trilogy, or even Windwalker--which had the added cache of the drow to boost sales. I'm told that my books do well in comparison to most FR books, but since none of my characters have had the sort of break-out commercial success as Drizzt, there isn't the same payoff in supporting lengthy series.

There's also the time issue. The last Arilyn and Dan book was published in 1999. If WotC offered me a new book today, the earliest it could on the shelves would be 2006. That's a really big gap. Readers tend to move on.

One of the choices facing publishers is whether to go with an established midlist author or devote time and resources looking for the Next Big Thing. Right now, WotC seems to be putting a lot of effort into the NBT: numerous open calls, a new line of original fiction, the The War of the Spider Queen series. The latter, obviously, was an attempt to give newer authors a boost in sales and the wider exposure that comes with having Bob's name on the books. To keep the momentum going, most of the writers involved in WotSQ (Richard Baker, Richard Lee Byers, Lisa Smedman, Phil Athans, and Paul Kemp) were signed to a trilogy. Hopefully this strategy will help each of these writers establish a solid readership.

Information about Elaine's submission for the *Realms of the Elves* anthology

27 Dec 2004
Whatever happened to Prince Lamruil, Maura, and the Tree of Souls?

Forgotten Realms readers have been asking me this question since the publication of Evermeet, Island of the Elves in 1998. I'm very pleased to announce that an answer is finally on its way.

A proposal for a novella-length story for Realms of the Elves, the next Forgotten Realms anthology, received a go-ahead nod. "The Tree of Souls" is a story I've been waiting a long time to tell. The longer format (about 20,000 words) is a perfect length for this tale. The final revision is due July 2005, and the book is scheduled for release in early 2006.

For new readers, here's a quick summary:

After the invasion of Evermeet in DR 1371, Amlaruil, Queen of all Elves, entrusted her youngest son, Prince Lamruil, with one of the elves' greatest artifacts: the Tree of Souls. Once planted, it will create a gradually enlarging sphere protected by ancient High Magic, and thus establish a new elven kingdom, a new haven for the elven people. Prince Lamruil, along with his human bride Maura and a widely varied group of elven adventurers, set out to find a foothold in the most remote, unaccessible, and forbidding lands of northernmost Faerun.

For long-time readers, here's a note about continuity and change:

Nearly eight years have passed since Evermeet was written, and FR readers and

gamers have seen many changes to the Realms and the d20 game mechanics. The elven people, drow and surface dwellers alike, have undergone considerable change. Although "Tree of Souls" will continue a tale begun under Second Edition rules and will be written with established lore firmly in mind, the story will be written in accordance with 3E rules and current attitudes toward FR elves. The People have survived for untold thousands of years, and weathered many changes. It's my opinion that their chroniclers should display a similar flexibility.

[…]

"Tree of Souls" explores a number of themes and issues, none of which involve the question of "good-aligned" drow on Evermeet. While I understand this might be of interest to many readers, this particular story doesn't seem the right place to address it. Right after a devastating attack on Evermeet--an attack in which drow played a significant part--the elves would be unlikely to place this question high on their priority list. Nor would the followers of Eilistraee, assuming they had reasonably good political instincts, chose this particular moment to press their case for inclusion. Keep in mind that the elves of Evermeet, unlike most of us, have not read a dozen books about Drizzt Do'Urden. Elves are not inclined toward political correctness. Their history, theology, culture, and recent experiences give them no reason to reach out to the drow.

On a brighter note, I recently commissioned a portrait of Prince Lamruil from Kay Allen for use on my website and other promotions. He'll be holding the Tree of Souls, gazing at a forbidding icy landscape. Can't wait to see what Kay does with the character!

On elves

28 Dec 2004
That would depend upon the elven view of drow and the nature of evil. Richard Baker has stated his intention to "rehabilitate" the elves, so I'm not sure what the current elven zeitgeist is concerning heredity vs. environment. In other words, do 3E elves consider drow to be evil by nature or training?

If the elves believe drow to be inherently evil (with a few notable exceptions such as Drizzt and the occasional priestess of Eilistraee), they are unlikely to open Evermeet to their dark kin. By that reasoning, there's no telling when a child of drow parents might revert to type.

If the elves were inclined to explore this matter, it seems likely to me that they would create some sort of magical artifact to test "good drow" and their offspring over a period of time, to see if a line is breeding true--and to provide a safeguard against the possibility of a sport (genetic throw-back). If they would employ so brutal a device as the moonblades against their own to establish a worthy royal line, what test might they apply to drow applicants to Evermeet? Such a process might well take 10,000 years, when you consider that only four or five generations in a thousand years.

But in the meanwhile, wouldn't it make a great central idea for a series of graphic novels? Out of everything I've written for the Realms, the notion of the moonblades has been the single thing that most captured the attention of readers and gamers. That general idea, applied to drow striving for acceptance in the world of light? Lots of story potential there. And imagine the efforts typical drow might make to subvert that particular magic in order to infiltrate elven strongholds. Manchurian candidate, anyone?

So many stories, so little time... and even fewer publishing slots.

[...]

This is an important point, one readers frequently forget. Just because elves tend to be a "good race," it doesn't follow that "good" means "politically correct." FR elves do not have the mindset that prompts them to expect the best of every sentient being until the have reason to believe otherwise.

[...]

When I mentioned the current elven zeitgeist in the above-quoted passage, I was speaking "in game" regarding 3E elven attitudes toward drow. But I agree my meaning was not sufficiently clear.

To elaborate on Purple Dragon's point, I find the notion of "Lawful Evil sun elf stereotypes" to be selective and far from accurate. It ignores the many good-aligned sun elf heroes and secondary characters in the novels--including some who were aloof, bookish and elitist. It ignores moon elf villains such as Elaith Craulnober, forest elf villains such as Kiva, and the various half-elf secondary characters who were minor villains. It also disregards narrative point of view. (EVERMEET focused on a moon elf family, and was structured as a collection of tales gathered by a human for his half-elf love.) I could name several dozen good-aligned Sun Elf characters that have appeared in the Forgotten Realms novels, and I strongly disagree that the novels promoted a negative sterotype of sun elves. A few selected examples from ANY race could support just about any conclusion about that race.

It's a common practice to differentiate from, if not quite repudiate, that which came before. I was rather taken aback to see this tactic used in a shared world with a strong back list. As marketing strategy, it seems as short-sighted as advertising the War of the Spider Queen series as a way to "get drow back to how they REALLY should be!"

I'm looking forward to "The Tree of Souls" to tie up some story threads from EVERMEET, revisit some characters, and explore some elven themes. I still have a few things to say about elves in the Realms before I move on to other things.

On answering certain questions

29 Dec 2004
I have very few restrictions on what kind of question I'll answer. I'm not going to comment on elf lore, for reasons already stated. As you pointed out, I can only say so much about upcoming projects. The only other restriction involves the creation of new, unofficial lore.

A while ago, one poster asked a number of questions that required speculation--in essence, the creation of new Realmslore--and I declined to answer because I'm not in a position to respond to such questions. Ed Greenwood's non-published lore is canon until WotC says otherwise, but it's my opinion that other authors who engage in "what if" dialogue are stepping over the line. Working in a shared world involves respecting WotC as the holder of copyright, and to me that means no dissemination of unoffical, unapproved lore. IMO, all published authors except Ed have less freedom in this matter than do readers and gamers. My status as a contributor to the "official lore" conveys a sense of authenticity which could be misleading to some readers. So if it ain't published, I don't talk about it.

On Liriel's stats

30 Dec 2004
The 3E conversion done by a committee of readers and gamers on the now-defunct WotC FR Novels thread addressed Liriel's life experience through the end of Tangled Webs. At the end of that novel, she repudiated the religion of her foremothers, but, as the next novel demonstrated, she had not yet won free of Lolth. The clerical levels were appropriate in stats done at that point. By the end of Windwalker, however, she'd completed the break from Lolth. Keep in mind that Liriel never set out to be a priestess. She was forced into Arach Tinilith. If left to her own devices, she would have focused on wizardry. Now that Lolth has finally left her alone, she will be able to find and follow her own path, and given her training and talents, I assume she'll focus on the study and practice of magic.

It's possible that Liriel will decide to follow Eilistraee, but doesn't mean she has to do so as a cleric. Not every Catholic is a priest, not every Jew is a rabbi, and not every Pagan is a Witch. Same goes in the Realms. The gods are there for lay people as well as clergy.

Bottom line: if I were assigning stats to Liriel, as she was at the end of Windwalker, I would drop the clerical levels altogether.

On writing pace

03 Jan 2005
Writers work at wildly varying paces. At one end of the spectrum are incredibly prolific writers such as Ed Greenwood, at the other, people who feel that a single well constructed paragraph is a good day's work. I have a friend who has been working on a book for almost two years, and isn't quite halfway through. Sometimes the pace is dictated by the style and subject. Susan is writing an incredibly well-researched novel set in southern New England during King Philip's War, and she's employing a complex metafiction style. Most of my projects are character driven, fast-paced adventure fiction. Guess who's got the higher word count?

My pace varies from day to day. Five to ten (readable) pages is a very good day, and it's my goal for 2005 to meet the 5-10 page standard every day, in addition to revision, reading, research, and related tasks such as email, promotions, and web maintenance. Once in a while, I have an unusually productive day. Recently I wrote a short story in a single day. Over six thousand words, 32 pages, polished first draft, and at the end of the day I hit "Send" and submitted it. But this is very, very unusual for me, and possible only because I thought about (and dreamed about) the story throughout the previous night and much of the day before. When it came time to write, I was pretty much typing what I'd already worked out. It's far more typical for me to tinker and revise incessantly while I write, which slows down the process to a crawl.

This year I'm taking several new approaches to improving my work AND my productivity. First, more time is going into the planning and pre-writing stage. Putting in more work up front can save a lot of time down the road. Second, less time is going into the first draft. I'm pushing myself to get the story down on paper before revising. Strict internal deadlines, something I was religious about for years, are back on the schedule. My goal is to divide the alloted writing time into three nearly equal parts: the planning stage, which includes the proposal, outline,

extended outline, and research; the rough first draft, and revising and polishing the first draft.

[…]

10 Jan 2005
A definite yes on using game products for ideas and inspiration. In fact, the plot of Elfshadow began with two disparate bits of info from the old gray boxed set: the death of King Zaor, and the establishment of a colony in Evereska about the same time. Hmm....

Anyone who suffers from writer's block should read the section about "bricklayer's block" in Frey's book *How to Write a Damn Good Novel 2*. This amusing but brutal little parody reveals "writer's block" as the self-indulgent crap it truly is.

Granted, there will always be times when it's harder to write. There are many things that can cloud the mind or sap creative energies: illness, the death of a close friend or family member, relationship problems, depression, extremely busy schedules, insufficient sleep. But I submit that such things make it more difficult for *anyone* to function efficiently. Yet somehow, teachers show up for classes, physicians go to the office and make their rounds, office workers keep the corporate wheels turning, and yes, bricklayers do their thing. Professional writers who, for one reason or another, don't keep working will eventually suffer the same consequences as any other professional who doesn't show up for work on a regular basis.

[…]

11 Jan 2005
Taking this thought and going off on a tangent, I'm finding that working on more than one project also helps. If you're revising one project and working on a first draft of another, you can switch back and forth when you hit a snag. The subconscious keeps churning away on the problem story while you're working elsewhere, and chances are you'll come back to the first story with the ability to look at it anew. Granted, this approach isn't for everyone. Some people need to focus on a single story with something approaching tunnel vision, but this schedule seems to be working for me. If I'm tearing out my hair on a story, it helps to know that after lunch, I get to work on something else. Then by next morning, I'm ready to go again. My point, and I do have one, is if you're having problems staying focused and motivated, it might be a good idea to examine your writing process. Another approach or schedule might work better for you.

There's also the possibility that an inability to stick with a project is the result of your subconscious mind trying to communicate that this particular story isn't yours to tell. Sometimes you know a story isn't working, or isn't worth telling, or is beyond your current storytelling skills, but you're too darn stubborn to admit it. Self-knowledge is good; self-editing is excellent. Sometimes you need to ask yourself if a reticence you're tempted to call "writer's block" is actually a legitimate urge to throw in the towel on a project that isn't working and isn't likely to.

A BIG caveat: the above paragraph describes a rare exception, not the all-too-common urge to abandon a project when writing gets tough. I suspect that a lack of resolve and discipline, not a true dead end, accounts for most unfinished stories.

On chapter titles

18 Jan 2005

Some of my chapter titles are assigned along with the project. Examples include *Daughter of the Drow* and *Radiant Dragon*. For others, the publisher asked for a list of suggestions, then picked one. These include *Windwalker, Tangled Webs, Magehound*, and *Elfsong.* Sometimes publishers ask for suggestions, then reject everything you suggest and pick their own. Examples include *Dark Journey* and *City of Splendors: A Novel of Waterdeep*. I've had publishers assign a title after I was well into a project; i.e., *Shadows in the Darkness*. Sometimes titles arise from variations on working titles that didn't quite, well, *work.* I'd suggested "Moonshadow" for the book that became *Elfshadow,* but apparently the folks at TSR walked around for a few days cursing my name for putting the tune of a Cat Stevens' song in their heads. The working title for *Floodgate* was "Watergate," which didn't sound right to me for some reason...

When I DO chose my titles, I attempt to create some sort of relationship to other books in the series. For example, the books in the Counselors & Kings trilogy are all compound word titles: *The Magehound, The Floodgate, The Wizardwar.*

On contact with other FR authors

21 Jan 2005
There's no organized club, secret handshake, or arranged meetings, but I keep in touch with a number of FR writers. Some I talk to at least once a month, some I run into once a year or so, and some I've never met, spoken with, or emailed.

GenCon is usually a good place to meet new people and hang out with old friends, but I'm not sure how long that will continue to be a viable option. For one thing, there's two of them now, which splits up the guestlist a tad. Also, there seems to be less and less emphasis on books. Last year was a new low. There were very few books available for sale in the WotC booth--a few of the newer releases, no backlist. Thanks to a mailing snafu, the new Margaret Weis hardcover didn't make it to the con. (She sat gamely through two scheduled book signings nontheless.) And get this: there were NO BOOKSELLERS among the vendors. WotC scheduled very few book-related seminars or events, and for the most part, signings were scheduled only for those writers who had something new out. It's still a great con, but if there's nothing for writers to do, fewer writers will show up. Con attendance doesn't come cheap, and it's getting increasingly difficult to justify it as a legitimate promotional expense. This makes it more difficult for writers to hang out.

On Elaine's Realms-reading experience

14 Feb 2005
Azure Bonds, the first book in the Finder's Stone trilogy, pre-dated the Harper series. I read it before I entered the open call that kicked off the Harper series, and read *The Wyvern's Spur* not long thereafter. What makes this confusing is *Masquerades,* a later Alias book, was included in the Harper series.

There were a few dotted lines being drawn back then. *Crown of Fire*, the second book in what is now the Shandril trilogy, was originally published as part of the Harper series, while the first book, *Spellfire,* was not. The FR product tree was fairly complicated for a while there.

On Elaine's contributions to the various FR anthologies

16 Feb 2005

Great project, Alaudo. Here are thumbnail descriptions of my stories from the anthologies:

Realms of Valor: "The Bargain." Harper agents Arilyn Moonblade and Danilo Thann travel to Tethyr on assignment. While posing as a member of the assassins guild, Arilyn encounters a young assassin ambitious to prove his mettle--by stalking and killing her. This takes place between *Elfshadow* and *Elfsong.*

Realms of Infamy : "The More Things Change" tells the story of Elaith Craulnober's fall from grace. The setting moves from Evermeet to Waterdeep.

Realms of Magic : In "The Direct Approach" (unpublished subtitle "Girls' Night Out in Skullport") Liriel Baenre and a time-traveling, female barbarian warrior match wits during a slapstick quest through the underground city. The story takes place during the brief interval between *Daughter of the Drow* and *Tangled Webs*.

Realms of the Underdark: "Rite of Blood" is a novella-length story describing a pivotal event in Liriel Baenre's early life. It takes place in Menzoberranzan and the surrounding tunnels. Chosen as one of the stories featured in *Best of the Realms, Book 1.*

Realms of the Arcane : "Secrets of Blood, Spirits of the Sea" is a metastory--a story about a story. A wemic loremaster shames his inquisitive elven captors with a tale about curiosity taken to extremes: the legend of the sahuaguin's creation. This story is set in the distant past, before the Crown Wars, and focuses on the relationship between a Illithiri (dark elf) necromancer and his wemic captive.

Realms of Mystery : "Speaking With the Dead" revisits Arilyn Moonblade, Danilo Thann, and Elaith Craulnober. It takes place after *Silver Shadow*s and before *Dream Spheres*. When Elaith Craulnober is accused of murdering a gnome illusionist, Danilo has the difficult (and ironic) task of proving Elaith's innocence.

Realms of the Deep : "Fire is Fire" is set in Waterdeep during the attack by sea creatures. It is told in dualing first-person narrative: a young wizard, eager to fight beside his mentor Khelben Arunsun, faces off against one of the sahuagin invadors.

Realms of Shadow : "A Little Knowledge" is set in Halruaa. A failed jordaini teams up with a mad sorcerer whose "gift" is the ability to see the future--in all its possible outcomes.

Realms of the Dragons : "Gorlist's Dragon" tells of a pivotal event in the early life of Gorlist, one of the drow villains from the Starlight & Shadows trilogy. Set in the slums and gladitorial arenas of the Underdark city of Chad Nesad, it tells the story of Gorlist's magical dragon tattoo, and sheds light on the implicable hatred he later develops for Liriel Baenre.

The Best of the Realms - Book 1 : "Rite of Blood," a novella-length story originally printed in *Realms of the Underdark*.

Sundry topics

08 Mar 2005
For more information on the Niedre family, your best bet would be "Elves of Evermeet," a softcover 2nd ed gaming accessory, and the boxed set "Cormanthyr." Unlike Ed, I don't possess unpublished Realmslore. He's the creator, and anything he says is canon until WotC published something to the contrary. I, on the other hand,

am a freelance writer working in someone else's shared-world setting. In respect for the setting, I try to be very careful about public speculation on unpublished lore. Until my creations and opinions are reviewed and approved by WotC, they're no closer to canon than any random piece of fanfic or any DM's notes, but because I have published in the Realms, any speculations I might offer might appear to have more pith and moment than they in fact possess.

[…]

Lameth, the upcoming Waterdeep novel does not venture into Undermountain or deal with smokepowder. The prelude looks back to the attacking sahuagin army we saw in the Threat from the Sea trilogy and the anthology Realms of the Deep, but the novel deels with the aftermath of that battle.

On the Moonflower children

27 Apr 2005
I'm curious: Where did you get this information? I don't believe I ever named Azariah's mother, or described her circumstances.

Yes, several of the royal Moonflower children are dead or MIA. But if you keep in mind that the book is told from a human's point of view, with all the limitations that suggests, the phrase "nothing is known" takes on a different meaning. The ELVES know the fate of most members of their royal family, and in every case Amlaruil knows what befell her children. She would not rest until she had this knowledge, and she has the resources needed to find it. Some of the "missing" princes and princesses are dead, others quietly removed from succession because for one reason or another they are unsuited to rule, and others simply choose to live their lives away from the royal court and the public eye. The elven queen keeps her secrets, and those of her family.

I wish I could tell you that an Elaith book is on the horizon, but lacking that, I'm doing the best I can! He plays a small but significant role in the upcoming Waterdeep novel, and today I'm finishing up a story about Elaith and Azariah that, if accepted, will appear in the August or September issue of Dragon Magazine.

Must get back to it!

On Elaith

27 Apr 2005
Technology and Magic in the Forgotten Realms

Sean has recently discovered the History Channel, and one of the series he's been following is "Breaking Vegas," an enacted documentary about gambling and those who attempt to beat the system. I had this series in mind when writing a short story entitled "Game of Chance," a tale about the rogue moon elf Elaith Craulnober, one of my favorite characters from the Forgotten Realms.

I'd intended the story to focus on Elaith as a elven crime lord, and to be a showcase for some of the glittering AND unsavory elements of life in the city of Waterdeep. (The story, if accepted, will appear in an issue of Dragon devoted to Waterdeep, with articles by Ed Greenwood and Eric Boyd...) But as the story evolved, it took another path, becoming instead a meditation on the implications of one technology being superimposed upon another. Rather unexpectedly, I cycled back to the core issue of

Elaith's life: the Craulnober Moonblade, a hereditary elven sword he was unable to claim. The ending was also unexpected, but it's a good fit for Elaith's personality and the story's underlying theme.

Every now and then, a story will surprise you by taking an unanticipated direction, and when it works, it's one of those Great Writing Moments that make this job worthwhile. :)

That said, I get a little impatient with writers who loftily complain of characters who "won't behave." It's a freaking decision tree, folks, and as a writer, you're making the decisions. Each branch leads to many posibilities, and if you're not careful, the story can get away from you, but enough already with the "My characters are so real they're living their own lives..." schtick. If you truly think your characters are calling the shots, may I suggest spending more time out in the sunshine and less time experimenting with recreational pharmaceuticals? ::End of rant.::

One more thing about the story: Elaith's daughter Azariah, his blade heir, makes an appearance. She was last seen in Elfsong, which took place in DR 1364, and she was described as a toddler. This new story is set in DR 1371, so she is still very young--around eleven years old, and at least a decade away from puberty. My "let's just climb the decision tree and see where it goes" approach to this tale led to some interesting developments for Azariah. I was surprised by the direction, and poor Elaith definitely never saw it coming!

Annoying Shakti

06 Jun 2005
It's good to know that Shakti is doing her job. :)

I think the main reason Shakti is so annoying is that she's banal. Common. Fantasy villians generally have an epic quality--they're brilliant or handsome or incomparable fighters or fiendishly clever wizards. Shaki, on the other hand, is a bureaucrat. She's a capable administrator and an expert at breeding rothe cattle. She's also plump, near-sighted, and humorless. At school, she's definitely not one of the cool kids. Yet this undeserving plodder rises through the ranks, gets the attention of powerful drow in Menzoberranzan--not to mention two of the drow dieties--and becomes a high priestess and heir to her House. She has a lot in common with that dull B student in high school who ends up a corporate executive, to the amazement and dismay of all who work for her. In short, she's not the sort of person you want to root for.

On the Halruaa trilogy

08 Jun 2005
When the folks at WotC asked me to do the trilogy, they specified that it was to be set in Halruaa, take place in current time, and focus primarily on human characters. That was the extent of the editorial direction. The second edition game product "The Shining South" provided most of the background lore. The rest, including the jordaini order, was newly invented.

I don't anticipate returning to Halruaa, but you never know. Under the right circumstances, just about anything's possible. At this time, however, I'm working on several non-FR projects.

On the return of Shade and possible conflict with Halruaa

05 Jul 2005
The return of Shade occurred just as the events of the Counselors and Kings trilogy were drawing to a close. The wizards of Halruaa will have some serious adjusting to do, but I agree that neither Matteo nor Zalathorm would willingly become allied with Shade. A game product entitled The Shining South (written by Thomas Reed) was released after the novels; perhaps it sheds some light on the matter. I haven't read it--does anyone here know if it addresses this question?

Possible episodes in Elaith's life that might interest readers

06 Jul 2005
Just curious: What episode(s) in Elaith's life would you most like to see told in short story or novel?

- His early misadventures in Waterdeep
- The development of his criminal "empire"
- His relationship with Azariah's mother (think Otello, except Desdemona actually DOES fool around...)
- His time in Tethyr, in which he cleans up some untidy loose ends (i.e., Isabeau Thione from DREAM SPHERES) and ends up championing the wood elves of Tethyr forest as a sort of (ruthless) elven Robin Hood
- "Return to Craulnober Keep," in which Elaith visits Evermeet shortly after the events of the novel EVERMEET, and considers rebuilding his ancestral home
- Elaith learns that Amnestria bore him a son, who, in a twist of cosmic irony, is more of a rogue than his father

[…]

I was leaning toward "Return to Craulnober Keep" because it's definitely a short story--at this point, I don't have time to do a novel just for the heck of it--and because I've never written a ghost story. (Yep, the ruins are haunted.) Also, it happens right after the events of the novel EVERMEET and shortly after the events of CITY OF SPLENDORS. I'm feeling sequential these days. And it occurs during the winter, which interests me as I've never contemplated what Evermeet in winter might be like.

[…]

In regard to the story about his relationship with Azariah's mother…

Surely you don't suppose the notion of sleeping with a human's wife would overtax Elaith's conscience?

I think this tale is tailor-made for Elaith. First, Shakespeare's version of the original Italian story constantly challenges contemporary expectations of good and bad, black and white. The good guy was the "black Moor." (Since "black" was also used at the time as an adjective for a dark-haired but milky-skinned Irish lass, it's not clear whether Shakespeare had in mind an Arab or a "Black" man.) The bad guy, Iago, was European. In early 17th century England, the audience would have very strong expectations about racial tendencies. Same thing here--people don't expect moon elves to be bad guys, and even when they ARE, it doesn't seem to register. Point in case: all the people who complain about my rendering of gold elves as "stereotypical bad guys" and desire to see the gold elves "rehabilitated" forget that the most popular of my elven characters, the non-drow who has appeared in more books and

game products than any other elf, is a bad guy and a moon elf. So yeah, I can definitely see Elaith pulling off the Iago role. With a twist, of course.

Current thoughts

06 Jul 2005

From time to time, I think it would be fun to write about the adventures of a kick-ass elven sisterhood, but there are no plans to revisit Liriel's story at this time.

Same thing with Halruaa--no plans to continue Matteo and Tzigone's story. I haven't given much thought to writing a story set in Calimport, but someone should. And while they're at it, do some serious worldbuilding there, something that focuses on the splendor and the scholarship as well as the squalor. With all that's happening in the middle east these days, it's not a bad time to remember that the Arab cultures have a rich history and fascinating folklore and mythology.

But I don't suppose this is likely to occur. As observed in a recent blog post about a book entitled blink, fantasy adventure novels that focus on cultures other than northern European seem to be a hard sell.

One of these days I want to write a (non-FR) fantasy novel based in African mythology. I ran the idea past quite a few people, and Bob Salvatore had the best suggestion: write it as a young adult novel. Readers that age tend to explore the folklore of various cultures, and teachers are always on the lookout for books that show "diversity." It's the sort of thing school libraries would purchase, and bookstores would display prominently every February. I've been a folklore and mythology buff since forever, and there's some really cool stuff in the various African myths. It'd be a fun project. The fact that I couldn't BE any whiter might strike some people as a deterrent, but then, I'm not an elf, either. And hey--a past-life regression psychic once informed me that I was a Masai warrior in a former life, so I'm good to go.

Lest my Elaith questionaire prove to be misleading, I should probably specify that I'm not working on ANY new FR books at present. Short stories will probably be it for at least the next couple of years. I don't have anything new on WotC's 2006 publishing schedule, and my writing schedule for 2006/2007 is rapidly filling up with other stuff. The prospect of an Elaith novel would probably tempt me back into the fold, but at this point in time, there are other stories I feel more compelled to tell, and other voices in the back of my mind are louder and more insistent than those of my FR characters.

On *Silver Shadows*

06 Jul 2005

Silver Shadows is full of secondary characters that could support a short story. Kendal Leafbower and Jill aren't a bad team. According to the game product "Lands of Intrique," Foxfire became a diplomat. Ferret's adventures as a courtesan/assassin might be worth a tale. Hasheth is an ambitious and unscrupulous youth determined to work his way up in the Knights of the Shield organization. And that's just one book.

The Realms is full of warriors and barmaids and farmers and dock hands who have small but interesting tales to tell.

On star elves

11 Jul 2005
First, I'm a little puzzled by the comments that star elves were "finally" recognized in a novel, as this subrace was introduced in a fairly recent game product. Second, I did not openly state that Sharlarra was a star elf because this game product had not yet been released when I was writing *Windwalker*. I obtained a copy of the manuscript from WotC and read it for continuity, and also for ways to tie the novel more closely with the new lore. Because of the timing, I was trying to avoid NDA restrictions, not to mention territorial issues--I don't imagine game designers would be pleased to see their new creations unveiled elsewhere. A small matter of professional courtesy.

But I had no doubt that Sharlarra would be recognized for what she is. I've fielded quite a few questions about her race, some on the WotC message boards and some in email, and quite a few people made the connection without any trouble.

Writers who work in the Realms understand the depth and breadth of some readers' knowledge of FR lore, and know that small details which might be overlooked by the new or casual reader will be picked up with delight by others. (Some even add an occasional inside joke, such as references to a "Cledwell" statue in early FR books.)

On 3e changes to elves

13 Jul 2005

First: Yes, I am deathly weary of all the talk about a novel-induced stereotype of "moon elf GOOD, gold elf BAD." This simplistic summation ignores the many noble, good-aligned gold elf characters in the FR books to focus on the few gold elf villains. It also fails to acknowledge the moon elf rogue Elaith Craulnober, who is perhaps the best known of the not-so-good moon elves. It ignores (or simply missed...) how the novel EVERMEET depicts moon elves as the authors of many of the elves' woes, often in rather ironic fashion. One example is the legend of the moon elf hero who marched into the Abyss to save her lover, thus drawing Lloth/Lolth's attention to the elves of Faerun. The popularity of moonblades amazes me, as does the fact that the brutality of the "moonblade solution" seems to be obscured by the magic swords' kewl factor. It is to ponder.

Now, on to the red vs. black question.

Third edition has brought a number of changes to the elves, including the end of Retreat, the subdivision of existing elven subraces and the addition of new subraces. 3E products describe moon elves as having black, blue, or white hair and blue or green eyes with gold flecks, "with rare exceptions" The game product Cormanthyr, with its nod to exceptions, has already been mentioned. The old gray boxed set was somewhat less restrictive, and mentioned that all hair colors found among humans could be found in the elves.

Queen Amlauril has been depicted with red-gold hair for nearly 15 years, in a variety of FR novels and products. The first such mention was in one of Douglas Nile's

Moonshae novels. A more detailed physical description was later given in the 2nd ed game product The Elves of Evermeet." This predated and was a primary source for my novel Evermeet which also depicted Amlaruil with--you guessed it--red-gold hair. Amlaruil also appears with red-gold hair in a previous novel, Silver Shadows.

Unfortunately, the extensive file of notes I compiled during the research process for Evermeet was lost in a move, but at the time I put a great deal of effort into researching on Evermeet's queen. To the best of my knowledge, she was never described as dark-haired in any FR product until her 3E makeover. She is, however, described as having blue hair in a Spelljammer novel (The Radiant Dragon), and I'm to blame for that. At the time I wrote that novel (1990-1991), I could find no physical description of Amlaruil in the FR lore. Since the exotic and fey image associated with blue hair appealed to me, I went that way. Unknown to me, Doug Niles was describing her as having red-gold hair. The books were being written at roughly the same time, with two different editors, and this continuity glitch slipped in through the cracks. There was much rending of hair and gnashing of teeth when I read the first FR description of Amlaruil, which I immediately adopted. Fortunately, none of the (17) people who read the Spelljammer books picked up on this error of continuity.

Since Amlaruil's red-gold coloring was well established, clearly described in the game product most central to the 2nd edition understanding of Evermeet's elves, and contradicted in no FR lore that I could unearth, that's how I depicted her. It seemed reasonable to me that some of her moon elf ancesters would also have red or blond hair. That is why you will find red-haired elves in the novel EVERMEET.

I can understand the desire to emphasize the changes 3E is bringing to the elves, but even 3E products have admitted that "rare exceptions" to moon elf black/blue/white hair do indeed exist. Amlaruil has been well and thoroughly established as one of those expections. The elven queen is no minor NPC with an occasional throw-away mention, but rather the central character in what was previously the most elf-centric novel in the Realms. I was, quite frankly, set back on my heels by the change in Amlaruil's appearance.

Life would be much simpler if all the existing copies of FR novels scattered about the globe were magically retrofitted every time someone changed the game rules or the FR lore. Since this is not (yet) possible, what usually happens is that the older stuff is branded as "wrong." I know it's not reasonable to expect readers to check the copyright page to see when a book was written, and thus what rules it followed. It's much easier for all concerned to simply retreat to the old standby: "FR authors, particularly the ones who have been around for a while, don't follow the rules and/or respect the setting."

So, with that in mind, here'd a few things to ponder. Drizzt was created under first edition rules, and Liriel under second ed. In fact, the plot of Starlight & Shadows was heavily dependant on the 2nd ed limitations on drow magic. I was informed of 3E changes to drow magic while I was writing the third book of the trilogy, and rather than knowingly write an anachronistic book or change game-rule boats in midstream, I wrote a partial explanation for the rule changes into the plot of the story. Drow magic and their powers on the surface world have been different in all three editions, so small discrepancies in the novels, especially those series written over time, are inevitable.

Also for the record, I used the terms green, wild, forest, and wood elves interchangeably in Silver Shadows and the Counselors & Kings trilogy because at the time, those terms were interchangeable. The subdivision of the forest folk into distinct subraces was a later innovation.

One more for the record books: There are no star elves mentioned in Evemeet because the book was written in 1998 and published in 1999, five years before star elves were introduced in a 2003 game product.

In closing, here's a proactive disclaimer: Elaith Craulnober has ALWAYS been officially, canonically described as having silver hair and amber eyes, from his first introduction in the game product "Waterdeep and the North," in the six novels and half dozen short stories, the seven or eight game products, and the Neverwinter Nights video game. If someone decides that as a moon elf, Elaith should have raven black hair and blue eyes, remember, you heard it from Ed Greenwood first, circa 1997.

And now, I really DO have to go....

A tidbit about the moonblade

14 Jul 2005

That concept (the Excalibur legend) played a big part in the moonblade's creation. Being able to pull a sword out of a stone when no one else can is a powerful sign. Being able to draw a sword when everyone else DIES leaves even less room for dispute.

On Arilyn and Foxfire

23 Jul 2005
I forgot about the Arilyn/Foxfire question, which is something to which I CAN give a definitive answer. The solstice celebration was an important step in Arilyn's process of figuring out who she was--and from there, what and whom she wanted. So no--there was no lingering affair. She and Foxfire were friends who came together only that once.

I'd still like to write a story about Azariah's mother someday, so I don't want to go there just yet. :)

On Elaine's musical education

23 Jul 2005
My focus was always music education, and performance was primarily church music. There are a few tapes (I still have a nice cassette that was done at the Saunders Theatre in Cambridge one year when I sang the mezzo solos on a Bach cantata with the Harvard/Radcliff chorus and orchestra) but no professional recordings. One of my larger regrets in life is dropping out of music when I was in my mid-twenties. I haven't sung for years, and I play Celtic harp just for my own enjoyment. For a while I was playing around with a MIDI system, doing arrangements and composing Realms-related pieces, but I haven't done that in ages. So the short answer is, no, I really don't have any music in shareable format.

I don't have time for composition these days, but I do a simple harp arrangement from time to time.

I had twelve years of piano lessons way back when, but I haven't played in years. Harp is actually a much better instrument for me, as you don't use your pinkes much. Mine are curved inward, which was extremely problematic for piano.

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06 Aug 2005
So Elaine . . . hypothetically, lets say you get the green light to write an Elaith novel, since that seems perhaps more likely than another Danilo and Arilyn story . . . would said hypothetical story be able to at least give us some more peripheral information on Danilo and Arilyn (for example, if Elaith finds out about his son and the fact that Danilo knows about him).
And I just though of this . . . with all of the questions you fielded over the years about Drizzt and Liriel meeting, I think it might be more interesting for Elaith to run into her, though I wouldn't be holding my breath.

In all candor, I haven't had the time to work out just what a hypothetical Elaith story would entail. Several non-hypothetical projects have been demanding all my time and attention. ;) Besides, I've learned not to put too much time and creative energy into a FR story until I get the go-ahead to write it. As a freelance writer, I can only guess at what else is going on in the Realms, and anything I might come up with is very likely to run contrary to something in the pipeline.

But I can say with absolute certainly that I have no intention whatsoever of ever placing Elaith and Liriel in the same scene.

Heh, what do you know--a definitive answer. :) I know protocol demands a mysterious smile and vague response such as "always in motion, the future is. . . " where possible Realms stories are concerned, but every now and there someone asks a question to which the only possible answer is, "Not in this lifetime." :)

[…]

Volatile is a good word, because what happens when I even TRY to contemplate the notion is very similar to certain clandestine chemistry experiments carried out in my long-ago youth. Put two incompatible chemicals in a beaker, and you get a nasty-smelling fog. That describes quite well what happens to my brain when it tries to toss Elaith and Liriel together: a small, extremely dense cloud of mist settles in, obscurring any attempt to observe the details of their meeting. I get the same result when I try to envision Arilyn and Liriel together.

Danilo is the only character who'd get along with just about everyone else. He'd want to take Matteo out drinking to see if he could get him to cut loose some, but other than that...

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19 Aug 2005

Hi, folks. Sorry for the delay in answering. I've been traveling quite a bit the past couple of week, but I'm currently in a location with an online computer.

Thanks to the Sage for posting responses. Yes, my Evermeet notes are STILL lost, and at this point it would appear that I'm unlikely to ever recover or reconstruct them. That's a shame, because I spent a tremendous amount of time digging out every reference to elven lore I could find, going back to first edition products and including Dragon magazines and the old Spelljammer and FR comic books. If nothing else, the information would have been a good resource page on my website.

As I recall, however, the Kingkiller star was a large and infrequently occuring comet, one traditionally associated with times of great upheaval for the elves. The real world reference I had in mind was Hailey's Comet, and its appearance in 1066, shortly before the Battle of Hastings. There's something incredibly powerful about "portents in the night skies," and it seems to me that the elves, who are so aware of and sensitive to starlight, would be particularly attuned to stellar events.

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24 Aug 2005

I don't have any other DRAGON pieces in the works, but I pitched a couple of story idea to Erik in an email sent shortly before GenCon. I haven't heard back from him, but then I didn't expect to, given the timing of the email. But even if he's interested, I imagine it could be quite a while before he'd want to publish another story from me. DRAGON only publishes fiction irregularly, and there are a lot of other people out there looking for a home for their short fiction.

By the way, Jim Lowder has a very good story in the next issue, #336. Dark and twisted, as usual. :)

It will be interesting to see what reader reaction is to Elaith's role in THE CITY OF SPLENDORS, as well as the story in DRAGON. If readers are interested in hearing more about Elaith, and WotC is interested in publishing another tale, I'd certainly be willing to write it.

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04 Sep 2005

Moonblades were invented for the novel ELFSHADOW. Their history (or a legendary version thereof) was given in the novel EVERMEET. As far as I'm concerned, these particular swords were intended for moon elves. Hence the name.

Elven lore abounds in magical swords. The moonblades had a limited, specific function: to select a royal family from among the moon elf clans. It makes sense to me that some high elves would take exception to this and try to claim a sword, but it does not make sense that some sun elves would succeed. That's rather like bringing in a boatload of Danes and another of Greeks to Camelot so they could try to tug Excalaber out of the stone. Some of those hopefuls might have been honorable men, great warriors or philosophers, or damn fine vikings, but they wouldn't be the king the particular magic of sword and stone would recognize.

I don't want to get into a books-vs-games discussion, which profits nothing and is too reminiscent of the WotC boards for my peace of mind, but sometimes game products hijack a character or magical item from novels and run with them in directions the original author never intended. To be fair, sometimes novels do the same with info introduced in game products. It's a shared world, and everyone who works therein learns to adapt. So if Steven says gold elves have wielded moonblades, I'm not going to argue.

Of course, I'm not a moon elf.

Ask a moon elf, such as Elaith Craulnober, and he's likely to tell you that no gold elf ever wielded a moonblade. He considers the Starym moonblade approcrophal lore, a vile canard, one of Volo's more eggregious fabrications.

Speaking of the latter, that's one of the joys of Volo's writing: his every utterance is not necessarily "canon" (unless there's a footnote from Elminster saying, "Well, the

truth of the matter is....), so characters in the Realms and those who write about and game in the Realms are able to make up their own minds about certain things. The Starym moonblade is one such.

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05 Sep 2005

I see your point, of course, but there are reasons why Arilyn, a half elf of moon elf heritage, inherited a moonblade.

Throughout the Songs & Swords books, it is made very clear that Arilyn's sword is seriously FUBAR. It was dismantled after Princess Amnestria's union with a human resulted in two things: the creation of the elfgate, with disastrous results, and the conception of a half-elf child. In fact, Arilyn's conception and the creation of a new power for the moonblade were simultaneous events, and Queen Amlaruil never ceased to hold this against Arilyn. After King Zaor's assassination, a bitterly grieving Amlaruil decreed that the moonstone--a gem that acts as a conduit for magic--be removed from the sword's hilt and put into the keeping of Bran Skorlsun, Amnestria's human lover. The primary purpose of this was to weaken the gate between the mainland and Evermeet enough that it could be obscured and protected, but it was also a punishment--it effectively kept Bran away from Amnestria, who still carried the moonblade.

But tampering with an artifact is never a good idea--you can never been completely sure what the result will be. One of the unforseen results was the strengthening of the link between the sword and the child: Arilyn was linked with the moonblade long before she claimed it. Had the sword been whole, she could not have done so. This is never overtly stated, but the hints are there throughout the Songs & Swords books.

The misbehaving moonblade was a central plot point of ELFSHADOW, so it should come as no surprise that the sword was not exactly functioning as designed. The fact that Kymil Nimesin could further mess with the sword's magic makes it plain that its powers were seriously awry. Also, Arilyn relates to Danilo an incident from her youth, when she raised the moonblade against a young gold elf tormenter. The sword turned on her, which she took to be evidence that the moonblade would not allow itself to be raised against an innocent person. That gold elf's subsequent actions, however, made it plain that he was not an innocent. (Big hint to readers, there.) The moonblade was restored at the end of ELFSONG, and when we next see Arilyn, in SILVER SHADOWS, she temporarily returns the moonblade to a previous wielder. After that, (in the four-year interim between that book and the events of DREAM SPHERES) we are told that the sword became increasingly tempermental. Toward the end of DS, the sword turns on Arilyn and she was nearly fried. (Sound familiar?) She receives healing, but she's unable to wield the moonblade again during the final events of that story. It is assumed that the sword is defective--it is, after all, a tampered-with artifact--but it's also possible that the converse is true: the sword is slowly returning to its original state, and is functioning as it was designed to. What that means for Arilyn is a topic for another story, should such come about.

Now, stepping away from the overall series arc for a moment to consider the moonblade's role in ELFSHADOW. Giving Arilyn a moonblade was meant to emphasize and amplify the usual half-elf's dilemna of being neither fish nor fowl. Arilyn was daughter of moon elf royalty, the only part-blooded elf ever to wield a moonblade, yet most elves wouldn't give her the time of day. She is in a unique position, and that molded her into an extremely solitary person.

This point is undercut--nay, nearly obliterated--if every good-aligned gold elf, forest elf, drow, or half orc paladin of Sune with a heart of gold and tusks to match* is able

to carry a moonblade.

Moonblades have become so popular and so common I half expect to see hand-written signs in the taverns of Waterdeep's Dock Ward to the effect of, "Good fish-scaling knife wanted. Will trade for moonblade."

But, it is what it is. Though the expansion of moonblades in game products does undercut the purpose of the moonblades as I originally envisioned them, I am keenly aware that it would be churlish to complain overmuch that ANY addition to FR lore that I've been priviledged to make has become "too popular." I'm just happy people want to read these stories, and incorporate some aspects of them into their home campaigns.

*Elaith's musings, taking from "Games of Chance," DRAGON #335

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05 Sep 2005

Reminds me of a telephone conversation with Ed, in which we were discussing bits that had been editied from various projects. I mentioned a line from an early draft of THE MAGEHOUND in which Matteo finds Tzigone copying spell scrolls onto velum sheets, using a spell that ran wildly amok. He asked her if there'd been any fatalities, to which she replied, "Not unless you count the velum, in which case I've buggered more sheep than a Calishite shepherd." Ed replied, "Oh, you should have told the editor, 'The sheep buggering stays. This is an issue of artistic integrity; I feel very strongly about sheep buggering.' They'd have cut it anyway, but they'd have been so appalled that they would have left some of your other bits alone."

We'd discussed the advisability of writing an entirely gratuitous elven orgy and just slipping it in among the pages of CITY OF SPLENDORS, but we never got around to it.

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14 Sep 2005
If I'm reading Evermeet correctly, Lamruil (sp) is off to establish the elvish commuinity on the mainland, but Evermeet will still need a ruler after Ammaruil (sp again) is gone.
Now, she's very spiffy indeed and likely to live quite a long time, but she could still die right? Lamruil is out of the question, he's off to rule on the mainland.
So it seems to me that the next king of Evermeet by blood would have to be Elaith's son with Ammenstria (still sp). And in Evermeet, Lamruil forsees that possiblity. I guess what I want to know is if Lamruil finding the boy anytime soon is on the cards? And I know NDA's *sigh* but am I on the right path in my musings at least?

Yes, Amlaruil could die; no, Lamruil isn't out of the question; yes, Amnestria's son is high in the royal succession. I can't comment on whether or not the hidden prince will make an appearance anytime soon. Nor can I comment on his actual place in the succession, other than to observe that not all of Amlaruil and Zaor's lost children are quite as "lost" as some might think...

Heh heh...

On what happen to Bran Skorlsun after the events of *Elfshadow*

Date unknown

Bran Skorlson tried settling down in Waterdeep. This attempt lasted for almost three moons. He and Khelben knocked back a few ales, remembered old times, and then, having remembered, got into a violent (verbal) battle. (No spells or punches thrown. Sorry.) Bran was also disgruntled at having to share city space with his former friend and erstwhile rival and enemy, Elaith Craulnober.

Any city decadent enough to allow that elf to survive, much less prosper, is no place for Bran.

But to get right to the heart of the matter, *no* city feels like home to the old ranger. So he took to the road, and he fully intends to die on horseback. Since he doesn't intend to die any time soon, he keeps busy with Harper projects. Rumor has it he's taken on an apprentice of sorts. More clandestine rumor has it that this choice of apprentice really, really ticks off Khelben.

And one thing more: he is the only person who knows both the whereabouts and the identity of Amnestria's first child, the hidden prince of Evermeet. It's possible that he's involved with the kid's education in one way or another. He also has a potential romance going with a retired paladin. (Think of Bogart and Hepburn in "African Queen" for an approximation of the tone of that one...) Trust me, Bran is not wasting his golden years by sitting at home watching Oprah.

Musings on Danilo and Arilyn, post-*Dream Spheres*

Date unknown

WARNING AND DISCLAIMER:

The story lines described below are NOT part of official WotC lore. This is simply the direction I envision my characters taking after the last book. Not all of these events will become published books; in fact, it's quite possible that none of them will see print. But I believe in keeping an ongoing backstory for each of my main characters. This helps me keep continuity, and adds a layer to the characters that sometimes manages to find its way into the stories, even if much of the material remains offstage. And quite frankly, I enjoy spending time with these characters and like keeping track of what they're "doing." I keep an ongoing story file - a journal of sorts - which is fun to do and which should come in handy if, somewhere down the line, WotC requests another story in the "Songs & Swords" series.

The events of DREAM SPHERES occurred in DR 1368. During that year, Prince Haedrak visited Waterdeep, gathering support for his return to his ancestral land. He marched for Tethyr in the company of many Waterdhavian nobles, adventurers, and mercenaries. This much is known. What follows is "back story."

Among these Waterdhavians were Danilo, Arilyn, and Elaith Craulnober. All three go to Tethyr and participate in the turbulent Reclamation period. Danilo enters court life, where his foppish persona - which was wearing thin in Waterdeep and becoming difficult to maintain - comes back into play. Arilyn has never fully recovered from the injury dealt her by the moonblade. Her sword has always been problematic, and when its most newly acquired power leads her into near disaster, Arilyn must decide whether to put aside the moonblade forever and redefine not only her methods, but herself. Elaith takes up the cause of the southern elves. Although his methods are still ruthless and he's still as nasty and conflicted as ever, he becomes something of an elven Robin Hood. Elves in polite society decry his methods, but they're secretly smirking in delight as word of each new exploit reaches them. (In the long run, of course, this could do more to hurt elven/human relationships than help.)

And Danilo has acquired a dwarven butler, Hamish, and a court hanger-on - Ghee Dulessop, a young man of wealthy if not noble family who is, in fact, what Dan pretends to be: silly, shallow, a would-be ladies' man, a fop and a bit of a fool. Ghee has come to Tethyr to win lands and title, and, if Sune smiles upon him, to despoil

many a fair maid. (In this case, Sune apparently does a lot of smirking, but never actually smiles....) Danilo is Ghee's chosen role model, and the young man is always underfoot. This amuses Arilyn, who views it as a sort of cosmic justice. Hamish, an unlikely expert on court protocol, delights in giving Ghee terrible advice and watching the inevitable results. To say that Arilyn and Hamish don't get along would be a bit of an understatement. And Isabeau Thione is creating trouble in Tethyr, as is her mother Lucia Thione, whom you may remember from ELFSONG. Hasheth is rising in the ranks of Tethyrian organized crime. Elaith might have something to say about this. What with one thing and another, they all manage to keep busy for well over a year.

As mentioned, Danilo and Arilyn spent the winter of 1370 in Silverymoon. The "little one" referred to in Khelben's letter at the conclusion of EVERMEET does not refer to their child. Sorry for the misleading reference, but I'd rather not go into details about this at present. Khelben's letter doesn't refer to what they're doing in Silverymoon, and for good reason: he doesn't know. Danilo is there on the pretense of promoting the new bard's college. As is usually the case with Danilo, there's the facade and then there's the reality. Khelben politely hopes that Arilyn is enjoying good hunting: he might not have said this had he known what Dan and Arilyn were really looking for.

That brings us up to the end of 1371. I believe "current time" is now 1372. As winter receeds, "Princess Arilyn" receives a royal elven summons - from young King Lamruil, who is experiencing some difficulties in his hidden, ice-bound kingdom. Danilo is currently having a fashionable new fur cloak made to his measure. He's gonna need it.

As for Elaith, well, he has his own royal challenge. This is really, really far into the future, so all I can say is that he's in for his own dose of cosmic justice.

And that pretty much brings us up to date.

Storm Silverhand Limericks

Date unknown

From the FR Message Board;

Our Storm's most exceedingly fair.
She's renown for her long, silver hair.
She is not being lewd
When she walks around nude,
For it covers her cute derriere.

And as if that wasn't bad enough:

Storm seduced a young drow known as Drizzt
Who had never been so much as kizzt.
With his bracers of speed
He completed the deed
With a haste that left Storm sorely pizzt.

Disclaimer: No disrespect meant to Storm, Drizzt, or their creators, all of whom can take a joke.

The Children of Evermeet's Royal Family - The Offspring of King Zaor and Queen Amnestria

Date unknown

One of Evermeet's mysteries and tragedies concerns the Lost Children. Many of the offspring of Zaor and Amnestria have died, but the fate of several of the princes and princesses has not yet be determined.

The royal issue, and their current state, follows in order of birth.

Ilyrana, the first born, a priestess. Her body currently lies in deep stasis in Moonflower Castle, and her spirit abides in Arvandor. During battle she acted in some mysterious, hard-to-define way as an avatar focus for the goddesses she served, and the result was a titanic battle maid comprising her spirt as well as power borrowed from the elven gods. It is unlikely, but not absolutely impossible, that she will return to Evermeet. Even before her sacrifice, she was not at all eager to take the throne.

Xharlion and **Zhoron**, twin sons. They are mirror images of each other and their father, the king. The rowdy, robust elven lads seemed destined for the warrior's life. The queen sent them to the Moonshaes for fosterage among the elves of Sonoria. One of them - it is not certain which one - was slain when the Ityak-Ortheel attacked the Moonshaes. It is not known if the other survived, or if so, what became of him.

Chozzaster, the next-born son, became a High Mage. He passed on to Arvandor at a young age, not because of illness or accident, but simply because the call of the ultimate elven homeland was too strong for him to resist.

Shandalar became a bladesinger, trained in the art by bladesinger Shanyrria Alenuath. She was accidentally killed by a fellow student, a spell-singer, during a training drill. It is not certain whether Shanyrria, her mentor, survived. If so, the bladesinger will be eager to avenge the death of this princess, her student and namesake.

Tira-allara and **Hhora** were female twins, both devoted to the service of Hanali Celanil. Both were excessively devoted to the cult of love, and each in her own way met the fate of those who love not well, but immoderately and unwisely. Tira-alara became involved with a rogue who used her wealth and position, then broke her heart. Elves are capable of wishing themselves dead, but few take this grim option. The princess was an exception, and she literally died of grief. Hhora left Evermeet determined to wed a commoner she met and loved during a seasonal festival. Perhaps she found her love, perhaps not. She disappeared into the High Forest, and no one has been able to learn what became of her.

Another set of female twins, **Lazziar** and **Genstarzah**, both trained as warriors and served as diplomats to mainland elves. They were lost at sea, and their fate has never been established.

Amnestria was a battle mage, and King Zaor's favorite child. She was betrothed to Elaith Craulnober, a distant kinsman who served as captain of the King's Guard. When Elaith broke with her over a personal disgrace, she followed him to the mainland - and fell in love with his human friend, Bran Skorlsun. In secret she gave birth to Elaith's son, and hid the child in secret fosterage. She later bore a girlchild to Bran, but she was slain before she could train her daughter in the secrets of the moonblade she would inherit. This half-elven child, Arilyn, was able to claim the sword - the first person of mixed blood ever to do so.

Lamruil, the youngest son, has been an adventurer for years. He was not widely liked by the nobles of Evermeet, considered too young and frivolous to rule, but he held the throne briefly following the sacrifice of Amlaruil. He happily abdicated the throne back to his mother, and undertook the task of planting the Tree of Souls on the mainland. He has chosen a hidden valley far to the north, a place surrounded by incredibly inhospitable terrain. He will be kept very busy recruiting a following, subduing the land, and establishing the colony. His consort, a mostly-human woman named Maura, will probably prove to be equal parts help and hindrance. It is unlikely that their children will succeed him as ruler. Maura is a teenager, but she is also impulsive, a warrior, and a human. None of those things lend to an impressive life expectancy. It is likely that the elves tolerate her, believing that they can put up with her for a human's relatively short span. Lamruil will undoubtedly be urged to take an elven consort and produce suitable heirs - either before or after Maura's death.

Or perhaps another form of government, one not based on monarchy or hereditary nobility, will evolve. One thing is certain: Lamruil will return to Evermeet to rule only if he feels the island has no other acceptible options. He would gladly throw his support behind a likely candidate for the throne. Like most of Toril's elves, however, he hopes that the end of Queen Amlaruil's reign will be very long in coming.