

So saith Ed

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

Part I

Feb - Apr 2004

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February 17, 2004: Well, Ed's been busy writing these past few days, but I managed to hail him and get a reply:

Hi, Josh. To take things in no particular order:

I have some long-term plans for the Rangers Three but nothing definite. You'll probably see Sharantyr before the end of the Knights trilogy.

None of the Knights books are finished yet, but I can say the first one begins just before the Knights are actually formed, when Florin Falconhand agrees to undertake a certain task, and gets more than he bargained for.

You won't have to wait that long, however, to see some comedic scenes: Elminster's Daughter and the Waterdeep novel will both have their share (though my latest Aglirta book for TOR, The Silent House, is a little darker). I love doing them, and have to restrain myself (before editors restrain me :) from going overboard in being arch. Realmsplay sessions in the home Realms campaign, thanks to the backgrounds, interests, and humours of my players, have never been far from an element of what the stage sometimes calls 'British farce.'

Which brings us to world building. I've designed or co-designed five major settings now (from a gamer's view, CASTLEMORN from Fast Forward Entertainment, Inc. will be the next to appear), and doing it more than once has hammered home one thing: for me, it always starts with some vividly-imagined scenes of places. Whether we're talking crumbling ruins or soaring castles or deep forest glades lit by glowing mists, these will be places that intrigue me, that I want to know more about. So, in my mind's eye, I walk around them, seeing and smelling and looking behind things.

And then I see people, characters that intrigue me. Why is this woman laughing, and why is there a sword sticking right through her that doesn't seem to bother her in the slightest? Why is yonder man acting so sly, and chuckling to himself all the time as if he knows something devilishly delightful that the rest of us don't? What are their secrets, and what are they up to? On a larger scale, what are the conflicts that dominate this land, or region, or world?

My original visions of places largely determine the overall landscape character of that part of the setting, of course (lush green forests, or seacoasts, or deserts, or mountains, or something weirder like floating, moving Roger Dean-style midair "islands" of rock). From that point, there are many ways to world-build, and the published Realms (just because areas have been bolted onto it by others besides myself, and many different folks have stirred their own characters and people into the mix) aren't necessarily the best example of how to do it. Your questions center on how I started, however, so let's go back there.

Picture a very young nerd (six and then seven) voraciously reading everything in his father's den full of books. The shelves in that den hold everything from cutting-edge physics and radar science (my father's academic pursuits) to lurid "naughty" paperbacks (or what passed for them in the 1930s and 40s). I'm the young reader, and find the fantasy stuff most to my taste. More than that, most of the authors are dead, and even those still alive at the time (such as Tolkien, Moorcock, Leiber, Zelazny, Pratchett, and Bellairs, just to name a few) either haven't yet published the works that will really make them shine, in my eyes, or aren't writing fast enough to feed my appetite for "What Happened Next?" to favourite characters. So I start to scribble my own sequels. Most of these, of course, are both horrible and unfinished little pastiches, but that hunger is the root from which the Realms grew.

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Eventually, I hit upon the idea of doing what Fritz Leiber was doing with Fafhrd and the Mouser in the pages of FANTASTIC at the time (a magazine later merged with its sister publication AMAZING, which TSR acquired and published about two decades later): telling self-contained stories about his main characters that just happen to be episodes in the ongoing lives of these wandering heroes (occasionally featuring old friends or foes they've met before), and also just happen to be set in the same world, and add little details of that world, story by story, that a reader who knows about the other stories in the series can pounce on, and fit together with what's already known, and build into a deeper understanding of the world.

So I start to write stories all set along the same coast (what you now know as the Sword Coast of the Realms), that share the same background. Most of them star the same main character: the fat, wheezing, sly Mirt the Moneylender (take Shakespeare's Falstaff, and add a dash of Poul Anderson's Nicolas van Rijn and a handful of Glencannon), who's crafty as they come but too old and slow for great heroics. In some of the tales, he teams up with Durnan, a "thinking-man's Conan" (strong silent type who isn't a barbarian ignorant of the lands he's journeying through, but who, although sensitive, believes laws and authority are usually oppressive, and to be ignored whenever they get in the way).

The first Realms tale is "One Comes, Unheralded, to Zirta" (Zirta is a city now part of Scornubel), and in it we see Elminster and a lady or two who will later become famous (or infamous, depending on your viewpoint) as members of the Seven Sisters. This tale is written in 1967, and D&D isn't released until 1974 (1975 to me and most of the wider world), so my fiction writing in the Realms predates the game.

As a result, I was piling details up far more deeply than most published game settings ever acquire, long before there WAS a D&D game (can't do registered trademark symbols in this primitive e-mail, but please take it as written that they're here, okay?).

I so admired the release of AD&D (specifically the Players Handbook, which put a Vancian magic system into specific game terms, just as the Monster Manual had already quantified monster specifics) that I turned the Realms into a matching-the-game setting. Regular Realmsplay started in 1978, and longtime Realms fans will notice that the greatest detail in the published Realms is found in places (Waterdeep, Cormyr, the Dales) where longtime adventuring companies (Player Characters) were based.

My players were and are superb actors/roleplayers, and demanded a world that felt real. They always wanted to know what was inside that caravan wagon passing by, and why (which of course forces some world design decisions on the DM, because the cargoes obviously mean that Place X produces an excess of cloth, but needs metals, and Place Y needs that cloth, and so on). As a result, the Realms got literally days (uh, when I was going to school, which would be my "study time") of me puzzling out economics, trade routes, currents, prevailing winds, floods and droughts, mineral wealth locations, and so on. Again, others have worked in the Realms, so not all of this survives in a coherent manner, and of course it's never been set forth in a "Trading & Traders" or "Merchants & Money" product, because many gamers would avoid such a product in droves. :}

So that's the way I did it. DRAGON issue 54 contains my work-in-progress unfolding of a pantheon of gods, and a glance at that article will show you three things at work: like all D&D gamers at the time, I was trying to stay official, matching deities with what Gary Gygax had revealed of his (the Greyhawk setting); I wanted lots of gods (one aspect of the Realms that's thus far been neglected is the extent to which Jonthun the baker next door worships Chauntea for a good harvest, Tymora for good luck in the baking, Talos for good weather so the grain crops

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won't be ruined, and so on, all in the same day); and I wanted lots of small, evil cults so PCs would have lots of evil rituals to disrupt and maidens to rescue off of sinister altars. :) (Another element we haven't yet properly addressed in print is clergy: exactly what prayers do they pray, what do they wear, what are their taboos, aims in life, and what are the hidden agendas or personal pursuits of the controlling clergy; all of that. We know entirely too much about the gods, and not enough about their churches.)

And yes, Josh, it takes time. Oodles and oodles of time. More than 35 years for me, thus far; the Realms has become my life, taken me all over the world, and changed everything for me.

However, it doesn't have to start with the planet cooling. Most designers will run out of gas long before they get half the canvas filled in, if they start macro and then zero in. Start small, with a place that grabs you, and build outwards. When you get as far outwards as a cluster of adjacent lands, then step back and look at trade and wars and alliances and power groups. Depending on your purposes (writing a long line of novels or just getting together one night a week to run friends through the latest adventure that's caught your eye in the pages of DUNGEON, or something in between), that far may be as far as you need to go. Until, of course, your players start demanding all that detail; any good DM will spend about 4 hours of design time for every 1 hour of playing time.

I hope this starts to answer your questions. Just between you and me, I world-build because I love doing it. Anyone who's tried to make a living from writing will tell you straight that it isn't because of money, and I matured enough not to want adulation years ago. But to be in the middle of acting the part of a king and to look across the gaming table and see people excited to the point of tears by what the king is saying and doing to their characters, THAT's wonderful.

Thanks for asking!

Ed Greenwood

...And this is the Hooded One, signing off for now. And that last bit? That's why I love Ed, and will always try to defend him against idiots who say he copied Elminster from Gandalf or writes Elminster as his sexual-fulfillment alter ego or other such garbage. He's given such a glorious world to us all, and done it without any of the control-freak fighting that has so often marred the gaming industry (welcoming folks like Bob Salvatore and Elaine Cunningham and so many others to play in his sandbox, and behind the scenes pitching in with guidance and help on so many Realms game products).

And if you see him at GenCon, white beard wagging as he signs this or helps a lost gamer with directions or catches up with old friends, I hope you'll see him as I do, and think: What a man.

Your servant, the Hooded One

February 20, 2004: The Hooded One here, with an answer relayed from the Master himself (who just finished winching a neighbour's tractor up an ice-covered driveway, BTW; it seems Winterkeep is in the throes of an ice storm right now):

Although I have always done some reading for work (a good librarian has a duty to sample a wide cross-section of books, in my opinion: it doesn't matter if I don't like Danielle Steel books, I'd better know exactly what they're like, and the works of Nora Roberts, too, so as to be able to answer patron queries about them), I read voraciously, and always have.

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The demands of my writing life have slowed me down somewhat from my carefree youth (when I was in school, three good-sized novels a day was about average, but now I'm lucky if I do a book a day), but I still read tons of stuff, and live in a house groaning under the weight of some 80,000 books. I buy a few thousand more titles a year. So, yes, I read for fun, but I do so seriously. :}

Aside from proofreading my own books and short stories so the errors are mine and not those of the publisher, some books I read in galley form because publishers ask me to "blurb" them (write those little quotes on the back covers that go something like this: "This is the best book I read this morning!"), and some I read in galleys because writer friends are asking for advice or opinions on how to fix something, or if I think they got this or that "right," and I'm not going to betray any confidences by telling you the books I'm reading right now, because all four of them are of that sort.

However, I can say that in the past week I've read the following:

Carrie Bebris: *Pride & Prescience* (a quick re-read because I'd already enjoyed it in galleys; a superb Jane Austen pastiche mystery)

Lois McMaster Bujold: *Paladin of Souls* (couldn't get to this when I received it due to workload, so it had to wait until now)

Robert Devereaux: *Santa Steps Out* (the only real 'oldie,' lent to me by a very kind friend because it's so pervertedly twisted)

Phil & Kaja Foglio: *Girl Genius Book One: Agatha Heterodyne and the Beetleburg Clank* (graphic novel; a re-read just for fun)

Guy Gavriel Kay: *The Last Light Of The Sun* (a very quick read because I'd already gone through it in galleys, not all that long after doing a panel with Guy at Worldcon)

Julian May: *Conqueror's Moon*

Patricia A. McKillip: *Alphabet of Thorn*

Ted Naifeh: *Courtney Crumrin and the Night Things Volume 1* (graphic novel; came out a long time ago but I had some fun tracking it down)

Anne Perry: *No Graves As Yet*

Robert Silverberg, editor: *Legends II* (a re-read of the George R.R. Martin tale therein for reasons that I'm not at liberty to discuss)

Gene Wolfe: *The Knight*

. . . And six books I re-read after the Nebula Awards nominations were whittled down to a final ballot, for "sober consideration" voting purposes. Please note that this isn't a typical week, being as there are NO nonfiction books on the list, no gaming products, only two non-sf and fantasy books (the Bebris and the Perry), and far more than the usual percentage of re-reads.

So now you know what my brain is full of. I don't mind at all answering this question, but I confess I'm a little puzzled as to why you'd care. If you're looking for recommendations, all of the books listed above have their good points, and several are superb. But then, with a few

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exceptions, I believe one can enjoy and glean something useful from almost any book (although I'll admit that with limited time or funds most of us have to pass over most books we happen to see), and I do a lot of wincing when I read savage crit of this or that book (or worse, generalizations about this or that author) on the Internet or in magazines, or hear the same in libraries and bookstores. Remember to always apply Elminster's Rule: one reader's masterpiece is the next reader's complete waste of trees. :}

Ed

And there you have it. More wisdom from the currently ice-covered creator of the Realms himself. Your servant,
The Hooded One

On February 20, 2004 THO said: I can answer this one directly, without bothering Ed (snow load tore off one of his eavestroughs last night, and sent it crashing down...so of course, being Ed, he uncovered one of the lawn chairs buried in the snow, made hot chocolate, and went out to watch and see if the NEXT trough along would fall; he didn't want to miss the crash):

When TSR bought the Realms, the original agreement (which I know about because, as one of his players, I had to sign legal release forms for my characters) included two things that touch on your question: Ed was supposed to receive a copy of everything published about the Realms (by TSR, not necessarily those by outside licenses like computer games), and be consulted and fully informed about forthcoming Realms products (so he wouldn't contradict or spoil surprises or anything like that by saying the wrong thing in public out of ignorance).

Over the years, this has sometimes been honoured very well . . . and sometimes not. WotC is far more secretive when dealing with non-employees, and I know that Ed buys his own copies of game products (not sure about novels), and often, because there are no local hobby shops anymore and he has to order through bookstores, waits a long time for them. I also know that a lot of WotC staffers and freelance authors working in the Realms keep in close touch with Ed, so I assume they are consulting with him about forthcoming Realms stuff.

The Hooded One

February 23, 2004: Josh, I e-sent your reply to Ed, and he remembers you and Jitters fondly. I'm sure you've seen the two-part result of this year's Spin A Yarn With Ed Greenwood seminar on the WotC website. Ed had these additional comments:

Regarding trade, it's important to note that any game product covering trade in the Realms or any properly detailed fantasy setting would be a snapshot, out of date the moment it's published, because a printed book is static, and (in daily detail if not in overall needs and flows) trade is constantly changing. Many fantasy fiction writers seize on the exciting "wheeling and dealing" of trade (the thirteen books by David and Leigh Eddings that include the character of Silk keep delving into his deceptions, swaps, arranged shortages, and so on).

About the gods: there IS a far more minimalist way to handle a pantheon of gods, if you don't want to go the "force good roleplaying by bewildering the PCs with so many altars that they have think before they charge in slaying, in case this particular altar is of a good god, and the unclad lady lying on it is willingly participating in some renew-the-land fertility ritual or other, NOT being

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sacrificed or oppressed" route. When CASTLEMORN comes out, glance at the gods I put in there. That way you'll have time to really detail the rituals, and you can still keep all of the other gods and angel-beings as the "forgotten" or "fallen" deities, with fanatical priests trying to revive cults whenever you need another mysterious altar in play. :}

As to the money thing: most real writers (as opposed to those folks who call grandly themselves "authors" and never seem to actually get around to publishing a book, or more than one book) have the itch to write. We'll do it no matter what. Just don't let the IRS ever hear you're doing it for no money it all, unless you slap the magic phrase "for charity" on the particular writing in question. I'm not scared of the Nazgul, I'm terrified of the taxman. ;}

Yes, one thanks or comment from a reader or a fan is worth a LOT. That's one of the reasons that unfair, hearsay, and over-personal criticism of writers should never be welcome anywhere on-line or in print. Many people seem to lack the self-control or basic reasoning that allows them to separate taking jabs from writing they don't like from taking a poke at the person who wrote it (to those of us who write game products or novels that have been heavily edited by others, this sometimes causes bitter hilarity, when some poster is trashing you for words you didn't even write).

And your thanks means a lot to me. I've been very ill (#\$%@!! restaurant food) at GenCons, and done seminars when I'd much rather have been sitting on the pot in my hotel room or lying in bed groaning, and I know just how it feels to push yourself because you want to. It makes me feel humble to know you did that, just to see me, and pleased as blazes that you felt inspired. Isn't it amazing, how we can all get so much pleasure and excitement from something we're just imagining?

That's why I love D&D, and I love fantasy writing, and I have have a harem of (oops, wife!) ahem, the adulation of thousands, and kind publishing companies that occasionally toss a few pennies my way, and . . . hmm. I'll shut up now before I get myself in even MORE trouble.

And that's my Ed.

Proud to be one of his harem (we're JOKING folks, joking, got it?),
The Hooded One

On February 23, 2004 THO said: Oh, Malaug, you touched one of our collective sore points. Mr. Lowder has summarized the whole comedy of errors surrounding SPELLFIRE very well, so I won't go into it again here. Let's just say that editors (not Ed) did the final cutting of both the original and the newer version of Spellfire (which despite what it says on the cover, is SHORTER than the first published version). Over a third of the original book was dropped, and the easiest way to do that quickly was to remove an entire layer of villains throughout. This had many unfortunate consequences, but the two Ed hates the most are these:

1. With the Malaugrym impersonations and manipulations gone, the actions of the Zhentarim become foolish "Keystone Kops" farce, and not the struggles of dupes being pushed into things. How many times down the years have you heard criticism of the Zhents as being bumbling cardboard figures? Not in Ed's original.
2. With the Malaugrym impersonations and manipulations and a key Knights of Myth Drannor "war council" scene gone, the Knights (with the half-hearted exceptions of Torm and Rathen, and over the anger of Sharantyr) seem to heartlessly abandon Narm and Shandril part way through

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the book, and even more importantly, so do Elminster and The Simbul. In Ed's original, El and the Witch-Bitch (sorry, our players' name for her) ordered the Knights to get back to their neglected other tasks, knowing full well that Torm and Rathan would disobey, and El and The Simbul fought the Malaugrym continuously "over the heads of" the unwitting Narm and Shandrill. This was a key part of Ed's intended message in the book: in the Realms, things are never quite as simple as they seem, and there are plots and surveillance and subplots behind everything and always on the go. Reading many TSR Realms books over the years, it's my personal opinion that they're aimed at a young male audience, and there's a deliberate editorial preference for simple, linear "lots of action" storytelling. Whether that's "better" or not than other styles and forms of stories is another debate, but I do know that it is at odds with what Ed was originally told by TSR, which was: "Show us your Realms. We're thinking a book a year at least, showcasing all of your main characters and power groups. Take us through those forests, down those alleys, into those magic user's towers. You've got a world here that's broader than deeper than any we've ever seen; show it to us!"

I KNOW those words were said, because I stood there at an early GenCon and listened to them (coming from Jim Ward and Mike Dobson). That was the GenCon where Ed and Jeff Grubb walked past each other, each wondering if the other was the other, because they'd talked on the phone for a year but never met face-to-face. :}

The 'why' of the SPELLFIRE debacle had a lot to do, I believe, with a change in personnel at the Book Department, and a different idea of what Ed's book should be than the above-quoted words. Which was fine, except that nobody got around to telling Ed this until it was all too late to fix EXCEPT by drastic editing and rewriting. If I recall correctly, one of Mr. Lowder's first tasks when hired by TSR was to rewrite Ed's character dialogue throughout the book.

However, over the years, Ed has slowly drifted to the view that trimming the Malaugrym may have been bad for SPELLFIRE, but was good for the Realms, because they are plane-hopping powerhouses (something like the royal family of Amber, in Roger Zelazny's classic Amber novels), and if fans had concentrated on them like they do the gods (Ed calls it "chasing the power"), we might never have had products like the Volo's Guides, grounded in the details of everyday life in the Realms.

So, yes, I wince almost as badly as Ed when I read the published version of SPELLFIRE (I got to read the original manuscript because Ed was also told, as he started writing it and we signed our release forms, "Make sure your players are happy with it"). But we've all moved on. As Ed put it, "I've got SO many other stories I want to tell. Shandrill was invented for that novel, and this mania for 'signature characters' means I've never been able to do a Mirt novel, or a Simbul novel, or an Alustriel book, or--get the idea?"

Oh, yes, and one more thing: "Mr. Greenwood" is Ed's DAD. Ed is "Ed." :}

February 24, 2004: Well, Blueblade, I caught Ed chortling over a fantasy novel manuscript he just received to "blurb" (he said it was hilarious), and he e-hurled a reply to me, to pass on to you:

Physically, Castlemorn is designed to be easily integrated into any existing campaign that has some unexplored sea areas, because its core lands consist of a coast surrounded on three sides by impenetrable mountains, facing an arc of islands that outline a bay, with always-misty, treacherous-with-shoals, islands, and monsters waters to the west and east.

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All of which means you could easily put it "on the far side" of Toril. You could also do what I did in the 'home' Realms campaign, as outlined in the article I did in issue 37 of DRAGON: have it as one of many parallel Prime Material Planes linked by gates (3rd Edition: portals). This, by the way, is where the "Forgotten" part of "Forgotten Realms" came from: we people of real-world Earth have 'forgotten' the once-widely-used gates to Toril, which gave us our legends of vampires, dragons, et al.

The only real problem I foresee with integrating Castlemorn directly into the Realms (placing it on the globe rather than as a parallel plane) is reconciling one pantheon of gods with the other. The Castlemorn gods are far fewer in number, and have a 'back story' that's integral to the setting. I can see a ready solution, but I'm not at liberty to reveal it right now because it involves not-yet-revealed secrets about the deities of both worlds, and I'm only really free to talk about those of Castlemorn (and doing so now would ruin a lot of the fun of exploring that setting when it first sees print).

The forthcoming WotC setting Eberron does have more of an emphasis on exploration than the published Realms (since the demise of Maztica and the Hordelands as published "lines"), and if you want to keep portals out of it and 'do a Moorcock' (using his concept of a plane-shifting sailing ship, the Ship That Sails The Seas of Fate), you could easily have travel between the Realms and Castlemorn involve such a ship passing through Eberron. Or you could go the Spelljammer route, through the phlogiston from crystal sphere to crystal sphere. Or you could have fun with a Philip Jose Farmer-style World of Tiers battle between power groups for control of many portals (with PCs who stumble on a portal getting caught up in the fighting whether they want to or not).

Or you could just do surgery: unbolt the gods of Castlemorn and replace them with the Realms pantheon, or vice versa. It all comes down to the flavour you want for your campaign.

And seeing where The Hooded One is going to post this, I can't not mention one of the secrets of Candlekeep: that certain books in the inner chambers are themselves portals that operate only when opened and held by someone who reads aloud just the right words, in the right sequence.

Heh-heh. I hope that helps. As the old Realms saying regarding young folk 'seeing the Realms' puts it: "May your boots lead you to victory, this night and every night after."

Ed

Hmm, Ed's feeling poetic. The Waterdeep novel must be going well. :}

The Hooded One

February 26, 2004: 'Lo, all. See not only below, but the "Ask Ed Greenwood" thread in the FR Chat section of Candlekeep. More answers from Ed there.

Herewith, Kuje, a reply from Ed (Alaundo, might I suggest this get preserved for the archives? I don't think Ed's set this down in print anywhere else, before):

Oh, boy. Part of me hates to provide clear answers here because doing so restricts or ties down future WotC Realms authors. On the other hand, I stoutly maintain the fiction that everything we know of the Realms comes through Elminster (or, on rare occasions, Laeral), so this conceit (of the sometimes-deliberately-unreliable narrator) should be enough to "explain away" inconsistencies between what I say here and what you may someday read . . .

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My take on things is this: Dornal has met all of his daughters except Qilue (sorry, can't do accent marks through this primitive e-mail [Hooded One note: Sorry, neither can I.]), because Mystra thought this might be too painful/mentally damaging to him, but she did carefully and covertly manipulate the other six of the Seven into meetings with him. Most of them know he's still alive but have been privately, one-on-one, been mind-told by Mystra not to go looking for him because doing so will doom him to torment and death at the hands of evil beings seeking to force Mystra to do certain things (which she will have to refuse), and because it will harm his delicate mental state.

Some of the six Sisters realized who Dornal must be, during or after their encounters, but kept this knowledge from him. The Simbul did once openly rescue him from destruction (with a spell cast from afar, accompanied by a verbal message: "Father, I honour you!") years after they met.

Dornal is bitter, but not as mentally fragile as all that, and is slowly "forgiving" Mystra (who went so far as to create a mortal avatar of herself whom he could physically punish and lash out at, to get back at her; he did so, and of course felt even worse). Mystra herself felt guilt over what happened to Dornal, and not only kept him alive far beyond his normal lifespan in an effort to bring him to "peace" before he died, but brought about these manipulated meetings (in each of which Dornal was made aware who his daughters were immediately after parting from them) in an attempt to heal his mental hurts.

In this, she largely succeeded, but Dornal is now suffering the same mental degeneration/utter exhaustion that most long-lived humans (such as Elminster and Khelben) do: the cumulative effects of repeatedly outliving friends, relations, and loved ones and seeing beloved places swept away or changed beyond recognition.

Dornal is still bitter over Mystra "using" him and his wife, and even feels bitterness about her obvious role in the manipulated meetings with the eldest six of the Seven, but knowing he has grandsons (some of whom he's met), the passage of time, and Mystra's clear sorrow and humbleness towards him have made these "old hurts" that are growing easier to live with. And there may even be some small satisfaction in knowing that he outlived the goddess that did this to him.

He remains a Watcher for the new Mystra, and even has some other "secret agent" duties for her (after all, a VERY experienced adventurer who really doesn't care what happens to himself can be quite useful for certain tasks). It will probably come as no surprise to you to hear me say: "I'd love to do a novel about Dornal Silverhand's doings in the Realms of today." It probably also wouldn't surprise you to hear that the long-suffering folks of WotC's Book Publishing division are almost certainly heartily weary of hearing me utter that sentence, with various characters attached to it. :}

If you met Dornal Silverhand in the present-day Realms, you'd be seeing a tall, gaunt, cavern-eyed man of grim manner and utterly silent movements, who seldom speaks. He sees all (even tiny details, glimpsed momentarily), forgets nothing, and can reason very quickly (interpreting what he sees). He carries an astonishing variety of concealed weapons, knows the back trails, ruins, nearby caves, and other "quick getaway" features of locales across the Sword Coast North and the Heartlands of the Faerun better than most beings, and is utterly fearless (not bold or reckless; he simply doesn't care what happens to himself).

He often tried to poison himself when it first became clear to him that Mystra wasn't going to allow him to suicide, and she kept him alive by magically neutralizing lethal dose (or even combination

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'cocktail') after dose, with the result that he's now immune to all effects of most poisons, and suffers only minor harm from the known remainder.

Dornal's hobby, as a onetime noble, has been to learn and keep straight the genealogies and family histories of divers nobility and self-styled nobility of Waterdeep, Sembia, and Cormyr, plus their exiled offshoots; as a result, he can smilingly deflate a noble dandy by revealing that their great-grandfather took the name and titles of a dead battle-comrade, and so the dandy and his kin really don't deserve to be treated as nobles at all . . . or shock sworn enemies or lovers by revealing their true blood relationships to each other. He doesn't go around doing so, of course, but he's not above "taking care of" cruel or over-ambitious nobles by letting rivals or family members know some truths about skeletons in family closets.

His favourite daughters are Dove and Storm, the former because she's the closest to him in manner and (in his eyes) the least "tainted" by her own spellcasting, and the latter because he's watched Storm comfort folk, aid in childbirths, entertain with songs, and pitch in and help strangers fight fires, hunt down missing children, and the like, and has come to love and admire her as many folk in the Realms do. He also sees something of his own "don't care what happens to my own skin" thinking in her deeds and behaviour, yet admires the way she couples it with empathy for others, and complete lack of personal pride.

He once gave all of his clothing to shivering beggars on the road near Neverwinter and walked naked into a blizzard, hoping to die numbed and unaided (Mystra, of course, has other ideas), and was awed when he once witnessed Storm disrobed completely to give all of her clothing to freezing folk who'd been driven out of their (wooden) home by fire, and then lead them for miles to shelter (striding naked through the snow to her farmhouse). A sort of: "That's my girl!" admiration. (Storm's casual attitude regarding nudity should of course be well-known to Realms fans and detractors by now. :})

Sembia is a place where wealth and boredom have reached sufficient levels that young nobles and inheritors are doing all sorts of crazy things, just now, and magically-gifted individuals often manage to indulge themselves (and yet survive) long enough to develop some of their potential. Silverymoon has long been such a place, too, and Everlund increasingly so. As a result, Dornal has been spending a lot of time quietly and covertly observing magic-related activities in these three places, walking everywhere and working alone. He has acquired some minor magic items that aid in healing and in disguise, and "the new Mystra" (who seems to admire him) has been covertly recharging these items, 'beefing them up' on occasion, and even surprising Dornal (and sometimes, pursuers) with casting feather fall or teleport spells on him that he wasn't expecting, and isn't quite sure of the origins of. On the other hand, she doesn't watch over him closely, and he's spent some agony-filled days crawling with broken limbs and ribs, or lying almost bloodless, waiting for wounds to heal under the slow benison of his healing magics. Yet he seems to have found reasons, at least for now, to keep going and to serve the new Mystra as capably as he knows how.

Yes, Dornal is one of two or three dozen fascinating 'loose end' characters of the Realms who could be very 'deployable' in Realms fiction or campaign play (Elaith the Serpent is a perfect example of another 'loose end' character that an author [Elaine Cunningham, of course] picked up and used with spectacular success). I won't start listing and describing them, because I'm sure you could compile such a list just as well, and I DO have a novel to finish. Er, several novels to finish. Umm, more than several, even. As one editor told me not so long ago: "Just don't go and die on us, Ed . . . or we'll be forced to kill you!" :}

And there you have it, from the Master himself. Me, I'm just (ahem) His Master's Voice.

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Hmmph. Well, I guess THAT advertised my age to everyone. Sigh.
The Hooded One

February 27, 2004: I tossed your queries and comments Ed's way, and here's his reply:

Hands taped to the keyboard whilst I slumber? Hmm, Thomas, don't suggest this to Jenny, okay?
:}

Dargoth, I know of at least a dozen Netherese who are still active in the Realms of today, albeit some of them in greatly changed forms. Hint: a LOT of Netherese bound themselves into magic items (especially swords), to 'live on' telepathically. If your blade seems able to see what's around it without having visible eyes, hear thoughts of nearby creatures, and mend/heal itself in limited ways, it just might contain the sentience of a Netherese.

The pages of ELMINSTER: THE MAKING OF A MAGE and SHADOWS OF DOOM both contain Netherese survivors (one each), and I can reveal here that I know of at least two who reside quietly (pretending to be "just plain folks") in Waterdeep and Suzail, respectively. No, I'm not going to give names, because for a DM it's far more useful to have them as 'handy tools.'

The Waterdhavian one founded a successful mercantile family now regarded as noble, and then (having prepared for this with covert investments, coin caches, and property purchases) faked his own death, to reappear as a retired merchant, a role he's played several times since. Like Elminster, he meddles covertly in city politics and society, spreading rumors and 'turning' particular individuals to hold more cosmopolitan world-views (investing in other lands, and taking an interest in folk from those places). He does this because he very much wants to avoid Waterdhavian haughtiness from growing any greater than it is already.

The Suzailan one is a female who firmly believes that Netheril fell because of overweening pride and overarching mastery of magic. She enjoys life in Cormyr (when it isn't imperiled by war, of course), has hidden coins and gold in plenty for her needs, and covertly works to do two things: confuse and confound War Wizard investigations, and to make both War Wizards and others think that there are secret personal dangers involved in too much spellcasting, and in casting specific, over-powerful spells. She is VERY good at keeping hidden, spreading such rumors through the mouths of passing strangers by means of suggestion magics, and never doing anything openly herself. She's no enemy of the Crown; she just doesn't think allowing the War Wizards to reach the status of 'extremely effective secret police' is a good idea. She's dwelt in Suzail for almost forty years, and knows it will soon be time to "disappear" or be noticed as something other than the well-to-do widow she's pretending to be, but is tarrying because she enjoys the city and its folk so much (she perceives a rising danger in wealthy, ever-restless Sembia of sorcerers and wizards becoming overproud and reckless in their use of magic, but has such a distaste for what she's seen of Sembian society that she just doesn't want to go there, while also seeing that it would be a very good place to take a new face and name).

You can, of course, create many more Netherese, though I'd suggest that they all conceal their origins and that they NOT (or try not) to know of each other, rather than forming any sort of shadowy secret society or power group. That would be why, even for the two examples from my novels, clearly identified Netherese should be very scarce. After all, if Netheril is most remembered as a "land of awesome magic," then anyone identified as Netherese can expect wizards and sorcerers to launch surprise attacks, mind-invasions, and attempts to capture or financially control them, to get all the magic that's "surely" waiting in their minds, or in the case of items, hidden in places they know.

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I believe there will be some sort of Waterdeep game product, and I believe I know who's writing it, but the tentative wording of this sentence should tell you straight off that I'm not sure, and that I'm certainly not the writer. We'll just have to wait and see. To play the old "if I was running the company" game: if I was head of Wizards, I would do a Waterdeep product. But then, I would do matching encyclopedia-sized sourcebooks and Volo's Guides for each and every city and realm, too. :}

Bookwyrn, you can call me whatever you'd like. One gamer I know of greets me as "Cuddles" (THAT'S fun in crowded airports), another as "Bum" and still another as "Monster" (shortened from "Scary Monster," which was her toddler daughter's quite logical name for the large, bearded, hairy and loudly clowning man towering over her). So I can handle a mere "Mister." It'll certainly prove less embarrassing than the lady in Denver who went down on her knees in an expensive restaurant to kiss my shoe and address me as "Lord Creator" . . . though that DID get us a very good table, as I recall. :}

Yes, I've always preferred that the Realms have many small-scale stories going on, everywhere one looks: that forges a feeling of life and realism better than anything else at all.

If a certain scene survives into print in the forthcoming Waterdeep book, you'll see a tiny joke about Elminster's infamy and being everywhere, and I've slipped other little digs at this into various Realms work (echoing LIFE OF BRIAN, my original Realms players have been known to react to impossible tales of Elminster's doing this and Elminster doing that, told to their PCs by NPCs they meet, with: "I'm Elminster!" "No, I'M Elminster, and my wife is too!"). The nature of striving for excitement and spectacle in fantasy novels leads inevitably to a focus on the high-and-mighty, royalty and nobility and courtiers holding power, that isn't a true reflection of the everyday Realms, in just the same way as Hollywood antics are far removed from the daily lives of most Americans. Of course some folk will never have heard of Elminster, and (Broken Telephone style) others will have heard things about him far removed from the truth. To very heavily paraphrase how Anna Russell and other comedy performers have described how folk songs are passed down to us: a singer gets a song from his grandfather, who can't remember most of it, is deaf, and can't sing in the first place. And he got it from his grandfather, who ALSO couldn't etc., etc.

THE ENDLESS CHANTS OF ALAUNDO concerns one young man's visit to Candlekeep, and how he was treated. It's where most of the original Realms boxed set information on Candlekeep's monks (the First Reader, et al) was drawn from, and I wrote it at least twenty years ago.

Even if it remains mislaid for some time, readers of ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER will get to see another character visiting Candlekeep, which should at least give everyone some idea of how visitors are treated at the gates.

And so, as the years pass, I build in more colour, adding to the walls little stone by little stone...

To which I can only echo: Rock on, Ed. Rock on. (LOL Hope he won't clobber me for that one!) And that's the latest from THE Master of Realmslore (hey, he coined the word!) himself.

I remain your servant in all matters Faerunian,
The Hooded One

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February 28, 2004: I just contacted Ed with your followup, Dargoth, and he was just arriving home after doing an author reading in Port Hope: the very funny Chapter 14 Cormyrean tax collector sequence from *ELMINSTER IN HELL*. Apparently a large audience of old folks now thinks he's the cat's pyjamas (ahem, figure of speech, people, figure of speech), and they want him to launch *ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER* there.

Ed himself is awaiting the usual Terry Pratchett releases, *Feast of Crows* (of course), and Susanna Clarke's first novel, *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR. NORRELL*, set for October 4th 04 worldwide release from Bloomsbury. The publisher is billing it (inevitably) as Harry Potter for adults, but Ed says from her short stories, this I-I-I-o-o-o-ng first novel from Clarke should be "very interesting."

Ed's reply follows:

I quite agree: the Netherese survivors won't get along at all well with the people of Shade. In fact, I'd venture to say that ALL surviving Netherese in Faerun would be wary at best, and actively hostile at worst, to the new "arrivals."

"Hiding from and otherwise ignoring" would probably be their initial reaction, and they'll quite rightly see attempts by the folk of Shade to find them as attempts to snatch their power. If that happens just once, word will get around, and the folk of Shade will then discover they've bitten off a lot more than they can ever hope to chew.

I'm not sure that many of the other modules (besides, of course, the Avatar trilogy) have been resolved. The Marco Volo trio, perhaps. We largely avoided detailing Daggerdale after its trilogy (and *The Doom of Daggerdale* stand-alone). From my point of view, modules are almost always a trove of setting details rather than a plot I'm going to follow closely, so to me they're never really resolved.

The reason I rarely write modules these days is twofold: I write 3.5e very slowly, and just hate wading through stat block after stat block (a problem when my writing time is at such a premium), and: I prefer to interweave subplots and mysteries, nowadays, rather than do linear dungeon-crawls, and there's rarely enough space (especially in *DUNGEON*) to do that sort of thing properly. Quickly, yes, but I find I need more space so as to leave a DM with lots of neat tools to re-use after the adventure is done. I did a short-short adventure in *DUNGEON* years back, but I doubt I'll have time to set down an adventure soon. I do write old-style 2nd Edition "dungeons" to run at conventions (often for charity), and have a bunch of those I could toss into print, but I have so many other things to do first (8 contracts lined up as we speak, and yet no money coming in :)).

The Company of Eight were created by Scott Haring for *Empires of the Sands*, updated once in print elsewhere, and I've never really had a "feel" for those characters, as people. I'd personally be more interested in low-level, starting-their-careers types, because I've already got veterans (the Company of Crazy Adventurers, the Knights of Myth Drannor) with which I'm intimately familiar, if I want to take a look at "old, tested and true swords." Perhaps Scott will get the chance to revisit them, somewhere and somehow.

Oh, and regarding what it takes to get a signed copy of Cormyr: I could tell much (ahem) richer stories than that one. Oh, yes indeed. My wife didn't believe half of what used to go on, in the early bloom of popularity for the Realms . . . until the time I was propositioned at a con by a VERY beautiful lady, while standing with my wife on my arm. I gently pointed out that said attached glowering female was my wife, whereupon the ardent fan said brightly, "Oh, that's okay: the bed is plenty big enough for three." :}

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Ahem, indeed. Thus endeth Ed's answer. And no, he's neither inventing nor exaggerating: I was at that con, too, and heard the whole thing. In fact, he's omitting mention of the lady's two giggling female friends, but . . . enough.

February 28, 2004: Ed saith: those minis look nice. How does the (very impressive) Vrock stand up? I always picture Bane as more the "dark, helmed, sinister" type (the Witch-King in the RETURN OF THE KING flick) than the buff slavemaster sort...but the mini is impressive. Must hunt some down at GenCon.

Re. the forgotten connections 'twixt Earth and Toril: I had (aside from moi and Elminster) various folk across Earth having "old family secrets" (and even cults) surrounding individual gates. TSR, of course, was so afraid of James Egbert-style lawsuits that all of this was firmly nixed, right away. Which was fine with me, because it kept the focus on detailing and presenting Toril.

Keep those questions coming; your interest and enthusiasm for the Realms is what fuels me to keep working away on it...

February 29, 2004: Kuje, I flipped this to Ed (who was hard at work writing), and when he came up for air at the end of a chapter, he pounded out this reply:

Qilue is a Chosen of Mystra with all the powers and special status other Chosen of the Mother Of All Magic possess.

Eilistraee wanted a "claim" on her, too, hence her Chosen of Eilistraee title. It means two things: she's as loyal to Eilistraee as to Mystra (in daily practise, as shown in SILVERFALL, more so), and Eilistraee foresees using her in some great task (i.e. a not-yet-revealed destiny).

Being as this is Candlekeep, I can do no more than point you to what a Harper PC (not one of the Knights) uncovered when asking a monk of Candlekeep to research Qilue's destiny. The monk was of course limited to finding prophecies and other written histories, and reported thus: one seer saw a dream wherein Qilue wielded a sword forged of her own blood, and was hailed by knights as "the Godslayer."

However, another seer (the monk declined to identify either of his sources, BTW) said "the dark one who serves two goddesses but leads the dance for only one shall be mother to a new race, and change the face of the Realms forever."

Either way, it seems Qilue's future bids fair to be interesting.

So saith Ed. Alaundo, you heard it here first. It seems Candlekeep holds some doggedly diligent or creative monks (or both).

February 29, 2004: Bookwurm, I shunted your Jack Archer query to Ed, too, and his answer has just come floating back through the ether:

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VERY nice, Bookwyrn. Great stuff. An approach to fantasy that you'll see something very close to in novel form from me in a year or two (new series, new publisher, must remain mysterious for now, I'm afraid). I also have a long-term project that may turn into yet ANOTHER series that's also very close to Jack Archer in another way (and yes, I enjoyed most of the earlier Stasheff Warlock novels very much).

So long as Jack Archer ventures into the Realms, of course, this must remain fanfic. Yet your prose is eminently publishable, so why not have him go also to a fantasy world of your own devising, and publish some Jack Archer novels?

Then you, too, can enjoy all the fame, adulation, crit, and heavy taxation. :}

Seriously, this is worthy "good fun read" stuff.

(More, please!)

Ed's words endeth. Wheee-oo. You've got him going now!

March 1, 2004: Ed's reply begins with the inevitable:

Oh, a horse is a horse, of course, of course...

Ahem. Okay, I'll probably miss something here, and I'll leave out the usual website and DRAGON columns, reissues (the mass market paperback of THE DRAGON'S DOOM, for instance). But here we go...

THE SILENT HOUSE (fifth Aglirta novel, from TOR Books, hardcover)

CASTLEMORN Campaign Setting hardcover from Fast Forward Entertainment, Inc. (co-written)

SERPENT KINGDOMS Realms sourcebook from WotC (co-written)

"The Keeper of Secrets" story in REALMS OF DRAGONS Realms anthology from WotC

"The Fallen Star" story in CHILDREN OF THE RUNE Diamond Throne anthology from Malhavoc Press

"Stormsong" novelette in REALMS OF WONDER 1: SUMMONED BY DESTINY fantasy fiction anthology from FitzHenry & Whiteside/Trifolium

I'm sure I've missed something, but whatever it is will probably come as just as much a surprise to you as to me. :} Happy reading. I've turned in the first of the three Pentacon for-charity tales, but how (or if) those get published is entirely up to their new owners. I've turned in three short stories for the Castlemorn setting, and one of them, "The Night of Three Strangers," will be in the Campaign Setting rulebook. I don't think any of my top secret projects will result in any 2004 publications.

Oh, and folks, I wouldn't leap to TOO many conclusions re. Qilue and WotSQ, okay? Seers tend to be reliable only in hindsight. :}

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So Ed saith. He also assures me there's absolutely no truth to the rumor that he wore diamond shoes to the Oscars. As he put it: "Diamond shoes with THAT gown? NEVER!" ;}

I've forwarded the cosmology and Bookwyrn requests to him, and await his reply.

Ye Hooded One

March 2, 2004: Here's the latest reply from the Bearded Thing himself:

Bookwyrn, I wish I could say something really useful. As it happens, no less than THREE of the "top secret" projects I'm working on right now concern magical travel between our real-world, present-day Earth and . . . somewhere else where magic works and things are vaguely medieval. :) As a longtime fantasy reader and collector, I'd direct you to check out Roger Zelazny's classic Amber works for descriptions of swordplay in which he simply used modern-day fencing terms (sixte, quarte, etc.). For a fencer, it helps, but I'm told that for a non-fencer, it was often an irritating brick wall of impenetrable gibberish.

Here's what I think you have to decide: is Jack going to be an expert fencer? Or learning as he goes? Would HE use modern fencing jargon? Unless he's an expert who mutters what he's doing aloud, I'd keep the terms to a minimum, and give the reader the fast-moving FEEL of the fight by describing how and where combatants are moving, and using general terms such as thrust (NOT stop-thrust), parry, hack, slash, and cut, but never over-describing (because it slows the action down too much). Keep the flow of narrative swirling as fast as the blades do, if at all possible.

You can have almost any sort of gate/portal linking Earth with wherever you want to take Jack, BUT: decide first whether you're ever going to want him to be able to get back, reliably, or move back and forth (and will foes or other modern-day-Earth characters be able to do the same?). In other words, is the gate or whatever it is going to work reliably, and are lots of folks going to either know about it or be able to figure it out or be able to accidentally stumble on it?

Like a game designer, decide what limitations you want first, and then design the specifics of the travel. One creature at a time? With or without gear? If no, they arrive the other side naked, right? (Repercussions?) If yes, how much gear, organic and/or non-organic, etc. makes the trip with them? Altered in any way? (The old fantasy fiction standby: magic items don't work on the Earth side of the gate, and/or firearms and other modern technology doesn't function properly on the other side.) How is the gate operated? Are those in transit vulnerable to spells, arrows, or hurled or swung weapons during their trip, while departing, or while arriving (i.e. can arrow be fired/bombs thrown/spells cast right through operating gate from one 'world' into the other?). Once you decide on something, follow through on ALL of the implications of that (longtime users of the gate would have to be idiots not to have experimented to determine gate/portal properties, and exploited them, perhaps to set up trade or message services, perhaps to set off alarms to tell them someone has used the gate or to awaken a gate guardian, and so on).

Between our Earth and the 'home' Realms, I had gates everywhere, most of them operating only a certain times (i.e. when struck by the rays of the full moon), but you may prefer something different.

This brings me inevitably to the cosmology question. The truth is, I'm not supposed to say anything about this, under the last few NDAs I signed, but I will utter this much: if the topic isn't fully and properly addressed by the end of this year's releases, I will ask permission to write something on it for the WotC website. Okay?

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As for DRAGON, the Elminster's Guide series still hasn't quite finished, although its format was set three editors ago, and I think no longer matches what the current editorial team wants to do with the Realms in the magazine's pages. The current editor and I have agreed on the format and content of a new (irregular) Realms column. Unfortunately, I won't be able to get to work on it anytime soon, because there are all these novels (and other lucrative top secret projects) to get done first!

Rad, you can ask me any question. ANY question. Sometimes legal agreements (NDAs) or 'inside knowledge' will force me to dodge giving a full answer, but this isn't one of them.

And isn't hard to answer, actually: I have to work harder on all non-Realms work, because I can "think Realms" automatically, and only have to check the Realms work of other writers for consistency, and follow the guidelines (limitations in topic, scope, and length) of my Realms editors for that project. So everything unfolds, and I can put all my energies into the creation at hand.

However, in all non-Realms settings, I have to try to understand the setting (get myself to where I can "think Kalamar" or "think Diamond Throne" or whatever) so I don't make any blunders, and so that I don't drift into "really writing this for the Realms." I WANT my non-Realms work to be different. If you survey all of the published fiction writing I've done over the last thirty-five years or so, from horror to mystery to (yes!) romance, you can readily see that I can be a chameleon when I want to be. It's harder to move distinctively away from the Realms when doing most d20 design, because my roleplaying design interests (storytelling, colour detail, subplots, giving NPCs 'real lives,' building in mysteries and power groups with longterm schemes) don't really change no matter what I'm doing.

Josh, I'm afraid I have to agree with you that postings on message boards have tended to get harsher as the years pass. It's probably just following societal trends (in earlier generations, like mine, bad-mouthing someone was never something to be proud about, unlike the way in which some folks now talk about how they "dissed someone good" or suchlike). I think it is often used to trash an author one dislikes. Bob Salvatore and I chatted about this once: how wryly amusing (and inwardly hurtful) it is to have someone posting on Amazon or a board or newsgroup about how horrible your latest book is, when you KNOW they haven't read it because you haven't finished it yet, so there's no way they can have sneaked a peek at the manuscript. This happens all the time, BTW, not as isolated incidents. In my case, many folks who resented the Realms displacing Greyhawk have spent years attacking me, which somewhat bewilders me because I, too, am a Greyhawk fan and have always wanted a steady stream of Greyhawk products to come into my hands so I can enjoy Gary's rich (but frustratingly full of gaps to me, the consumer) world.

And I've said before (as have Mark Twain, Diogenes, and scores of others down the ages): it's the mark of an idiot, or someone being deliberately intellectually dishonest (knowingly twisting the truth) to equate what a CHARACTER says or does with what the CREATOR of that character believes or does. (College professors please take note. :)) Legions of folks regularly try to skewer me for being perverted, sexist, a bed-wetter, or whatever for writing some of the Seven Sisters and Elminster as rather lusty. In doing so they have to conveniently ignore all of the decidedly straight-laced characters (Piergeiron, et al) I also put into the Realms. I created the "cast of thousands," people, and I know in our real world how angry people can get when someone publicly judges a race or country by looking at one individual ("See? And all Americans are like that!" or glance at Hitler and then judge all . . . get the idea?). So why is it valid to be so weak-minded or dishonest as to think anyone who writes about slavery must secretly BE a slaver? Geez, I guess all of these American historical writers must get up from the keyboard to go down to the cellar and get to whupping their slaves every night, right? And so on.

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Josh, you have to write what you believe is "right" for the world you're creating. So long as it's self-consistent, you've done your job as a designer. As a real-world business person, you'd better decide before printing money flows that the world you've created has wide appeal (I could easily design a world in which everyone plays maggots gnawing through heaps of human excrement, but the boredom factor would limit appeal: Q: "What're you doing this round?" A: "Uh, still eating dung."). The moral tragedy you describe (the mistaken killing of the royal heir) is a perfect motivation for good roleplaying, intrigues, strife, and so on. So I'd say you have the right instincts -- go for it!

So saith Ed. I remain your messenger 'twixt him and the wider world, and am still: The Hooded One here.

And Bookwurm, feel free to use my initials if it doesn't bother you. I've been called far worse, and for less valid reasons. :}

March 2, 2004: Hi, SiriusBlack, I tossed your question to Ed, and he fired a reply RIGHT back:

Sometimes co-ordination between Books and Games has been superb, sometimes nonexistent. In the case of Serpent Kingdoms, it was closer to "superb" (draft information went back and forth), which is as it must be to make both lines 'fit' with each other. I hope (and believe) that both the sourcebook and the trilogy will prove to be 'solid keepers' to most Realms fans.

Thanks for the question; it reminded me of a quick follow-up I must do this evening... :}

Folks, even * I * am beginning to get excited about SK, and I helped write it! :}

...So saith Ed. Keep those queries coming. :}

March 3, 2004: I sent your message to Ed, who was up early helping a neighbour to get his tractor to start (dead battery), and he sent this reply:

Well, let me tease just this much: certain serpentine races like to work behind the scenes...in a LOT of places in the Realms. Certain game designers like to write far too much, and cramming stuff between the covers becomes a challenge. Gods tend to get short shrift when space becomes a problem.

There. That doesn't reveal TOO much, I think (there are rules about these things, I'm afraid).

Ed, darling, since when did you follow rules? :}

The Hooded One

March 3, 2004: Okay, Ed just teased me about my following the rules comment, and added a question for all scribes of Candlekeep: what details of the Realms ("little lore" rather than huge topics) do you think have been thus far neglected in print? What would you like to see addressed (in novels, in game products, in website and magazine columns...anywhere and by anyone)?

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Whoop. A biggie. I've already given him *my* shopping list. :}

March 4, 2004: Okay, folks. Ed hath spoken once more:

Hello, all! Thy eager communications are ringing about the Greenwood. :}

Rad, I have to be careful what I say about cities, but let me go this far: I wasn't picturing a Realms sourcebook when I answered you. (Gads, I'm having to pick words as carefully as a politician! Or rather, far more carefully than SOME politicians. :})

However, on a happier note, I'm clear to give you information on Firefall Vale. I'll leave it until last.

Border Kingdoms: Me, too. I'll suggest it again, along with Volo's Guides, and when Volo gets shot down (as usual), perhaps Border Kingdoms will still be standing. Perhaps.

Vaasa and Damara aren't part of my original Realms, and I'm probably not the guy to do justice to them, but you've got me thinking. :}

Old Empires, yes, deserve a sourcebook. Time will tell. As for the duergar kingdom, I believe I'll be stepping on toes if I try to detail anything there.

Kuje and Bookwyrms, I'm in enthusiastic agreement about rituals, ceremonies, and all of that. Unfortunately, time and again that's been shelved (in the early days because of the "bad satanic press" argument, and latterly because of "too limited appeal/sales"), so I'll have to find some other way of getting such information to Realms fans. As I've said many a time before, I care little about the doings of the gods themselves (aside from the Time of Troubles, almost all divine doings happen offstage anyway, and mortals have no way to be certain of the truth of anything they're told about them), but very much about what their priesthoods DO on a daily basis in the Realms, from the "we don't wear pink, and we pray this way" level up to the "our creed is this, but secretly we strive to do that." I will suggest this project, but it won't be for the first time. That's why I asked for "little lore," because I have no way of bringing about "big lore" except by pestering people, and that route loses effectiveness fast.

Faraer, you're right on, as usual, and all of your topics will go on my "list of suggestions for approval" for the next raft of Realmslore columns. As you know, those are written way in advance, so we may all be noticeably older before you see any of them, but rest assured, I have heard and agree.

Bookwyrms, I see medical knowledge as varying widely across the Realms, but being highest among demi-humans, because tending humans has been one longterm way of being accepted in human-dominated communities. Herb lore is predominant, coupled with "potions" (herbal concoctions, not magic) effective in dealing with minor diseases, allergic reactions, and shock. The organs of all humanoid races are known, plus the general functioning of the body (hence what shock is, and how to treat it), how blood 'works,' and the importance of cleanliness for wounds (though most folks in the Realms have what we modern real-world types would consider bad personal hygiene and BAD teeth, though persons desiring to make a good impression who can't get a chance to bathe properly will work scented oils into their hair and rub scented oils on their bodies to change their strong odour into something less unpleasant).

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In the Realms, almost everyone understands that ill or wounded people need rest, to be covered by a blanket or at least kept out of full sun, that moving or rough handling will do greater harm, and that people should be given much to drink (even in cases where we moderns would say, "No, not even if complaining of thirst should Thrudd be given water or something stronger, because he's hurt inside!"). Stretchers and slings are commonly used, and where a stretcher can't be found, injured who must be carried are usually lashed to felled tree trunks and borne along between the shoulders of two strong carriers.

Scarring is common, because cauterization is well-known. Herbal painkillers (usually liquids that are "brewed" and drunk, but also liquids drizzled into wounds) are widely known and used, especially before someone is "sewn up," and there are herbs known in the Realms but not present in the real-world, including fleshwort (yes, I know we have several plants by that folk name, but I'm postulating a new and different plant) that can be sewn into an internal wound, and slowly absorbed by the body as raw material to build new tissue, blood vessels, and cartilage, bloodstaunch (which thickens blood very quickly upon direct contact, and so can be applied to open wounds to slow or stop bleeding), and bloodpurge (works to neutralize poisons).

Splinting is common, many beings are expert at neatly sewing flesh, and yes, body piercings (especially among goblinkin) and the importance of using flame or alcohol (not together!) to prevent infections related to said piercings are commonplace. (Note that it is not currently the fashion anywhere in the Heartlands to make use of facial piercings except in the nostrils and earlobes.)

Herb lore was another of the things strictly vetoed in the early days of the Realms (along with poisons, my terms of vengery article, and my "Dragon Soup" article on using monster byproducts in human Realms cookery; the first two for "we don't want lawsuits if kids try these" reasons despite my promise to use entirely fictional herbs and poisons, the terms of vengery because it was "unnecessary fluff," and the last one for the "some of these creatures are intelligent, so your article is in very bad taste"). More recently, the gnome vocabulary and heraldry Volo's articles suffered the same fate, but as they're owned by WotC, I can't put them into print without permission.

Dargoth, your list is all "big lore," and thus beyond my unaided powers ("Hah! The Realms imperilled again! Stand back, gentles -- only my unaided powers can save us now!"), but I'll see what I can do re. Tethyamar, okay?

Which brings us at last to Firefall. Thanks to STORMLIGHT, you know where in easternmost Cormyr Firefall Vale is, in the district of Northtrees March, hard against the Thunder Peaks and the northern edge of Hullack Forest, and that it has traditionally been ruled by Lord Summerstar from his castle at its western end, Firefall Keep.

In the early days of Cormyr, Glothgam Summerstar (the founder of House Summerstar and its first Lord) used the magical Sword of Summer Winds to slay and drive away red dragons after they attacked Glothgam's encampment with a mighty spell that turned the waters of the Brook to flame (giving the Vale its name), and so claimed the valley as his own.

I'm going to pull some SPOILERS here, though they shouldn't really ruin your enjoyment (or if you hate it, lack of same :) of STORMLIGHT if you just read on. (By the way, if anyone reading this wants the true measure of Storm's character, read pages 114 through 121, and page 192, of the novel.)

Generations later, Glothgam's descendant Rauvor was the Lord of Firefall Vale. After Lord Rauvor Summerstar's death, of a wasting fever decades before the events of STORMLIGHT, his

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bride became the Dowager Lady Pheirauze Summerstar, and -- as an haughty, imperious and coldly beautiful noblewoman widely known (though not to her face) as "Dowager Lady Daggertongue"-- outlived her son (Pyramus) and her grandson, being in her sixties at the time of STORMLIGHT. She became romantically involved with no less than three generations of the Illance noble family (one after another, not all at once!) but never remarried. Pheirauze was very intelligent, very strong-willed, and very used to getting her own way in everything: spreading and using her personal influence to govern others is what she does.

Rauvor had one brother, Hergrest, who predeceased him. Hergrest married a quiet, strong-willed sorceress, Harper, and adventurer, Maerla Downhand, but it was a true (though childless) love-match, and she survived him only by four summers.

Lord Pyramus Summerstar was the eldest of five sons of Rauvor and Pheirauze. Eldest to youngest, the brothers of Pyramus were the mage Orm Hlannan Summerstar, the warriors Darandar and Brezm, and the womanizer and rogue Lord Erlandar Summerstar (the only one still alive when STORMLIGHT begins). After birthing sons, Pheirauze gave Rauvor three daughters: Dalestra, Margot and Nalanna, and the latter two (both 'maiden aunts') are still alive at the time of STORMLIGHT.

Pyramus wed the timid and mostly silent Zarova Battlestar (of House Battlestar of West Shore not far along the coast west from Suzail, who became the second Dowager Lady Summerstar, and -- like Pheirauze --outlived both Pyramus and Athlan). Lord Pyramus married Zarova only after his secret marriage to Princess Sulesta (daughter of King Rhigaerd) was annulled by mutual agreement (and furious pressure from the War Wizards to undo the match and never to speak of it) after their love cooled. Thanks to War Wizard precautions, Pyramus did not sire any children with Sulesta.

Lord Pyramus was succeeded by his son Lord Athlan Summerstar (a Harper), who perishes in the first few pages of STORMLIGHT, leaving his stunningly beautiful, wanton younger sister Shayna as heir. Their cousin is the womanizing fop Sir Thalance Summerstar, the bastard son of Baelangar Harth (a local forester -- ranger -- of common birth), and Lady Dalestra Summerstar. Baelangar was killed by wolves whilst defending his lady when they were caught in a fierce winter storm while travelling overland during a very hard winter, a decade before STORMLIGHT. As STORMLIGHT begins, Shayna, Thalance, Erlandar, Zarova, Pheirauze, and two daughters of Darandar not named in the novel but present at the feasts, Myara and Calaumdra, are still alive and dwelling in the Keep.

Firefall Vale is the long, lushly green valley (prone to spring flooding) carved by Turnwurm Brook on its descent from the Thunder Peaks to join the River Immerflow. It runs for some five miles east to west, being about a mile wide at its midpoint and much narrower at both ends. At its eastern end, the Vale hooks to the southeast, and ends at the Cascades, a series of falls that brings the Brook down into it from a higher, narrower 'upper Vale' that runs for another two miles southeast back into the mountains.

Vale folk keep many small flocks of sheep and goats are kept in the upper Vale and in the many small, nameless valleys around the Vale itself. The Vale is bordered and surrounded by knife-sharp rocky ridges, and there are rumored to be 'ghost dragons' lurking in the nearby peaks, one of which is Mount Glendaborr.

The nearest neighboring noble holdings are Hawkhar to the northwest (high rolling hills where fine horses are bred and reared for sale) held by House Indesm, and Galdyn's Gorge, south along the Immerflow (known for its gorge-side caverns where mushrooms are grown, gems mined, and vralo, a VERY strong-flavored mushroom wine, is made), home of House Yellander.

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(Vralo, pronounced "vrAL-oh," is an amber-hued drink made by adding fermented mushroom essence, the juice produced when certain smoky-tasting small, brown, and wrinkled cavern mushrooms are crushed, to an undistinguished sour white wine made locally from grapes and known to most as "horsepiss." It's very much an acquired taste, but many Vale folk seem to have done the necessary acquiring.)

Firefall Keep is a much smaller small stone fortress since the events of STORMLIGHT. Its formerly predominant Haunted Tower, Twilight Turret, Hall of Honor, and Gargoyle Stair are all gone, leaving it much changed.

Today, the oldest and tallest part of the castle is the West Front of three original towers (Darkwind, Nalvor's, and Scorchedshields), with their tall, north-south linking wall. Darkwind, the northernmost of the three, is linked by a battlement running east to the North Room (a semi-circular dining hall raised atop the rebuilt kitchens and pantries). From the North Room, the outer walls run southeast to a new, smaller tower, Ladytower, where the walls turn south for a short run to the matching new tower of Braceguilt.

Ladytower is the living quarters of the current Lord and Lady Summerstar, and Braceguilt contains guest apartments (with the quarters of the seneschal and guards at ground level, beneath them).

The original gate between Nalvor's and Scorchedshields opens west onto the end of the coach road linking Firefall with the rest of Cormyr, as it always did, and a second gate, between Ladytower and Braceguilt, now opens east into the rest of the Vale.

A modest battlement wall runs east from Scorchedshields to a large, misshapen new tower known as the Armory. From there the wall turns northeast for a short run to Braceguilt, completing the outside edge of the Keep and enclosing a large courtyard now largely given over to gardens. The stables and granary cellars run along the inside of this south wall, and there are known to be underground passages beneath the courtyard and the ring of battlement walls linking all of the Keep towers to each other and to the (original) Summerstars crypt and dungeons.

It's not necessary to pass through the Keep to enter and leave the Vale: a wide wooden bridge arches over Turnwyrn Brook just west of the castle, and carries the main cart-road over to the south bank of the Brook and along it east into the Vale proper. For most of the length of the Vale, cart-tracks run along both banks of the Brook, and are linked by cross-bridges at Dunstone Farm, Marthtree, and Bottomstones (at the base of the Cascades). Only agile hikers can ascend beyond Bottomstones, but there are rope-anchors (huge rings hammered into the rocks) to allow heavy goods to be raised or lowered from one Vale to another. At least one person took a cart up into the upper Vale in this manner, but carts can't pass freely from one Vale to another except in a spectacularly crashing descent.

After the events of STORMLIGHT, the war wizard Sir Broglan Sarmyn wed Lady Shayna Summerstar, and was created Lord Summerstar in his own right. Broglan and Shayna have three children. In order of birth, they are Ileira (daughter, now four years of age), Storm (daughter, now two, and yes, named for Storm Silverhand, a naming that some say caused Lady Margort Summerstar to die of mortification), and Rauvoril (son, just approaching his first birthday).

The battles in STORMLIGHT took a heavy toll; the only other Summerstars still living are Thalance and Erlandar. Thalance spends most of his time in Suzail these days, making friends and seducing ladies with energy enough to have some chance at catching up to the exploits and reputation of his Uncle Erlandar, who has settled into being the Lord Warden (captain of the guard and police) of the Vale, and slowed his seductions to one or two per season.

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Broglan and Shayna are a happy couple, and their kindnesses and sharings of food and shelter in winter have made them much loved by the several hundred folk who call the Vale home. They are widely regarded as "good" and "just" by the locals, whose loyalty is strong-and bolstered by the fact that Cormyr often seems to reach out with cordial interest to Firefall Vale. Part of that is due to Eargluth Rowanmantle, still Boldshield of Northtrees March, part to Broglan's rank as a War Wizard, and part to Storm Silverhand's deeds in STORMLIGHT.

Harpers and War Wizards are now most welcome in Firefall Keep, and the place has become something of a retirement destination for folk of Cormyr whose colourful pasts or careers lead them to seek seclusion. These retirees have considerable coin to invest, and are sponsoring the transport of the goods of local artisans who craft pretty (and inexpensive) jewelry by cutting and polishing tiny sections of certain local stones and stringing them into bracelets, pectorals, and necklaces to markets in Arabel and Suzail, where these affordable adornments are gaining great popularity among the merchant classes.

The Vale proper has many spreading blueleaf trees (and in the upper Vale, even a few weirwoods), but is dominated by small farm fields bounded by rubble-stone walls. Most Vale farmers dwell in single-story cottages built of fieldstone where two or more field-walls meet, and roofed in wooden shingles or slates, sealed with pitch. The homes have storage cellars beneath, because long, harsh winters force prudent folk to preserve and store a lot of food and drink. Bitter-root beer and goat cheeses thickly sealed in wax are staples of such larders, and mint and "rock fur" (lichen) jellies are popular homemade condiments.

Vale farms produce local food crops (radishes, cabbages, apples, nuts, and potatoes), chickens, and hogs. The morning and evening mists coupled with bright hours of sunlight have always made this tiny area a verdant, prosperous slice of paradise, and young sons of the Vale seeking work have always been able to find it as foresters working the verges of the Hullack, or in Purple Dragon service, just as daughters have traditionally traveled to larger cities in Suzail and sought service in the households of nobles, proudly proclaiming their Summerstar training. Storm visits the Vale seldom, usually arriving by night and teleport, to a room in the Keep that's been set aside for her. When upset, Lord Broglan has been known to go alone to this room to think or pray-and it's a measure of the deep love between Shayna and Broglan, and her regard for Storm, that this has never caused friction between them (indeed, certain Keep folk say that on the occasion of a great fight between the Lord and Lady, and when Rauvoril's birth turned difficult, the two magically called to the Bard of Shadowdale for aid, and she came).

This is not to say that all is sweetness and light in Firefall. Fell beasts have begun to prowl out of the Hullack Forest, and there are rumors that some folk among the wealthy arrivals who've built mansions along the coach road just west of the Keep are engaged in illicit practises and trade. Rumors have a tendency to paint darker portraits than truth, but local whispers include suspicions of agents and trade in drugs and poisons involving Zhentarim, Red Wizards, and a wide variety of Sembian interests who lack all respect for Cormyrean law. The whispers inevitably continue on to speak of all manner of plots against the Crown, trading (smuggling and slaving) cabals among various nobles, and so on -- and there's even talk that the Harpers are hiding something (or someone) very important in the Vale.

"Well, now," as Elminster would say. With a chuckle. "Well, now . . ."

End of Edspeak. Hi, all. The Hooded One here.

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Checking my own extensive Realms notes, I'm certain that this is the first time Ed has revealed any of this (beyond the opening summary of STORMLIGHT's contents) in print, so . . . another scroll for Candlekeep, I guess, Alaundo. Whee.

By the way, Rad: thank you very much for asking this question. It prompted me to get out my copy of STORMLIGHT and re-read it. Nude wood-chopping scene and all, it's VERY well-written, and I'd almost forgotten that. I had remembered that Storm was the Marchioness Immerdusk, so my mind isn't going completely. :) Ed did tell me that he's going to be VERY busy "taming Waterdeep" for the rest of March, folks, so his replies may drop off somewhat. However, I'm sure I can wheedle answers out of him if your questions are interesting enough. I do good wheedle. :}

On March 5, THO said: I can answer that one without Ed (I hope). Lord Uldonner Erendin (I MIGHT have the spelling wrong, but I don't think so) is a gruff retired successful warrior now dabbling at becoming a wizard. His tall, beautiful warrior daughter, Nlatha [again, sp] is a much better mage. Hawkhill is a tiny, rural 'border barony' on the very edge of northeastern Amn, up in the mountains. Basically, to cut down on smuggling, slaving, and brigandry, the least populated fringes of Amn are populated with a string of small, "no one has ever heard of them" baronies, usually consisting of a single keep given for free to a successful adventurer-type. He gets to keep all taxes he raises and a share of monies on goods sold by 'his people' (usually in return to paying for the transport of their goods into the rest of Amn), and he's supposed to keep the peace, mainly by killing outlaws and prowling monsters. Some of the bodyguards for each 'border baron' are usually spies for Amnian authorities, to make sure no border baron is 'on the take' and allowing smugglers and outlaws to operate under his protection.

The Baron of Hawkhill is a buffoon and a lecher, but is also just and brave. His daughter (whom all the males in the barony swoon over) mothers him (his wife is long dead) and is the REAL power in Hawkhill. Ed has used this setting in "Spellstorm" and a bunch of other adventures he's run at conventions, down the years, including "Thraldigar's Tower," "Mousehole," and "Lord Levraunt's Left Nostril."

Your obedient source of arcane Realmslore,
The Hooded One

On March 5, 2004 THO said: zeathiel, Ed recently wrote a long, exhaustive list of Khelben and Laeral's Blackstaff Tower apprentices for use in two WotC novels, but I'm afraid they'll have to stay "off limits" until those novels are published (in case the authors make changes). Elminster's 'new Lhaeo' is an upcoming Realmslore WotC website column topic, and the same column is currently running a series on Alustriel's consort (not an apprentice, but offers access to the High Lady for your PCs if they run into him). I'll fire your request off to Ed, and see what happens. Considering how many of the 'Mages Mighty' are being used by Realms fiction authors and his dislike of screwing up forthcoming novels with contradictions, he may avoid answering about some of the listed NPCs, but...we'll see. :}

March 6, 2004: Missed, Dargoth? Never! Ed speaks:

Kameron, no coverage of the Adder Swamp city in Serpent Kingdoms, as I recall, but I do vaguely remember 2nd Edition coverage of it. I'll have to check my notes, and with Eric (who

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created much Realmslore when at work on POWERS AND PANTHEONS and sourcebooks of that ilk). Hmm . . . you've got me looking forward to your novel . . . :}

Hi, Dargoth. Well, here's the best I can do right now, re. answers to these:

1. I've created extensive lists of drinkables, recipes, and suchlike for inns, but always avoided doing direct real-world equivalents, especially for "mixed drinks" or "cocktails." However, you will find many notations in my published writings along the lines of 'firewine tastes somewhat like a cross between RealWorldA and RealWorldB.' To help you with this specific query, however, here are the general guidelines: in the warmer climes (ending, as one goes northwards, at about Amn), drinks may sometimes be blended for taste reasons (or mixed with fresh fruit juices), but are almost never deliberately made stronger by combining one alcoholic drinkable with another.

However, from Westgate northwards, and Beregost northwards on the Sword Coast, most inns and taverns serve fortified drinkables. These are of two sorts: the booze that 'the house' adulterates habitually and 'everybody knows about,' and mixed drinks that are done on the spot, at the request of a patron or upon a patron accepting a clear offer of "warming" a drink.

The first sort of "warmed" drinks include zzar and what's called "deep ale" or "fire ale" (beer to which a grain-based spirit has been added). These may be watered to make them go farther if the taste is harsh (and of course to save the establishment some coins), and also often fortified with distilled spirits (usually potato-based, in other words close to what we'd call vodka: essentially clear, colorless, and tasteless).

The second sort of "warmed" drinks only approach the elaborate recipes of our real-world cocktails in places like Waterdeep, Silverymoon, Luskan, Neverwinter, Sembia, Westgate, and the coastal ports of the Dragonreach. Usually they're simple "warm your wine by stirring in a little throatslake, goodsir?" concoctions ("throatslake" being the generic term for a distilled spirit such as gin, bourbon, vodka, whiskey, et al). If the throatslake has a strong taste that clashes with the wine, the result can be, well, horrible. :}

Years back, one of my players spent a gaming weekend at our cottage serving us all various cocktails and giving them Realms names, so I can give you here what I can remember of her admittedly short list (of course, you'd have to rename all the ingredients to make them fit the Realms, too, and I've never bothered):

Angel's Kiss: Tansar's Dance
Buck's Fizz: Marthoun's Flagon
Cherry Sling: Dragondown
Daiquiri: Ladydagger
Gimlet: Bright Blade
Margarita (Strawberry): Wyvernblood
Mint Julep: Sea Ward Slake
Pina Colada: Snowfire
Port and Starboard: Nightfire
Rickey (Gin): Lightning Bolt
Rob Roy: Battle Banner
Rusty Nail: Merchants' Tears
Rum Eggnog: Harbour Foam
Stone Fence: Stag At Bay
Tequila Sunrise: Caravan Lantern

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I accept NO responsibility for what happens if these are used in play sessions. * My * players are more than crazed enough without alcoholic aid.

2. Storm's longtime consort and adventuring companion, Maxan Maxer, died in the Year of the Broken Blade in Dloemen, a ruined, long-uninhabited city north of Escalant (that is now, with the magic of the demons gone, flooded by the waters of the Umber Marshes). At the time, the marilith Araunrhee was using it as a base, and from it commanding a sizeable force of tanar'ri to raid the surrounding lands. Her servitors were allowed to devour all animals they found, but were under orders to seize all humans and bring them to a "temple" at the heart of Dloemen. There the marilith sacrificed them in a ritual designed to gain their life-force for her own, so she could increase her personal powers and rise to dominance over all mariliths. Araunrhee had been performing the ritual for some years with apparent success; it's not known if she was manipulated into this (or given knowledge of the ritual by) a deity or a more powerful demon. Maxer fought his way to Araunrhee and wounded her gravely, whereupon she beheaded him and then teleported herself away-taking his body and head with her.

The destruction of Araunrhee's tanar'ri force, temple, and magically-charged altar led to destructive "spell storms" in southern Thay for more than a year, as the violently-released magic surged across the land like ripples in water.

A SPOILER for STORMLIGHT follows: Maxer returned to Storm, alive and whole, at the end of the novel, and from then until now, has remained her consort.

However, Maxer gained a magical means of invisibility when escaping from Araunrhee (during a pitched battle between Araunrhee and a balor, Olorkroth). He grew so comfortable using invisibility as he made his way back to the Realms and his lady that he uses it still, preferring to hide from most folk of Shadowdale and observe. In this way he can spy for Storm, guard her farm when she's away, fetch and carry for her -- and have her to himself when she has privacy and leisure (which is seldom). As a result, very few people in Shadowdale know of his return, though (thanks to the doings of Sylune, Maxer, and some Harpers) word has spread that her farm is "haunted." Maxer is a sensitive, understanding, and kind man who foresees and anticipates very well. In the 2nd Edition shorthand Jeff Grubb and I devised for FRA, he's a CG hm Bard of unknown levels (7+); if twisting that into 3rd Edition terms, he should have fighter- and thief-related prestige classes involving agility, juggling, and/or entertaining. He should not be confused with either the beholder Manxam, or the Cormyrean wizard Maxer.

Sorry, no Serpent cult or Bane involvement in his demise -- and sorry, I can't (yet) provide more information as to how he got his head back and regained life. Heh-heh; pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

3. I'm glad you like the skeletons adventure in the original, award-winning LORDS OF DARKNESS. So did I, but I'm afraid I had no hand in writing it. I wrote the lich adventure and all of the "framing chapters" of that book (the spells, the wardings and antidotes, the alternative draining rules, and so on).

As to the Barrowfields, however, there I can be of (minor) help. The FRCS, Volo's Guide To the Dalelands (the most extensive entry: you don't need the other two if you have this one), and The Dalelands 2nd Edition accessory all mention the Barrowfields, but let's recap: about thirty miles east of Peldan's Helm is a large, grassy glen (in this case, a broad stream valley or basin whose stream has 'gone under,' leaving no visible surface water) in which "a dozen or more" old mounds stand. Mists from the River Ashaba often cling to them, and (of course) they're said to be haunted.

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There are actually sixteen grass-covered mounds, each about two hundred feet long and rising about twenty feet from the surrounding earth with fairly gentle side-slopes and more abrupt end-slopes. They all run in the same north-south direction, parallel to each other, like glacial drumlins.

If adventurers visit the barrows by day, they'll be aware of nothing more than an unpleasant feeling of being watched. If they try 'prying magics,' or sleep near the barrows, their minds will be invaded by disturbing visions of silently menacing robed watchers -- who if confronted will prove to be wraiths with skull-heads that melt away when revealed.

If any of the barrows (all of which lack visible doors, though many have grassed-over pits in their sides from early diggings) are dug into or blasted open, skeletons will be revealed (in 3rd Edition, "Human Warrior Skeleton" undead, about ten percent having odd magical abilities such as: split into two intact skeletons if touched by a spell; able to blink about to attack, able to deliver various touch-attack magics, and so on). These will all attack fearlessly and tirelessly, pursuing all living creatures to the edge of the glen or until destroyed. "Slain" skeletons will crumble into dust. If you introduce a Shade necromancer, of course, these skeletons would become perfectly obedient troops under the necromancer's command.

The main 'monsters' of the barrows are wraith-like undead Netherese who are linked to specific magic items (mainly wands and scepters) buried in the barrows -- if the items are carried off, the wraiths (which can't be turned) go with them. If a wraith is destroyed, it vanishes back into the magic item, only to emerge some days later and attack again. (Adventurers can wield the item and call on its powers, but don't gain any measure of control over the wraiths linked to it.) Items with wraiths "inside" them become more difficult to destroy, but breaking such an item releases the wraiths in a VERY powerful, item-is-ground-zero explosion of withering unlife. In 3rd Edition terms, I'd make these dread wraiths, except that their 'spawn' rise instantly as controlled zombies, not wraithlike creatures, they aren't harmed in any way by sunlight, and they can't be turned, rebuked, commanded, or bolstered (they can be 'destroyed' in battle, but not disrupted -- except by breaking the item they're linked to, which destroys them in the explosion I referred to earlier).

Hidden in the heart of some of the barrows are whatever variants of powerful lichs you want to introduce into your campaign. In the 'home' Realms campaign, one of the inadvertently-freed inhabitants of the Barrowfields was a "flying skull" type of lich that lurked unseen, as much as possible, observing the living and manipulating individuals (often wizards of low level) by means of silently-cast spells into doing things it wanted done or even becoming thralls who served it for years. This entity became a long-term behind-the-scenes foe of the Knights just because they were present in the Dales as do-gooders, and it wanted to expand its influence across the Dales, ruler by ruler, without hindrance.

There is a 'dungeon' of sorts linking two of the barrows (a single-level labyrinth of burial chambers and passages), but as the Knights were never foolish enough to delve that far, my notes on it are safely packed up and lost in the infamous Basement Boxes. So have fun putting whatever you want down there. An ancient portal to somewhere interesting in Faerun would be fun.

If you have access to the EPIC LEVEL HANDBOOK, a Worm That Walks can 'stand in' for the unique undead mage I had lurking near the Barrowfields in the 'home' Realms campaign. This fell creature, Halamorthaun, came to be in the battles that laid waste to Cormanthyr (though it lay dormant and unnoticed for centuries) and during the present day lurks near the barrows, observing who visits and revealing itself in attacks only on those it judges weak and isolated enough to destroy without being seen by others.

Heh-heh. Enjoy. :}

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So endeth the words of Ed.

The Hooded One here, with just one additional comment: "My players are more than crazed enough without alcoholic aid" is putting it mildly. He may recall my once dissolving chocolates into the whiskey after the Bailey's ran out. :) None of us are drinkers these days, I hasten to inform the world, but we were younger then, and Ed's cottage sessions tended to be in very hot weather, and two of us DID work in breweries one year, and had our own microbrewery the next year. Their "best bitters" was about 12 percent alcohol, I believe (none of your 'water in a can' American light stuff). In fact, I remember the windowsill of the gaming cottage displaying a neat row of about twenty 1-litre plastic empties after a long, hard day of gaming. :}

On March 6, THO said: Why, yes, SiriusBlack, I cannot lie to thee. :}

Waterdeep IS one of those two novels . . . but the list was REALLY needed for the other one.

Your mysterious servant,
The Hooded One
[exit, winking]

March 6, 2004: Ed speaks once more:

zeathiel, that's one BIG request. :}

And, yes, I'm going to slice it down to something a lot smaller. First off, The Hooded One is correct: Khelben is off-limits right now (and of necessity, Laeral with him).

I'm going to chop things down still farther. All of the Mages Mighty you list have been around for centuries, if not longer. They have collectively acquired thousands of apprentices who are now ex-apprentices (Vangerdahast being one of Elminster's, for instance), some of them friendly towards their former tutors, and some of them decidedly hostile. However, the thrust of your query implies access to the ear or cachet of the Mage Mighty without the actual presence, on-stage in play, of said Grande Fromage, so I'm going to sweep my hands and clear those thousands of ex-apprentices off the table. (Ah, 'tis GOOD to be King!)

So that leaves us with current apprentices of Mages Mighty, and me still staring at a roster list that tops a hundred individuals, and at a calendar that indicates very clearly when my next novel is due (and, for that matter, the one after that). So something(s) else must give.

Let's dump Elminster, because the Realmslore column is going to eventually get around to the current impostor who wears Lhaeo's face in Shadowdale, and because the Old Mage tends to keep other apprentices in a somewhat unorthodox fashion: he leaves them residing wherever they are and 'drops in on them,' often unexpectedly, to teach a single spell or aid them in solving or practicing something, dispenses some (manipulative) information to them, and vanishes again. Such apprentices are hardly going to provide access to Old El himself, nor dare to impart much gossip about him or words he's said to them. All of the Seven enjoy such relationships with various longtime apprentices (and Harpers who've never formally entered into an apprenticeship arrangement, too), and I'm going to exclude all of them, too.

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If I sound slippery here, well: yup. I'm acutely aware of the danger of damaging other writer's as-yet-unpublished Realms projects, and revealing too much for the comfort of various Dungeon Masters (who may well have created their own apprentice NPCs, and strung plots thereto). So I'm also going to categorically state that any apprentices I mention aren't the ONLY current apprentices of the Mage Mighty in question (and also quietly drop some of the other Mages Mighty, such as Halaster, because of other writers' projects).

Furthermore, my postings via The Hooded One are already wordy enough, so forget 3.5e stat blocks: I see nothing wrong with my old 2ndEd FRA shorthand ("NG hm W16" being a neutral good human male wizard of sixteenth level). You don't even need that much for the four apprentices of the Simbul (see page 111 of UNAPPROACHABLE EAST and a few scenes in ELMINSTER IN HELL for their speech and characters).

So I'm down to Alustriel (see how unadroit that was? :}), which by happy chance was your particular interest. Now, Alustriel is in the habit of teaching all sorts of folks in Silverymoon who've pleased her a spell or two (in the casual manner referred to above), and (with Taern and various members of the Spellguard or even Laeral) "testing" both Spellguard members and mysterious visitors to the city to determine their loyalties and characters, often with "a spell new to them" as a lure. However, among all her former-and-not-yet-quite-ex apprentices in the Marches, she does have three hitherto-unrevealed current apprentices:

Jemmethra Halatarn: NG hf Sor4/W6, a petite, plain-looking young woman who has disconcertingly large and bright blue eyes (and a poker face), speaks softly and sparingly, habitually dresses in unadorned dusty gray cloaks, gowns, jerkins, and breeches (she has black velvet for formal wear), and always walks or trots (some servants would say "scuttles") about quietly (preferring to go barefoot indoors whenever etiquette doesn't forbid it). Jemmethra came to Silverymoon from mistreatment as a 'house servant' (unofficial slave) in the household of a High Captain of Luskan. Her magical abilities both thrill and terrify her, and she fled to Silverymoon -- alone, afoot, and overland -- because she heard it was "a city of wizards and minstrels and laughter." Encountering Alustriel in the streets at night by chance, she boldly asked the High Lady for apprenticeship without quite knowing who Alustriel was -- and to the astonishment of most Silvaeren, Alustriel accepted her to gave her living quarters in the Palace. Jemmethra has come to worship Alustriel, and often (zealously) serves her as an errand- and message-runner, spy, and fetch-and-carry servant. She has access to Alustriel at any time of day or night, and in any circumstances except private moots with other Chosen. However, Taern is as suspicious of Jemmethra as he is of anyone who can get close to Alustriel, and Jemmethra's mind is magically probed twice or thrice daily by various Spellguard 'on duty' mages. Thus far, no one has tried to impersonate Jemmethra, and her loyalties have proven stainless.

Narandar Torstin: LG hm W10, a tall, broad-shouldered, amiable-looking young man cursed with a "misshapen potato" of a nose and long, luxuriously-flowing blond hair that he dyed silver in a successful attempt to attract Alustriel's notice (but which now crumbles and breaks under the dye, so he has shoulder-length, brittle piebald-looking locks). He's a trifle hesitant of speech and manner, and has just a touch of haughty pride, and came to Silverymoon on a caravan from Amn six seasons ago seeking someone who could teach him wizardry. The son of a merchant who'd stolen a dozen spellbooks years before, Narandar sought audience with Alustriel because he didn't know who the tomes belonged to, and wanted to study from them -- but also didn't want to break any Silvaeren laws or be accused or attacked as a thief (a Zhentarim mage launched several magical attacks on the caravan to get at a trade rival, but Narandar thought the spells were aimed at him, and were the work of a mage trying to recover a spellbook). The High Lady examined both Narandar's mind and his books, and decided his best fate would be to stand as her apprentice, if he desired to. He very much desired to, and has served her as a confidant, personal envoy, and dresser ever since (he not only helps to select clothing for Alustriel, he

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orders garments made, pays for them and picks them up, and sees to her clothes-cleaning -- seeing nothing at all undignified in this).

In return, she's stood at his side through several weepingly unsuccessful attempts to find a 'lady love' in Silverymoon, and through some spectacularly embarrassing spellcasting humiliations (such as the time he tried to adorn Alustriel's garments with a handful of gems at a revel, and succeeded only in melting away the garments of everyone in the room), and they've become good friends. Narandar is the only person in the Palace who daily dares to joke with Alustriel and speak to her with the casual rudeness and blunt criticism of a street friend -- but he worships her, and she knows it.

Zelauma Telthornstars: CG half-elf W9, a free-spirited, always-laughing imp of a bouncy lass with large, liquid blue-green eyes, lush figure and features. She sees the safety and beauty of Silverymoon as a cradle of mirth and 'human nature' amusement, and intrigues as fascinating entertainments. The most recent of Alustriel's apprentices, Zelauma was orphaned when a disease carried off her mother (orc blades had reaped her human father years before), and found her own way overland from their wilderland steading to the only place she knew of that had an abundance of food, warmth, and folk: Silverymoon. There she indulged her love of climbing things to scale buildings and peer in windows, watching Silvaeren private life and considering it one great passing parade of entertainment. Sleeping on rooftops and occasionally hiring herself out as a roof-tile replacer and painter (thanks to her fearless and nimble climbing skills), Zelauma was noticed by a Spellguard mage long before her coins ran out and she'd have been forced to either steal or starve.

Thinking her a thief but not wanting to blast her without proof, the mage reported Zelauma to Taern -- and Alustriel happened to arrive, overhear, and take an interest. Finding Zelauma watching revel through a window from atop an ornamental spire some seventy feet above the street, the High Lady greeted her cordially, they talked, and a few minutes later descended magically together, with Zelauma now Alustriel's apprentice.

She's still an impish (but gentle, not cruel) prankster, and loves to climb (especially when restless or upset), but she's also rapidly becoming a mage of skill, and (to put it bluntly) is hopelessly in love with Alustriel. She's aware that she's third in rank among the High Lady's apprentices and quite content to remain so -- but fully intends, decades from now, to still be serving Alustriel when everyone else has departed or turned away.

And there you have it. I'm revising my own Silverymoon notes right now.

The Hooded One

March 6, 2004: Oh, almost forgot. Ed told me the queries re. Athalantar and other "vanished Realms" are off-limits for now because of forthcoming products (and that after certain products see print, he'll be happy to provide more lore if they haven't). Do you have the DRAGON issue that deals with Athalantar?

On March 7, 2004 THO said: Narad Bladesinger, that's a question Ed can't answer. Vaasa, Damara (a country name also used by fantasy author Robin McKinley) and Bloodstone Pass were all added by TSR to Ed's Realms (as was the name "Galena Mountains," after a retreat the TSR execs went to, I'm told). They rolled back Ed's glacier to put them there.

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Maybe Mike Dobson, who was the creative head honcho of TSR at the time, knows who came up with the name. I asked Ed, and he confirmed that the first he knew about it was when products started coming out with those names and places in them. His Assassin's Run module from DRAGON was put into a Bloodstone module, and was a complete astonishment to him, as I recall. :}

On March 7, 2004 THO said: Now, now, down boy! No hood, no top -- hey, we're all old friends, and it gets HOT in that cottage. I WAS wearing my bikini briefs.

Blueblade, I will say this: in just my skin, I'm easier on your eyes than Ed is. But then again I will NEVER have a Santa beard. :}

March 7, 2004: Ed writes: Yes, Damian & Liz,

I did keep the 1st edition bards. From a game design standpoint they "progress" in levels too quickly, but that doesn't matter a whit in a 'roleplaying over rules' campaign of the sort I run, and every rules choice is done by votes. My characters took one look at the "you can use 1st Ed characters alongside 2nd Ed" TSR text and said, "Right-o! So we pick and choose what we like of the new, right?"

So, of course, we did. :}

Play never took us to a bardic school ("directly onstage" as it were), but I did locate a few, Jeff Grubb and I discussed this briefly, and Steve Schend pinpointed them all. I'm deep in Waterdeep now and don't know if I dare call Steven (our phone calls tend to last for literally hours, which just please our phone companies very much) right now, but perhaps you can hail him on the REALMS-list and he can dredge up the complete list. I must confess I've forgotten, other than there was a bardic academy of some sort in Silverymoon.

The Hooded One (who thanks you for not asking about hoods and bikinis and drinks. :})

March 7, 2004: Here respondeth Ed:

Well, Blueblade, let's see. You won't see the first of the Knights trilogy until 2006, I believe, and the plan is that they be published once a year after that. However, the outline for the first book has been approved, so I can tell you a very small amount about it.

As things stand right now, with the book unwritten, the narrative should begin in upland Cormyr, looking over Florin Falconhand's shoulder, as events unfold that will lead to the formation of the adventuring band that will later become known as the Knights of Myth Drannor, and the granting of their royal charter.

If you have access to the old FR7 HALL OF HEROES tome, you know a little about the early history of the Knights, and who the major surviving Knights are. A glance at that book should also tell you that I haven't a hope in the Nine Hells of covering even a twentieth of the Knights' adventures (assuming you wanted to read endless "and then they did this, and then they did that"

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accounts) in three books, even if every volume was allowed to be longer than the three LOTR tomes (which they're not) and even if I was in Tolkien's league as a writer (which I'm not). So you are NOT going to see anything approaching a comprehensive chronological novel covering the careers of the Knights. As you know, I like to 'pull in' the focus of the story to follow individual characters, rather than doing the DeMille-style "rock the Realms" grand catastrophes, so you can guess at the storytelling style.

Hard news about the content, and which Realms NPCs are going to appear? Nope, sorry, not yet. If the head of Book Publishing reads this and implores me to Spill All, okay, but I won't be expecting his call. We have several other projects to take care of first.

On the other hand, it's early enough along yet that if there's something you're dying to see in the Knights trilogy, post it here. That goes for everyone, of course, and there's no guarantee I'll follow any of the suggestions. As I said, the outline for the first book is firm, and I know what ground I want to cover in the trilogy. But I DO listen. After all, I do this for you folks. (My grandparents wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer, and make millions more than the Realms has ever made me. One judge who presided over a mock trial and saw me perform said I was the best trial lawyer she'd ever seen in all of her years on the bench. And I hated every moment of it, and would much rather be spinning tales of the Realms for all of you.)

Right now, it's back to a certain tense confrontation in a room somewhere in Waterdeep, where an angry Master Stoneworker is tongue-lashing young nobles...

So endeth the words of Ed. In May, BTW, he'll be doing the ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER book tour (mainly in Ontario, Canada, I believe). So if any of you want books signed, and a chance to chat with the Bearded One himself . . . I hear that the store in Cobourg even plans to have an open bar. :}

Yours as ever,
The (full dressed, SORRY there, Blueblade :}) Hooded One

(P.S. Please Alaundo and everyone, don't jump down Blueblade's throat. I'm having fun flirting, and don't mind what he or any of you ask me.)

March 8, 2004: Hello, Elfinblade. I passed your post on to Ed, and his reply has come back: 1. Halaster has been around for a LONG time, and for almost all of that time he's been an enigma. Steven Schend and I pretty well agreed that he was only insane as long as he was in Undermountain, and it seems that 'the new' Mystra has freed him from the worst magical effects of its thrall, returning him to sanity. She did NOT make him a Chosen, but instead made a 'separate peace' with him, giving him the status of a free-willed agent (from time to time she'll ask him to do something for her, with new spells or augmented powers as his reward or price, but she will do absolutely nothing to coerce him into service, nor look upon him unfavorably if he refuses).

Whether he'll become a threat to the wider Realms, or a 'good guy,' depends on him. Right at the moment, I personally have no plans for a Halaster novel, but it wouldn't surprise me if the good folks at WotC are pondering this topic for some scribe's pen. He is a perfect main character for a pull-out-the-stops spellhurling novel, after all. :}

2. SPOILER ALERT! "STORMLIGHT" NOVEL SPOILER ALERT!

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Yes, I do think the return of Bane would make an excellent novel, and it's something some fans have been clamouring for, lo these passing years. Unfortunately, I don't decide what novels get written, so I can't 'make it so.' I DID hint for years that Bane had survived within his son Xvim, and even wrote a novel (STORMLIGHT, published back in 1996) that featured an attempt by an avatar of Bane to re-ascend to godhood, but I personally prefer 'smaller stories' about individual mortals who don't have great personal power, and don't get involved with the gods. Looking back over the Realms novels I've published, you can see that my personal preferences don't have all that much to do with what gets published. :}

3. I am not now, and have never been, an employee of either TSR or WotC (freelancer, yes, consultant, yes, but not on staff, various magazine editor titles notwithstanding), so although the original Realms agreement means I'm SUPPOSED to be kept fully informed about all forthcoming Realms products, licenses, and plans, in practise it doesn't always reliably happen. I do work with the Realms book team whenever and however possible, on the understanding, of course, that I keep silent about what I know.

I can confirm, because it's already been revealed by WotC, that the Year of Rogue Dragons will be marked by a trilogy of dragon-related novels by Richard Lee Byers, an anthology of Realms short stories entitled Realms of Dragons, and that dragons will appear in ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. If you look back over the Roll of Years and the 'real years' in which the Realms has been published, you'll readily see that the year names I devised so long ago (the decades surrounding 'Year Zero' for the Old Gray Box are all on my original yearname-roster) have inspired all sorts of Realms-shaking fun. In fact, we've done GenCon seminars at which panels of Realms experts speculated about what an upcoming year name might mean, in terms of Realms events. So, keep pondering those year names...

Wishlist entreaties duly noted. I'll see what I can do through the Realmslore column and other channels, but it will take some time before you see anything, for two reasons: I must make sure I'm not blundering through secret WotC product plans that are already under way, and I have a year or so 'lead time' (between handing in a finished manuscript and seeing it published) on the web columns, novels, and game products.

And there you have it. Ed sinks once back into the flowing scenes of Waterdeep, and I return to happily reading my way through all the fantasy novels he's recommended. Peace reigns over Winterkeep as the snow gently falls, and in the time I've typed this, Ed has probably finished another chapter to send to Elaine, so I'll get out of his e-way. Mustn't hold up the grand parade of Realms delights for us all!

Ye Hooded One (Yes, Blueblade, before you ask: yes . . . :})

March 9, 2004: Hello, all. The Hooded One here with Ed's latest replies (and no, Damian & Liz, I've met a lot of Clyde's models at GenCon, or seen their photos on the Virtual Gencon pages, over the years, but never modeled for any painter . . . though Ed did say the sight of me going down to skinny-dip [swim nude] in the bay in the soft light of early morning inspired him greatly :) but enough about detaching the retinae of aging gamers).

Ed speaks:

SiriusBlack, fishing will get you nowhere with me. Save it for The Hooded One. [who tells me Candlekeep has an array of smilies, but probably lacks one for the leer I'm inserting right here]. Yes, I do know what the next scene will be, and no, I'm not going to tell you. :}

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However, as a consolation prize, I'll sneak you a sentence (just one) from a story I wrote recently (well, okay, just for you, TWO sentences):

The bruising strength of his grip made her gasp, and even as she twisted furiously away, cursing her silks for their lack of handy daggers, she knew she'd been dangerously -- possibly fatally -- wrong about him.

A moment later, her fingers found what they'd been straining for . . . and a moment after that, he knew it too.

There. THAT ought to keep you going until this next answer: yes, there have been plenty of Waterdeep adventures where nobles haven't been in trouble. You just haven't seen any in print, yet. :}

And yes, I was offered jobs at TSR on several occasions. Unfortunately, game designer positions aren't very well paid (game company presidents and shareholders occasionally hit the big time and get very rich, but the "creatives" share in the riches less often), and my poorly-paid Canadian library job, with its barely-adequate medical and dental insurance coverage laid atop the government-funded medicare system, managed somehow to dwarf the salary and benefits I would have received by moving across the border -- abandoning family, friends, and fully-paid-for house. (I continue to wait patiently for the USA to provide medicare for ALL of its citizens, and no, before everyone jumps down my throat, doing so ISN'T socialism, it's something called "civilization.") None of which means I didn't LOVE to drop down to Lake Geneva and volunteer my time and writings, every year at GenCon time (and of course at the con, too). The TSR brass even checked with me one year about when I was going to arrive in town, so (I surmised later) they could show me off, hard at work in a cubicle, when they gave execs from another company "the tour" -- because that's what they did. :}

I've assisted behind the scenes on many, many Realms products down the years that don't have my name on them, and WotC did make me a consultant for a couple of years (to continue doing just that). Unfortunately, as the money dried up, I became, and am now, just another starving writer (I'm not joking: if you want to make money, becoming an electrician or a plumber is a really good idea, with doctor and lawyer waiting as alternatives for those of us with patience and money enough to jump over more hurdles first).

I do live by a personal code of ethics, so NDAs and "gentlemens' agreements" mean something, which I'm afraid in this case means, Sirius, I can tell you nothing about draconic impacts in ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER, nor speculate on just how elfkin might rise. :}

For the same reason, Dargoth, I can't comment on empires, lost or otherwise, in the context of your query.

Ah, it wounds me deeply, being so coy.

To your other questions, Dargoth:

1. If any of the Bane Liches are still left, they'll be completely insane. I'd treat them as megalomaniacal local lords or "robber baron" types, dominating tiny communities or outlaw bands in the wilderlands. Either that, or skulking around the sewers of Waterdeep or similar hideaways. Anywhere else, and their unstable "conquer all" tendencies will have led them into battle and eventual destruction long since. The problem with the Bane Liches is that their need to be tyrants far outstrips any prudence or power they possess.

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2. Shandaril is still around, but has learned the virtues of disguises and keeping hidden. So is her workbook, but I personally have no idea where it is. Ask a DM. [evil grin]

3. In the original Realms campaign, Iyachtu Xvim was Bane's mortal son born in Faerun of a human mother, and Faerun was always his home (plane). As tieflings hadn't been thought of, back then (and in fact were in the Code of Ethics 'red area' of "never, never discuss sex or its consequences" that meant we couldn't discuss the breeding of devils, or in the case of one DRAGON article had to remove the word "lovers" when describing the relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere), his (many, thanks to his habit of forcing himself on women) offspring tended to be humans, but insane and malformed (and so died young), or to grow up with 'wild talents' (in 2nd Edition terms: that is, possess minor psionic powers or innate magical abilities). Xvim never knew who they were, and they never knew their true heritage (though that doesn't mean that a returned Bane wouldn't be able to recognize the seed of his seed, on sight or in particular circumstances).

4. Bane and Shar were never siblings, but that doesn't mean the Pool author was taking liberties or getting it "wrong." It means that mortals 'know' lots of things about the gods that are just plain untrue, because gods lie to them, priests lie to them (sometimes unwittingly, through passing on church doctrine they don't know to be false or invented by a priest sitting nearby or of a previous century or three), and rumors distort everything, leading to 'common folk knowledge' that says a lot of things about the gods that aren't true. After all, almost everything we know about the Realms has come to us from Elminster -- and how do we know HE'S been straight with us, all or even part of the time? 5. I haven't seen the Players Guide, so I really can't comment on this yet. However, from the point of view of any character of Faerun who doesn't personally go planehopping often, everything I just said about the gods applies: there are all sorts of strange beliefs about matters cosmological, even among "learned" sages, and most folks have no way of knowing whether they're true or not. Which leaves you free to twist your own campaign cosmology however you see fit. I LOVE doing "D&D quantum mechanics" for my own brain-fun, but not if it's at the expense of making the day-to-day Prime Material Plane game setting interesting, colorful, and fully detailed. Look to the foundations first, and then stand on them to gaze in wonder at the stars.

Alexander, well met! Here we go:

1. Silverymoon: I wanted a northern beautiful Renaissance of human and demi-human cooperation, and thought that something a human might occasionally see in that savage Northern wilderness that would be both beautiful and breathtaking (inspiring, as our Hooded One might say :) would be a large, full moon in a clear winter sky. One of the themes or manifestations of 'good' magical power in the Realms is the hue of silver (hence the hair of the Seven Sisters), and I wanted to further evoke the Unicorn deity (sprung from the Lion and Unicorn of British nursery rhyme fame, and yes, there's a Lion deity, too), not as a homage to Zelazny's Amber (though his later use of it didn't hurt), but rather following the delightful Elizabeth Goudge childrens' novel THE LITTLE WHITE HORSE, with its Moon and Sun aspects of the Merryweather family. I needed there to be 'an outpost of sophisticated civilization' in the North because it provides a social base that can be attacked or threatened, and serve as a center for intrigue (and source of supplies) in an otherwise survivalist setting.

Selune and Shar: The same silvery moon thinking led to Selune [sorry, I can't do accent marks in my primitive e-mail setup] and her 'dark' counterpart Shar (darkness = blindness = danger = evil, whereas moonlight = visibility = aid to navigation = relative safety = factor for good). The Stratford (Ontario) production by Richard Ouzounian of Webster's THE DUCHESS OF MALFI provided

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some "costume and looks" inspiration for how an avatar or aspect of Shar might look, added to any number of "Dark Lady"/Witch images from gothic literature.

The Harpers: I wanted a Sherwood Forest band of anti-authority figures, who were revered by some common folk despite actions that are lawless, often violent, and occasionally disastrous (also echoes of how Aragorn and other Rangers are viewed in Bree, in LOTR), and I wanted the Harpers to include people clearly as sophisticated and cultured and far-thinking as any government they might oppose, so I hearkened back to Celtic bards and their role as preservers of lore/culture/wisdom, hence "Harping At Twilight" and the Harpers. I designed the Harper logo, and when Jeff Grubb saw it he immediately wanted TSR to do cloisonne pins (hey, if fans can proudly wear Starfleet insignia, why not?), though management vetoed it.

2. Yes, we'll hear more. Check the WotC website for the My Slice of Silverymoon article I did (WotC split it into parts) and the current Alustriel's Latest Consort Realmslore columns there, too. In the longer term, I hope to touch on Everlund and other northern features in that column and elsewhere. I think Rich Baker did a superb job in planning what would go into the SILVER MARCHES (and then cramming a greater amount of stuff into it than I would have believed possible), but of course in covering such a large area, we had to slight many topics. Glad you liked it, anyway!

Ah, as for Ascore, I'm afraid that must remain mysterious for now. We've had a LOT of fun over the years dancing around that (I did it with one of my Wyrms of the North, which are ALSO reappearing on the website, updated for 3e, if you missed their original 2nd Edition publications in DRAGON).

3. When writing DWARVES DEEP, editor Tim Brown asked me to create new dwarven gods and to "give Realms roots" to those already in the game (created through the pioneering work of Roger Moore in DRAGON and developed by Gary Gygax and others into the form seen in the original UNEARTHED ARCANA rulebook). Assigning this aspect to Marthammor Duin gives him a Realms purpose (in the same manner that I later -- again, because the editors wanted me to -- created Vhaeraun and Eilistraee, and their portfolios, in DROW OF THE UNDERDARK), and therefore makes the clergy and churches of such deities eminently 'playable.' I see Marthammor's faith being grudging among some elder dwarves, but more enthusiastically embraced by pragmatic younger dwarves, right across the Realms. Remember, on surface Faerun dwarves are seldom numerous and concentrated (aside from the Great Rift), so large temples and great congregations of devout dwarves are unlikely anywhere (just as you wouldn't expect to encounter abundant groups of dancing priestesses of Eilistraee in, say, the farm fields outside Waterdeep :)). How things play out in your campaign is up to you. The dwarves are on an upsurge now (made possible by the shift of the D&D rules, edition by edition, from the "humans are best" limitations of the original AD&D books, which forced designers who really thought things through to try to come up with valid longterm and large-scale reasons why elves and dwarves didn't predominate over everything, leaving humans as the henchmen, servants, and slaves), so Marthammor's faith should be strengthening, too.

4. I sure hope we'll manage to do Realms fiction and game material from the view of the common folk, but it's not something current approaches embrace, so it might have to be me putting little bits into print here and there "around the edges." A hunter/trapper in the Marches views most adventurers as 'folk with strange powers he'd best be wary of,' whose plunderings and rivalries he quite understands, but whose abilities make him uneasy. Are they favored of the gods? WHY would a priest, say, who could be safe and warm in a temple somewhere, want to go out among the lurking orcs and worse prowling monsters to get lost and freeze in the wilds? Is the man crazed?

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The Harpers and Zhents are similar forces for distant insanity, good for gossip entertainment when he hears of them -- unless or until personal encounters with members of them sway his opinions into something more definite. Unless the hunter visits Silverymoon, Luskan, Mirabar, or Everlund, he probably wouldn't have heard of the Shades (beyond rumors akin to this: "great dark magic in the desert, where they say a CITY has appeared overnight!"). Most hunter/trappers dress in, and sell, the pelts of their kills, salvage some bones for needles, etc., and eat the rest. They also know what herbs, lichens, bark, berries, and the like to harvest and eat regularly, and how to keep themselves from dysentery and weakness by balancing the diet -- as well as the rich vegetable, grain, and grasses harvest that can be gleaned during the brief but vigorous growing season in the isolated northern mountain valleys (assuming one can survive all the orcs). As for ballads, I once prepared lyrics for a dozen songs (to go to traditional English folk tunes), and even sang a few at an old GenCon (in addition to those few that snuck into print in early Realms products). I'll have to find them and get them out to Realms fans again, but it may take some time: they're somewhere in the dreaded Basement Boxes.

So endeth the words of Ed.

The Hooded One here, signing off (Sydney, eh? Well, Dargoth, I know Ed loved his visit there, with Uncle Wes and his family, during his 1994 book tour, but I only got to see Sydney briefly (and it was work-related, visiting a certain submarine base there for official purposes), so if you see someone with, as Blueblade so aptly put it, legs up to here and down to there, mixing strange drinks at one end of your gaming table, it'll probably be me (unless, of course, someone's just followed you home from the Rocks :}).

March 10, 2004: Hi, all. The Hooded One here, bearing Ed's latest answers:

Adrian Moonbow, I too would like to know what Larloch's up to -- not because I think he's planning to overthrow realms or reach out and slaughter me if I visit the Realms, but because his 'slowly, softly, quietly' intrigues and manipulations to steady gain more and more magic and knowledge about individuals in the Realms who have magic he hasn't yet acquired (or are experimenting with new castings or magic item craftings) fascinates me. Whereas Elminster and the other Chosen are tirelessly disseminating magical lore in the service of Mystra, but trying to steer who gets what to avoid reckless tyrants blowing up the entire Realms, Larloch is the silent, patient sponge who long ago gained enough stuff to shatter Faerun, but just goes on quietly grabbing more.

No, I don't think adventurers often get far enough to really pester him, given all the liches he can throw at them as defenders. I see him as viewing adventurers as the equivalent of television: a parade of entertainment laid on for his amusement, too much 'the same' from day to day to be really enthralling, but worth a glance and a laugh now and then.

Lantan is of course 'on the list' of places to deal with, eventually (watch upcoming Realmslore columns for more about a different thus-far-neglected island), but in general I see two factors at work governing what fantastic gadgets from Lantan get into circulation: price (how many folk in the Realms will pay serious coin for, say, a clockwork toy, or even a clock when the sun and local religious observances govern daily events, and in daily society no one makes or keeps appointments "by the minute" or "on the hour"? palaces and temples have their own timekeeping, and no one else lives that way) and self-control: really powerful weapons (beyond individual battlefield firearms and the printing press, which have already found their ways onto the mainland) are probably either kept on Lantan, or are sent out of Lantan only under strict

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conditions (like having a Lantanna "minder" with them at all times, under the fiction that the gadget in question is so complex that it will only keep working under the continuous supervision and maintenance of a trained Lantanna. In other words, young maverick inventors of Lantan are going to be restricted in what they can export by their long-seeing seniors (who thanks to the religion of Gond have the moral authority to do so).

If you're at all interested in steampunk, a within-Lantan campaign might be the way to go, and I'd put it on two levels: secret inventions of sophistication being kept within families (just as the noble houses of Waterdeep show off some things at revels, but keep others as dark secrets), and a public (that is, openly within Lantan) mechanization that's about at the level of what Phil and Kaja Foglio have depicted in their marvellous GIRL GENIUS comics, with machines known as "clanks" and whatnot.

Whether or not the published Lantan ends up looking like this or not, Lantan is the "sleeping giant" on the Realms scene, with the potential to rise to become an alternative to magic, but easily kept down to the status of "oddiy" if players and DMs don't want technology to play that large a role in their games.

Lashan, I did indeed create and name the Vast. I don't know exactly when the small fishing port grew into a city or acquired the name Tantras (I can tell you what afternoon * I * named it that, but that's hardly the same thing :)), but I see it as not gaining its importance to the faith of Torm until relatively recently (two to three centuries ago). I do know that the temple of Torm in Tantras began as a shrine in a modest manor house, the Loyal House, and that the manor was soon expanded and fortified to become The True and Loyal House, and that devout worshippers of Torm built houses all around it, forming their own neighbourhood of the city. As the power and influence of the clergy of Torm grew, Tormites became scattered all over the growing-around-its-port city, and rebuilt and greatly expanded True and Loyal House is, yes, now known as The Temple of Torm's Coming (for obvious reasons).

The coopers, cabinetmakers, turners, and carpenters centered in Tantras remain there because of its good harbour (hence easy shipping of goods to elsewhere) and generations of skilled woodworkers (hence ready training, streets and docks suited to crating and moving furniture, controlling and guarding against fires, etc.). They were established there in the first place, centuries back, because of the quality and quantity of the forests of the Vast (which lacked the fierce elven defenders of the similarly good woodlands on the other side of the Dragonreach). Many of these forests have now been cut down and used up, though the rolling farms of the Vast sport many woodlots, and its many creeks are cloaked in continuous runs of bankside trees: a visitor looking at the Vast will see a landscape of gently-rolling hills, and many trees (the forest studded with farms, not open farmland adorned with one or two trees).

Woodcutters are busily at work logging the eastern Vast even today -- and by "eastern Vast" I mean the slopes of the mountains that form the eastern barrier of the Vast. Although orcs do cut down timbers for their own use and do start fires from time to time (especially when making war), it would be wrong to see the orcs of the Vast as tree-hating clearers-of-the-landscape. Looking at it this way: if orcs want to eat humans or dwarves (the two dominant intelligen sources of meat in the Vast), they have to fight for their meals. Nowadays, they can also raid livestock kept on human ranches, or moving along roads as beasts of burden. However, the chief source of ready food in Vastar and in the Vast today has always been woodland animals (deer, rabbits, squirrels, bears, and everything else). The only way to keep such game abundant is to leave the forests standing: denude a stretch of land and you starve yourself (deer will certainly graze in grasslands, but you have to wait until your cleared forest floor grows consistent crops of grass, and orc bellies complain as loudly as anyone else's if they have to wait from season to season. So the trees are still there, in all those narrow, monster-haunted, orc-prowled valleys between the mountains.

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Getting them has just become more dangerous and time-consuming (and hence more expensive).

BrokenRulz, you know I'd love to see Realmslore books on anything and everything, from trade routes and barter rates to the Border Kingdoms, and a collected Wyrms of the North to Volo's Guides to this, that, and every last corner of the Realms . . . so I doubt it'll come as much of a surprise to you that I'd love to see a Big Book of Realms Battles or something of the sort. If you look at some of the gloriously mapped and illustrated with blow-by-blow battlefield troop movements books on real-world ancient warfare (and the "Osprey"-like FR sourcebook that covered the Tuigan conflict), you can see how handsome such products can be. Yet someone running a games company (like, uh, well, take Wizards of the Coast :}) might well view such a product as having too narrow a focus and thus too small sales to be worth the time and expense of creating those glorious maps and graphics, and having someone write the thing. I'm not sure just what the sales of that past FR product I referred to were, but I'm sure they'd be used in reaching such a decision. And covering the battles and tactics of the past is "looking back," something extremely valid in examining the real world (if one follows the "history is written on the battlefield" philosophy), but sometimes frowned upon in crafting roleplaying game products, where the focus is on "what will PCs find there now, and what's about to happen that the PCs will find themselves in the middle of." I agree that the specific example of drow strife you mentioned would be fascinating, as would the Harpstars Wars, and half a dozen other conflicts I could list off the top of my head, but that doesn't mean, if I pass this suggestion on (and I will), that you'll see such a product. Just to name one WotC staffer whom I know would do a great job on such a game book: Rich Baker. Yet the days of Rich Baker getting to work one day (or me phoning the old TSR offices in Lake Geneva one morning) and saying, "Hey, I've just had this great idea for a product on Pink Elephants Of the Realms! I'll write this month, okay?" are over, if they ever existed at all. Lots of folks have input into what products appear in the product line. I'll pass your idea along, and we'll see, but I have to admit I want to do those ten "essential starter" Volo's Guides first (Moonsea, Amn, Tethyr, Silver Marches, the Vast, Impiltur, Aglarond, Calimshan, Tashluta and the Tashalar, and of course "All the Other Places I Got Thrown Out Of").

And for the record, I now tend to agree with what Jim Lowder has posted here: the dialect of my original Realms DOES cut down on accessibility (remember, I was used to portraying all of these NPCs as a DM, to a group of players who included at least three who were steeped in British accents, and a majority of whom were highly educated on medieval matters), and I could certainly have been convinced of that at the time, if I'd been consulted or told about it at all (Rule Number One when launching dozens of people to work on a shared world: constant good close communications are a MUST, and that's what was all too often lacking, then and in the years that follow. Jim has quoted the "cod-loose winker" line exactly, and I've been informed that the original Harper pin idea was his. too. (By the way, fans of old English words should take a sharp glance at the latest Spin A Yarn tale: I worked about a dozen of them into it, providing WotC with an explanatory glossary, and I think they were all left in the text [without the glossary, of course :].)

So endeth Edspeak. The Hooded One, signing off . . . and fondly remembering the arch in-play comment of one female PC to her PC suitor: "Prithee, m'lord, must mine ears hear yet more of thy old 'doth not now, how I trow' sallies? Thy ensnaring railery and saucy maynoverer doth make me no more deeply thy piggesnye!"

Yes, we DID talk like that. You must admit it does sound more medieval than the infamous DM's utterance at an early GenCon, when running us through the Slavelords module, after Ed cast a wall of fire spell on our foes: "Eat flaming death, Nazi pigs!"

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Even today, we female members of Ed's players have been known to mockingly rebuff flirtations (or over-flowery excuses handed to us by bosses, co-workers, or partners), by rolling our eyes and murmuring, "MORE of your doth not now, how I trow?"

Ed warns again that Waterdeep may slow his replies, but that he certainly still wants to hear your questions. (Faraer and anyone posting after Mr. Lowder, I'll be sending your queries on to Ed ASAP.)

March 10, 2004: Well met, all. The Hooded One here again (this whipped cur trailing me is high Blueblade; if he offers you a beer, I'd decline), with the latest answers from Ed:

Karth, Steve Schend catalogued Alustriel's sons elsewhere and elsewhen, and to avoid stepping on the toes of folks currently at work on must-remain-mysterious-for-now things in the Realms, I'm going to bow out of giving you names, order of birth, levels, et al. Sorry.

However, you deserve answers to the rest of your related query, so here goes:

My concept of Alustriel as de facto ruler of Silverymoon has always been glossed over by TSR (and now WotC) for Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct reasons, because I see her as the Realms equivalent of 'the Queen of Courtly Love,' presiding over a Court that amuses itself (along with delighting in wit, new songs, new inventions or clever craftsmanship, and fashions) with dalliances, courtship, and lovemaking. Er, lots of lovemaking. :}

In the same way that real-world kings in some places and times enjoyed droit de seigneur [French for: "As the King, I have the right to sleep with anyone" :}], Alustriel takes many lovers for short periods of time, and is one of those rare kind, understanding, warm people who has the knack of staying close, affectionate friends with former lovers, even in the presence of other ex-flames. In fact, it's quite likely that any meeting of courtiers will contain a majority of folk who have visited the royal bed or baths at one time or another -- and most of them remain fiercely loyal to Alustriel and to her dream of Silverymoon. (In fact, some cynics, such as Torm of the Knights of Myth Drannor, believe she deliberately seduces political foes to transform them into personal friends.) The fact demonstrably remains that to attack Alustriel in Silverymoon will be to evoke immediate defense of her person by dozens of champions who will lay down their lives to protect hers, even knowing she's the "Anointed of the Goddess" and may not really need their protection.

For obvious moral reasons, published Realmslore glides over all this 'free love' stuff (gakk! orgies! Nonononono!) without saying much (though if you read the words of Silverymoon-related Realmslore I've written, nothing contradicts it). If you're portraying Alustriel correctly in play, she loves to laugh (except when to do so would be cruel to others), gives hugs, caresses, and kisses freely, has no personal dignity (nude? Me? Yes, so? Yes, I heard him comment on the shape and taste of my breasts -- that's why I was thanking him) but a LOT of personal grace and charm, and never forgets details about people (so if meeting a knight she bedded one night eight years ago, she'll recall the name of his ailing mother and her ailment, the name of his new bride, and any 'touchy triggers' any of them might have). Most folk who meet her can't remain jealous of her or angry at her for long.

The original Mystra seemed to encourage Alustriel to have children (why? Hoho! SO many mysteries, waved before you!), because she conceived every nine months and a day or two, giving Faerun a succession of healthy males in a series of easy births (and being little constricted or uncomfortable while pregnant, because rather than acquiring a ballooning belly, the High Lady always put on weight all over, and retained her poise, balance, and activities). Yes, she's given

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birth to females, and no, I'm not going to say ANYTHING more about that for future schemes reasons. :) The new Mystra may have other ideas, because (as far as Elminster knows -- and he doesn't hesitate to ask her, straight out) Alustriel isn't pregnant right now, and shows no signs of becoming so.

For details of her current consort, see the quartet of Realmslore columns appearing on the WoTC website right now.

"Aerasume" is a surname, and all of the tall, strapping lads who bear it share the same father, who remains Alustriel's lover on nights when she needs comforting, but these days is often away from Silverymoon on explorative expeditions into the wilderlands. As I said: with very few exceptions, Alustriel remains on good terms with her former lovers, and manages somehow to keep them comfortable with each other (I guess it's like being members of a club one very much enjoys being part of). So they all get along well together. At long-ago GenCons I often ran Realms play sessions in which PCs were sent with an urgent message to Alustriel [a stranger to them by all but reputation] through a secret portal that admitted them to the Palace but removed all metal -- weapons and, er, BELT BUCKLES -- and all enchanted materials [items and garments vanished, spells operating on the bodies of the PCs just melted away] in doing so. Stumbling over their own falling clothing but under imperative, overriding orders to get to Alustriel right away (and bearing a pass that would let them do so), the racing PCs were directed to a certain chamber, and burst into it to discover that it was taken up by a vast, shallow bath filled with warm rosewater and naked people making love. SOMEwhere in all of that sliding flesh was Alustriel. Their mission: find her.

I loved watching players' faces, right at that moment.

Ahem. I hope that answers half of your questions, Karth. :)

As the commercials say: "All participants are trained professionals. Don't try this at home." But then again, feel free to ignore this warning.

Faraer! Well met as always! Yes, "Spellstorm" is one of my Baron's Blades modules. It was donated to the RPGA for their use, and they edited it, unfortunately removed most of the fun graphics handouts I did for it (messages and other things given to players during play so their PCs could solve a mystery). So I vastly prefer my original.

As for artists: well, I'm sure we've all had this feeling, when looking at a piece of artwork or watching a movie or television show that adapts a book we love, of thinking "That character looks wrong!" . . . and of course I get a lot of that when looking at Realms stuff. (Please remember, all who read this, that we're talking personal preferences here.) When doing the Volo's Guides, I turned in eighty-page art orders with examples drawn from diverse sources of how buildings and garments and people should look, and Val Valusek captured almost everything perfectly (though the printing method used in the Volo books often obscured the beautiful detail of her originals and made them "blobby"). In like manner, I love the pic she did that appears on page 74 of the City of Splendors Campaign Guide, and it hangs over my upstairs study desk. Her interior art throughout Seven Sisters pleases me VERY much. Her Realms work in general has been superb art and 'bang-on' in getting the looks of things correct.

I love the Larry Elmore piece used as the cover of both Cities of Mystery and the City of Splendors Adventurers Guide To The City, and almost swoon over the grandeur of his cover for FR5 The Savage Frontier. I think Matt Stawicki got Elminster just right on the cover of Elminster In Hell, and Fred Fields did the same for Khelben on the cover of the City of Splendors box (in both cases, expertly capturing the man AS HE LOOKED AT THAT TIME).

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Just as pieces of art, I like the Walter Velez cover for Stormlight and the cover of the forthcoming Elminster's Daughter. I could go on for pages and pages here (it's okay, Alaundo, I won't!) of "I like this," but what really matters to me is capturing the look of buildings, countryside, monsters, and individuals correctly, so a DM can hold an example up and saying, "You see THIS."

I've detailed all or part of all the northern dungeons you list, but most of them are "mini-dungeons" (eight to twelve chambers linked by passages), and the published references to many of them no longer match my faint, 1st-Edition pencil originals. Which is a not-so-deft way of saying you'll probably never see said originals in print. BTW: I had many mini-dungeons of the sort my players call "gauntlets" (doing the right or wrong thing triggers a portal that whisks you to another subterranean chamber and encounter, which you can't avoid because there's no way out except by finding the next portal, and so on, in a little chain; terribly unfair, of course [evil grin]).

No, none of those maps are from my originals, though the Scardale one is a simplified (individual buildings in city core blocks not shown), made-smaller version of one of my originals. The needs of a publisher require small, compact maps, and most of the Dales are clusters of farm dwellings, so you'd have handfuls of buildings here and there, on a map measuring 4 feet by 8 feet, as the "center" of a dale. So things got . . . telescoped.

Are the maps of Dalelands towns that first appeared in FRS1 The Dalelands and FRQ3 Doom of Daggerdale all yours?

At the moment there's no hope of seeing the cut parts of FRQ1, for reasons of the time it would take and the different approach to the game since then. I didn't finish writing a lot of it to readable-by-all standards, would have to put the maps 'back' to my more complex and larger originals, and WotC doesn't publish exhaustive setpiece locales (detailing every chamberpot, intrigue, and old feud tale in a small village).

As far as I know, the publisher for Mornmist went bankrupt, or nearly so, through no fault of his own. Lynn Abbey and I did our world-building, and I believe four novels were contracted and at least partially paid-for and written (not by Lynn or myself). I heard that the publisher was selling copies of the first one at flea markets, years later, but I've never seen a copy, and that might be mere rumor. Rob King, who'd just left TSR, was editor for the project, brought us all on board, and behaved with honour and dignity as disaster overtook Mornmist, which was a serious fantasy setting in which intelligent, speaking animals (echoes of Redwall) adventured in a post-Apocalypse North America. BTW: I know there are far too many Arthurian fantasies out there, but Rob's, published by TOR these last few years, are VERY good. Literature.

Foxhelm, you haven't bothered me; I LOVE answering questions. Besides catching up with all of my friends in gaming (and there's no truth whatsoever that "catching up" means 'drinking under the table') this is what I go to GenCon Indy every year FOR.

However, your first question has too many variables for me to do more than wildly guess (what about the advance of technology? The doings of the Shades or Thay or Larloch or other masters of powerful magic? Plagues? Tidal waves and volcanism and continental sinkings or risings?)

So let me just answer by saying what I'd do, if as DM I was setting up a far-future Realms campaign.

I see the Silver Marches and Waterdeep as both growing in size, wealth, and population, despite the batterings of orc hordes. I see certain critters (dragons) as being far rarer, thanks to reactions to the flights of dragons that cause an "exterminate on sight" attitude in many humans. I see

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strong surface dwarf and elf realms on the mainland, and the collapse of Thay into small, warring holds. I see Sembia trying to swallow both Westgate and the Dales, and failing to swallow Cormyr, which now has a large wealthy merchant class and overcrowding. I see Impiltur and Thesk and Aglarond also expanding, with much local lawlessness and warfare . . . and everywhere, I see powerful mages exterminated, and those who do have magic keeping a lower profile (adviser to throne rather than on throne, local healer and sage rather than local tyrant). I see many of the Chosen gone mad and weepingly imploring Mystra to slay them -- and in a few cases, I see Azuth stepping in with newly-picked Chosen to oversee rituals in which a new Chosen slays a willing old Chosen in a manner that allows subsumption of the Silver Fire and some memories (transfer from old to new). I see the memories changing the new Chosen and driving a few of them mad (the work of Shar?). I see fewer gods, and all of them having less power and influence, as general wealth and technology increases, and "the common folk" make praying increasingly a "say and do this for good luck on the way home, and then say and do this to this other god before bed" matter-of-fact affair rather than obeying priests to the death.

I see lots of new, small realms, and warfar between them.

And I'm not sure I'd want to see much more of a Realms like that, or play in them. Yet as I said at the outset, this is merely one possibility among literally thousands.

As for the Planetouched, I doubt there'll be a "Year of" them soon, because the Roll of Years is set for quite some time into both past and future, and because in the Realms they're individuals rather than grouped as coherent colonies, nations, or kingdoms I think it's a lot more fun in play to have planetouched living among just regular folks (remember, much of the Realms is already a United Nations of half-breeds and various intelligent races anyway, not given over to single xenophobic races), especially if they keep a low profile and can surprise PCs in play. Quite a few of the ladies of pleasure in Waterdeep and Amn are tieflings, for instance, because of the "lure of the illicit" and the spice of danger. I'm unsure what you're asking here: "Also what do your characters think of the Planetouched?" Do you mean the vast and varied NPCs I run as DM? Or the characters run by my players? Or...?

Dargoth, future schemes not yet quite unfolded in the published Realms prohibit me from saying anything about Glen. Yes, it DOES seem rather odd, doesn't it? :}

The title of the Waterdeep novel still isn't settled, but neither Elaine nor I get to choose it. Suggest, yes, choose no: publishers always reserve that right for themselves (also release date, price, marketing, format) because they're the ones risking the money, and they therefore want to control how a product is presented to the market. Yes, the Realms has many outcast (as opposed to ruling) archdevils and similar major-league-nasty unique creatures from other planes, but most of them keep a low profile (because to do otherwise is to get whacked). No, I'm not going to reveal any more here, again because of future plans.

Alexander, you're welcome. And so is everyone else who's thanked me; I'm sorry, I've been remiss in basic courtesy the last little while. And while I'm at it, you're welcome, Alaundo, and I must thank YOU for making this forum available and so welcoming to all who love the Realms.

It's my pleasure to help make the Realms more colourful and real for everyone, whenever and however I can. I have quite nondescript business cards (other than the crescent moon badge they bear), but I also have Elminster business cards I hand out at conventions and at book autographing sessions (to those who don't bring, or can't afford to buy, the books, but do want to meet me).

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And hi, Crust! There are many "unfold secrets of the Realms," but I don't want to air dirty linen here, just explain why some things turned out the way they did. Jim Lowder and I are good friends, and I have a LOT of respect for him as a writer and an editor. I try to be as friendly as possible with all of the gaming creatives and Realms fans I meet, because what else is life for? If I can put a smile on someone's face, I've helped a little, and done a little to pay back whatever gods there be for the air I've breathed and water and food I've used, that day.

So endeth Ed's words (for now). Those last few lines have, as usual, left me close to tears (awwww, Ed, you big bearded lug, you!), so I'll skip the smart or flirtatious comments.

Your Hooded One, as always.

March 11, 2004: Ed has spoken again (a busy boy, indeed), thus:

Hi, Damian! Fangs awfully (sorry) for your questions. Herewith responses: in the original Realms campaign, I had a lot of NPCs with the same name (just as in real life) for maximum confusion = realism = force engaged roleplaying reasons. Obviously, when the Realms was to be published for a wider audience, TSR wanted to eliminate these confusions, so we have just one: Torm the thief sharing his name with a god (which of course is actually very common in the Realms, which has some gods risen from mortal status recently enough that there are peoples still around in which the god's name(s) are still in popular use, and even more often because devout parents often name children after the gods (particularly if the babe is sickly, because they hope the favour of the god will result in the child surviving its early years).

In the case of Ashtaroth, I had a demon and a devil sharing the same name (the demon taking the name deliberately to echo the devil's name, and the devil presumably being named by its parents). Therefore, if mortals (player characters) did a faulty or incomplete summoning (remember, folks, this is a heavy roleplaying campaign, not a "so we cast this spell from the Players Handbook, okay?" campaign), you could have the wrong entity show up, and it would arrive totally free of the summoner's control. Heh-heh. This wasn't something I went in for often, but rather set up as a harsh lesson waiting for impatient or careless PCs to find the hard way (I wanted to steer my players away from any thoughts of becoming frequent summoners and commanders of any third parties; if you're an adventurer, do it yourself, I say). So there you have it. The name, of course, comes from -- or is unwillingly shared by -- many ancient religious and mythological sources.

I'm not sure about Neiroon; no plans right now, but you've got me thinking. :) I do know the Crazy Venturers won't be in the Waterdeep novel, because we've had to chop out so many things already that I just can't justify sneaking them back in (and peer at the approved outline as much as I like, I just can't seem to find them mentioned in there).

As I told Faraer, although I'd love to do up the Haunted Halls properly (and I quite agree, it makes a great campaign starter, which was my intention when I suggested it as a 96-page "fat module"), the time that would be necessary to produce it, plus the change in focus and approach of the current D&D game, make its publication unlikely. However, this has been a perennial fan request, and -- a la Volo -- one I don't mind at all making one more time to the good folks at WotC. Perhaps as a web supplement . . . but being as my body needs to be fed and all the levels of government want their taxes, I MUST write the paying novels first. I've done many charity projects down the years, still have four on the go, and just can't afford another big one until I've paid some bills (if anyone reading this would like to change this state of affairs, I need about 200,000 Canadian dollars, okay? :}). But yes, I VERY much want to do up the Haunted Halls, someday, as

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a "here's your campaign starter pack" adventure. After all, it's in Cormyr, on the edge of the monster-haunted Stonelands, on a caravan road leading to the wider Realms, should have a completely detailed temple, inn, tavern, local lord, and so on, and should also include the Caverns of the Claws, Whisper's Crypt, the Haunted Halls themselves, the ruins of Rivior's outpost, the witch's hut, and several tiny mini-dungeons. Drool...

About the Dungeon of the Crypt, I have better news -- sort of. I can't say where or how you'll see some lore on this yet, or how much you'll see about it, but in the next three years we should all be able to read a brief something, in some form somewhere, about this feature. As for Nimoar, I'll add it to my "to do" list.

Alaundo, thanks very much for the work you're doing to preserve some of this blather for Realms fans. I'll continue to try to provide good, solid lore whenever it won't hamper 'official' stuff in the works. And I must say, you've got a nice place here. I've wandered around Candlekeep a lot over the years, but I've never seen these particular halls and chambers before. :}

Lashan, please don't apologize. I'm soon going to take longer and longer to reply as the Waterdeep novel heads into the 'race down to the wire' stage (as these things always seem to * sigh *), but don't stop asking about the Realms, you or anyone.

I don't see the orcs of the Vast as forming nearly as many hordes as the orcs near the Spine of the World, because they enjoy a slightly less harsh climate and so can forage for longer and in greater numbers before they strip all those unmapped, unexplored high mountain valleys of all food, and have no choice but to either slaughter each other (which happens quite frequently, further delaying the rise of a leader who could form a horde) or boil forth down into the Vast proper as a raiding horde. I see the mountain caverns the Vastar orcs dwell in as being just that much warmer than those of the Sword Coast North as to support more edible fungi and therefore more carrion crawlers and other subterranean life, some of which the orcs can eat.

Moreover, the dwarf-battling history of the Vastar orcs makes them wary of large numbers of armed non-orcs, and they can readily see the large and nearby cities of Calaunt, Tantras, Mulmaster, and Raven's Bluff. Also, from time to time, whatever power is resident in Ironfang Keep reaches out and harvests some of the Vastar orcs. The high grasslands thrusting east from the coastal Vast just south of King's Reach provide the orcs with abundant wild herd animals they can devour -- but also hands them forceful warnings not to strike out on the surface lands too boldly: wyverns, perytons, and even dragons have been known to swoop down and snatch up orcs caught in the open here.

The roads of the Vast are patrolled for at least one settlement outwards in all directions from Raven's Bluff by city forces (assuming that city hasn't been shattered in your Realms campaign), and all of the other cities listed above do regular road-patrols, too, though they don't range out as far (on an everyday basis, they're trying to keep brigands, gangs of thieves, and prowling monsters at least a day's ride distant from the city -- and give the city fair warning of the approach of anything larger, more numerous, and more formidable). I can't see why the sort of order you envisage wouldn't be present, given the strength of Torm's faith in Tantras (after all, what other useful benefit could they render, that non-Tormites could see and appreciate?). In the 'home' Realms campaign, many folks in the smaller settlements hired bands of adventurers as defenders (something I've been largely silent about since the Vast was "given" to the RPGA -- in a chat between Jim Ward, Jean Rabe [then head of the RPGA], and me, Charter Life Member of same-- and I detailed its countryside and then stepped back, not to return there in print until I was asked to write the City of Ravens Bluff sourcebook). This at times led to clashes between rival adventuring bands (with a sort of Robin Hood vs. the Sheriff of Nottingham flavour), but -- augmented by the heavy bodyguards laid on by caravan costers -- did keep the roads fairly safe.

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As you imply, camping or travelling in small groups along the road that runs along the mountains has never been a wise idea.

Rad, I'd love to return to Gencon UK and see the many friends I made there again, as soon as I can. At a Butlin's again this time, I see. My wife grew up in Surrey (very near Wimbledon, actually), we have family in England, several of my own rather-busy-in-the-marrying-game ancestors were from various places in the UK, and we love to visit whenever we can. Unfortunately, time and money are both problems working against this. I loved all the opportunities I got to just chat with people at Gencon UK (and still owe Sean an adventure * sigh*), and I'd do it again in a shot. However, it's absolutely out this year and possibly next year. I must say, I'm one of those who'd miss London if I couldn't easily get to it (so having it on the edge of Hammersmith and staying at a hotel a short stroll away across the railway cut in Kensington was heavenly for me). It'd be great to see you again at another FR Q&A seminar!

Umm, now I'm going to go back to Waterdeep dreaming of London . . . the bookshops on Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street . . . so many beautiful places in the countryside (like Eric Boyd and Victor Selby among my own original Realms players, I'm a sucker for crumbling castles), so many sunken English lanes to stroll along . . . hurray, hurray, it's the first of May -- and so on...

There he goes, wandering off e-muttering, Yes, 'tis the Hooded One, here to answer Damian's questions -- or rather, start to. We crossed swords with Lashan a time or two before his conquests began, so his fate was somewhat frustrating for us (but quite realistic; Ed's always been very good at making the Realms seem alive all around us by having dramatic events happen that we DIDN'T cause or weren't involved in).

As for best ever moment, well, that's why I said "start to." Like choosing favourite books or record albums [she said, firmly dating herself again], I find it very hard to impossible to choose a single best moment. Ed and my fellow players are all such good actors, and are so sensitive to when one of us has had a hard day and just wants a big laugh (Ed's turn at portraying an increasingly irritated but trying to be debonair Azoun IV trying to seduce a noble debutante and getting deliberately interrupted every few minutes by various courtiers and War Wizards sent in to him by Vangerdahast was a hoot that STILL makes me laugh, remembering it over sixteen years later. . . and so was Jhessail seducing Manshoon but then being replaced in his bed by Torm, which was one of our ploys that reduced Ed to helpless mirth), that time and again we had great play sessions that kept us going until we were yawning. (Up at Ed's cottage, of course, we sometimes fell asleep playing and resumed the next morning when we awakened.)

Now, those are just the funny occasions, among many, many grim, gripping, and, well, enthralling 'serious moments.' I will say this: maybe it's a gal thing, but I quickly grew tired of trap- and monster-filled "dungeon crawls." I never get tired of Ed, because he's at his best acting out the cast of thousands as we crashed revels in Suzail or Waterdeep, trying to get to the bottom of intrigues and dealing with dozens of tipsy, preening poseurs of nobles, some of them very evil indeed, who were trying to impress or get laid or manipulate others into doing unwise things politically.

We once spent an entire six-hour evening play session at a feast, chatting with nobles as we tried to find a shapeshifter hiding among them, and uncover another treasonous plot -- while a certain assassin lurked for a chance to off just one of us, and two other nobles (quite separately) tried to draw some of us into behaviour that would allow them to blackmail us or denounce us as traitors . . . and a young woman who'd been cursed (at the feast, by a Zhent wanting a diversion so he could steal a valuable magic item) into having a dragon body struggled with herself to keep her own human form and avoid being sworded by frightened guards. It sounds like a farce, when I'm typing it like this, but I assure you it was ENTHRALLING. Now, things only work that well with an

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acting DM like Ed when the players all know one another, don't mind doing or saying ANYTHING (shy and quiet just doesn't cut it), and also want to act.

And I've sat at that gaming table weeping like a baby when we found friends (NPCs) slain, or arrived too late to rescue someone. And been bright-eyed with pride as John Hunter, playing Florin defending a bridge, faced down certain death when given a chance to flee with the calm words, "I gave my word, and my word is my bond, my honour; my life. If I break my word, I am nothing. So here I stand, one blade against all your host. Come at me, Zhent, and we'll see what blood-price it costs you to sweep aside . . . a mere nothing."

Florin had no hope of rescue, and knew he was going to die -- but he fought like a whirlwind, and bought his life dearly, taking down over forty Zhentilar before the others forced their way across the bridge. By then, the farmwives of that southern end of Shadowdale had gathered all their bows, sent word for reinforcements, blocked the road with a litter of overturned loaded haywagons --- and Storm Silverhand was running alone down the road to meet them, to do the same thing Florin had.

In the end, not a Zhent of that seventy-strong warband left the dale alive. Florin was brought back from the dead, of course, but that doesn't diminish John's play that night one whit.

And I went home happy. After all, I was friends with all of these heroes.

March 11, 2004: The Hooded One again (yes, I know, I know, I've ALWAYS been The Hooded One; 'tis a figure of speech, okay?), with Ed's latest:

Hi, Lashan. You're welcome, of course; no thanks needed. Calaunt has very few temples because of its repressive rule. It's truly a place of grim tyranny, and the secrets of those in authority have been left mysterious to give DMs a chance to put what they'd 'behind the scenes.' There's no Thayan outpost there (no market in comparison to Raven's Bluff, unless it's been destroyed in your campaign), and nothing public enough to give Mulmaster or Tantras a chance to attack -- but there could very well be agents from Zhentil Keep or anywhere else you'd like to pick, from unscrupulous Sembian slavers to drug-runners and pirates serving masters in Westgate. Whatever the truth, Calaunt's temples are few and far between because its rulers don't want priests challenging their authority and 'influence through silent threat.'

Karth, you're welcome, too. :) I wasn't thinking of Heinlein when I made Alustriel act that way (for one thing, those particular novels hadn't been written yet), but rather of some of the historical tales of the French and Italian courts where women -- especially widows of dead dukes and kings -- used their charms to rule (and the troubadours did their thing, and 'courtly love' was the rage). I coupled that with some real-life experiences of meeting women of the 60s generation (Woodstock, coffee houses, folk musicians, the drug scene), who through their beauty, generous sharing of their own bodies, and sunny dispositions and 'genuinely caring for others' characters, exercised great influence on the people around them. It was a time before AIDS and widespread sexual diseases, a "free love" time of rebellion against repressive social authority, and to a young gangly nerd like me, watching awestruck with my glasses steaming over, there was something magical at seeing beautiful women strolling nude and carefree through parkland, totally at ease, laughing and chatting casually with the various long-haired, scruffy-jeans-clad guys who were inevitably accompanying them.

In the case of the Seven Sisters, I see their need for the companionship of others (and casualness when it comes to nudity and to sex) as being born not out of social rebellion or drugs

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or an insecure need to 'belong,' and be at the center of "what's happening," but rather as the result of living for centuries, outliving generations of friends and loved ones, and trying to make up for the ever-growing grief and loneliness of being 'The One Who Survives, And Is Left Alone Again, and Again, and Again.' As I've said before on many occasions, none of the Chosen are probably anywhere near what we would judge as sane or 'normal' (whatever that is :)).

That's part of their fascination for me. Not "I can hurl godly power" but "I've been hurling godly power for so long, and yet can't save the things about the world around me that I want to save, and can't even die when and how I want to, and I'm so TIRED of it all, and what can I do to derive some enjoyment out of this." In other words, I want to look inside their heads and see what makes them tick.

Increasingly, my books and those of other Realms authors, too, are (behind the fighting and spectacles of roaring monsters and slapstick) concerned with looking inside their characters and seeing what makes them the way they are, and how their adventures change them -- which of course is what all good books do in some manner.

(It's also why I'm always somewhat bemused when I read yet another "Elminster's a munchkin!" or "Elminster's just Greenwood's pet erotic wish-fulfillment character!" or "Elminster's a Gandalf ripoff!" post. I moved beyond thinking about the game and characters in that way almost thirty years ago.)

Ah, Ed, you take me back to my childhood childhood childhood, you really do. Love to all from The Hooded One

March 11, 2004: Hello, all. Herewith, Ed's reply to Foxhelm:

Hi, Foxhelm. Yes, I've had many covert invasions (by relatively small forces) of isolated backland areas of Faerun (through gates/portals from alternate Prime Material Planes). I've had the Malaugrym meddling, and even a few other shapechanging, from-elsewhere forces trying the bold "Let's infiltrate the palace and take over this kingdom from the top!" (One of them, in a certain Sembian city a little more than a century ago, succeeded -- and no, I'm not going to tell you which one. :) Amn and Tethyr have also been successfully hit.)

Helmed horrors are as close as I got to robots in the Realms (the 3rd Edition origins for them have been twisted somewhat, obscuring this), although Paul Jacquays did put Radoc and other 'aliens with advanced technology' into the Realms when he did FR5 The Savage Frontier (atop the Starmounts in the center of The High Forest). And Netheril, various elves (see Drow of the Underdark), and several elder/fallen lands achieved robotic technology good enough to fashion deft, complex functional replacement metal limbs (warriors could even get latch-on blades, axe-blades, picks, and the like to swap for their hands).

For the most part, I'm uncomfortable with the 'flavour' that such technology brings to play, but as long as it's kept rare and therefore awe-inspiring, it has worked as a 'spice' for play.

I'm not sure what you mean by "Abserve"? Absurd? If you can take another stab at this, I'll certainly try to answer. Sorry.

I, too, am a fan of Finder; I find him Jeff and Kate's most intriguing character (whereas Giogi is the most fun character). Now, as to empowering demigods -- well, you'd be letting loose a lot of relatively immature (hey, the way we've ended up depicting the lesser and greater deities in print

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makes most of them very immature, too) superheroes to wreak havoc. My "what would happen" answer depends on the answers to some other questions:

Would priests of everyone but the demigods lose their spells?

If Mystra (and Shar) lose all of their powers, are the Weave and Anti-Weave destroyed/collapsed/left untended? In other words, do spells still work for anyone? Is wild magic raging chaotic and uncontrolled across the world, beyond the control or influence of anyone? Would creatures with innate magic die in agony, burned out or torn apart from within? Would any being with spells memorized at the time suffer the same fate, or just go insane? Or would they, too, randomly gain initially-uncontrolled (and perhaps temporary) "superpowers"?

None of us can properly answer these questions, in ways that apply to everyone (all campaigns that use the Realms). As I've participated in many of them, I can reveal that both freelancers and TSR/WotC staffers debate the "true" nature of the FR gods frequently, and that one of the reasons fan arguments about the gods are largely useless except as entertainment for all involved (ahem, like the Eilistraee/Vhaeraun discussions that proceed sporadically here in Candlekeep) is that we still haven't published some important things about the gods (in other words, the views and understandings of them held by all readers of Realms material are limited and therefore almost certainly incorrect or only partially correct). Which is a long way of saying that the tendency of gods, priests, lore-books, sages, and those who report the Realms to us (such as Elminster) to lie, distort, omit, or just pass on their own ignorance to us gives "wiggle room" to every DM to answer the blizzard of questions I posed above any way they like.

What I personally would do, if that happened, was keep the Weave operating and Mystra "alive and functioning," transform her Chosen into killers intent on eliminating all demigods (if necessary, by manipulating demigods into small cabals and alliances and driving them to make war on each other), strip priests of all spells and add a slowly-increasing-chances wild magic element to all spells cast (except discharges of simple magic effects ["simple" being fireballs or lightning bolts, whereas mind-reading, identification, mending, or suchlike would be deemed "complex"] stored in items, and with the Chosen of Mystra and the demigods having a smaller tendency to succumb to wild magic), and have creatures of magical natures (liches and so on) start to quickly decay (and therefore become desperate). Portals (to other worlds and planes, NOT those just linking places in Faerun to other places in Faerun) would become areas of magical stability as well as escape routes from the Realms, beings with psionic powers would acquire growing influence and importance as magic crashed and burned, and Mystra would put all of her remaining strength and power into holding the Weave together (so castles held up by magic would start to fall, magic items not deemed artifacts would slowly lose their efficacy, and so on).

Bear in mind that you'd be changing the Realms markedly, because the fangs and claws of big monsters, and the number of swords a commander can bring into battle, would rise to rule in a way magic had hitherto balanced against.

The end result, of course, would depend on what happened, in the longer run, to the demigods and the Weave. I'd expect they'd tame their powers to become new lesser gods, resident in Toril, and the Weave would eventually stabilize, but one thing is for darned sure: for the common man or even for the intrepid adventurer, it would NOT be a fun time to live through.

So saith Ed. Your Hooded One will return soon with his next replies.

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March 11, 2004: Well met, fellow lovers of the Realms. The Hooded One, relaying Ed's latest replies:

Hi, Alex. Your English is just fine. As for your questions, well, the best way to use Realmslore in a game is whatever way works best with your players. Some folks want to play the game "out of character," discussing and consulting rules openly. Some love maps and using miniature figures, and some prefer to 'do it all in their heads.'

For MY players, I act out the dialogue of all NPCs 'to the hilt,' and PCs can question them or try to eavesdrop on them. If you treat the Realms as real, and let the players determine the speed of play and where their characters go, it's up to them how they gain information. Let them ('in character') discuss what they've heard or learned, and where they'll go and what they'll try to do next (the "council-of-war"). Then, when they learn things, it all seems real.

I don't have any good way, with my primitive e-mail, Net connection, lack of website, and inability to post attachments here or anywhere, of showing props or handouts, but yes, I occasionally use them -- usually written letters, royal documents, or notes (and usually when PCs are snooping and trying to solve a mystery). I prepare drawings of runes and heraldic devices beforehand and hand these over in play. I also draw head-and-shoulders pictures of characters (NPCs) to display, and have an extensive library of books with illustrations of armor, medieval garb, old buildings, bridges, landscapes, and the like that I occasionally display during play. I say "occasionally" because my players are such good actors and 'imagers' that they prefer not to slow down play by extensive use of such things (for instance, they only want to use figures if we're doing a large setpiece battle, like defending Shadowdale against a Zhent attack). My job as a DM is to entertain my players (after all, I'm wasting hours of their lives with this game), so what they want is paramount.

I fully agree that landscape pictures are VERY useful, because for many players that's the hardest thing to "get" in their minds, and the best way to establish a mood. The most effective way of doing this, of course, is always mentioning aloud a place that the DM and players have both been to, together (sunrise at a particular spot when camping, for example), but when you can't do that, by all means use magazine photographs or pics you can glean from the Net (unless your players say they hate it; ask them at the end of the play session). Long ago, the Automobile Association in Britain published a grey binder full of cardstock 'country walks' (if someone reading this is familiar with it, please tell us all the real title; was it "Off The Beaten Path" or something like that?). These were small 'leave your car, walk around for an afternoon, and circle back' treks around a country neighbourhood, and each one was illustrated by a panoramic 'from a few hundred feet up in the air, looking down' painting of the route. They'd make MARVELLOUS rural-location play aids.

Here's my attempt to help with your specific locales:

Trollmoors/Evermoors: the high, bleak moors of Scotland: lots of bare rock, scrub lichen, stunted shrubbery, frost, and clawingly cold wind, with small "winding crack" ravines holding more lush greenery. Ground-hugging junipers, "wandering star" ground cedars, and so on.

Northern Sword Coast around Luskan: Alaskan Panhandle, northern British Columbia coast (Prince Rupert), Queen Charlotte Islands

Moonwood: at the north end, the dark "all tall pine" forests of Scandinavia and the Rocky Mountains of Canada, and at the south end the dense, dark Black Forest as it used to be (just post-World-War-II, before acid rain thinned it out to today's shadow of its former past).

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Area around the Fork: Exmoor or Dartmoor (the barer parts, with little stands of trees but no human farming) in England

Transition between desert/moderate climate around Ascore: this is a cold desert area, and I've always seen it as resembling the high, rocky pleateau country in Tibet, running into (as one moves west, away from Ascore) the verges of a cold alpine forest

Nether Mountains: the tepuis (accent over the "i" that I can't do on my e-mail, sorry) mountains of Venezuela (Angel Falls) on the southeastern flanks, but sharper peaks elsewhere in the Nether Range (like the crags cradling the hot springs of Waimangu in New Zealand)

Dalelands: yes, I've seen the nice Mueller artwork (thanks to Faraer and others directing me), and I see the dales as a cross between the Canadian Shield (with its bare rock outcrops, like the Old Skull, and temperate mixed forest dominated by maples, oaks, beeches, and elms) and the English farming countryside of the Cotswolds (the southern and western dales are surrounded by forests whose verges resemble the New Forest in England)

Moonea: the eastern end resembles the fjords of Sweden and Norway, but the southern shore is more like Loch Ness in Scotland: farms and trees on relatively gentle (not high) banks. The northern western shore is more like Windermere, in the Lake District of England

Sundabar Valley: the most tamed (farmed) parts are like the rather bleak northern Yorkshire (mountain-cradled) dales of England, and the more rugged parts are like the river valleys in the Elburz Mountains of Iran (not the desert ones, but rather the wetter high alpine ones), while the various valleys to the north of Sundabar Vale, that stretch north past the Moonwood and Cold Wood, are like the Alaskan taiga

Rauvin and Dessarin Rivers: like the Mackenzie, Nahanni, and Yukon rivers of the Canadian Arctic

Spine of the World: the western face of the northern Rocky Mountains of Canada (a towering wall of cold, snowcapped bleak rock mountains, falling abruptly down into a rugged but pine-forest-cloaked landscape of finger lakes, cascades, bogs, and rock outcrops)

Hi, Adrian. Great? Well, I'm not so sure, but if you were a pretty lass I'd certainly pretend to be. :}
As for the hours of fun, THAT'S great: the Realms is working!

As you inferred (see also a post by The Hooded One in the Chat forum of Candlekeep, under "Vancian magic?") I often delve into the details of magical research, with spell inks, players jotting down observations like students taking notes, for later attempts to modify spells or create new ones (always easier to twist and modify an existing spell, BTW). When my players were in the mood for "full" roleplaying, they'd make up incantations (usually a nonsense "Abracadabra"-like word for a word of activation or the last/trigger word, preceded by a rhyming couplet (here's the one for fireball, which has no last trigger word: "By tongue of bat and sulphur's reek/And the mystic words I now do speak/Where I wish to strike my bane/Let empty air burst into -- FLAME!").

And yes, wizards and apprentices have many 'how to' conversations (usually larded with advice: "The greatest wisdom, lad, lies in knowing when NOT to use this spell") in my campaign. Most of them center around the dangers of using a particular spell effect in specific circumstances (when too near a moat or a low ceiling, for example) or how substituting alternative material components will change a spell's effect ("If ye lack any means of making a flame, lass, bite thy cheek or tongue and spit forth some blood as ye incant -- but be aware that the spell will then...")

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I could of course go on with examples like this forever. The best teachers let students try the castings themselves, over and over, until they've got it right -- and let them make their own mistakes so the lessons learned really stick, too. For more fun of this sort, if you have access to The Best of the Realms Volume 1 paperback, or the original Realms of Valor, read my tale Elminster At The Magefair (just to see the crowd chatter at the Magefair).

And yes, The Hooded One warms my heart, too (no, she's not my wife, folks, and I just said "heart," not anything else. :) I can see her sticking her tongue out at me right now, straight through this Internet connection.)

Hi, Elfinblade (okay: Stig). As King Haedrak III, Lhaeo is currently ruling Tethyr (with his wife, Queen-Monarch Zaranda Star Rhindaun. However, if you visit Shadowdale today, you'll find the same scribe, cook, and house-servant in Elminster's Tower that the Old Mage has had for decades: the effeminate rose-grower and master-of-all-egg-based-cuisine Lhaeo. For details of who's wearing that shape right now, check my Realmslore columns on the WotC website (probably not before this fall). Yes, Kuje31, you've got it right. :)

As to the ages of some infamous Realms characters: well, as SiriusBlack has just posted, they are ALL older than we'd think they are, except Lhaeo (who actually appeared a trifle older than his true age when in his Lhaeo guise). Many of them (the Chosen, including Elminster, Khelben, and the Seven) are practically immortal due to Mystra's silver fire, and look to be whatever age they choose to (Elminster and Khelben tend to look like vigorous sixty-ish guys these days, El a little whiter-haired and thus older than the Blackstaff, and the gals a sort of lush late-thirties-threshold-of-forty-can't-tell-and-too-dang-beautiful-to-matter-anyway). Haedrak (Lhaeo) looks to be in about the same age range as the Seven. Halaster looks like an old man (late sixties, early seventies) but very vigorous, and he, too, is maintained by enchantments. Mirt has imbibed many potions of longevity down the years, and looks like a fat, heavily-muscled but wheezing and lurching sixty-ish man (no longer quite as vigorous as he likes to think he is). The true ages of all these folk (except Lhaeo) are much greater, but the precise measure of their days really doesn't matter: it's how old they appear to be when you meet them/see them do things, and how old "everyone" thinks they are.

So saith Ed.

And now, as requested, the Hooded One will reveal a little more (after all, Adrian, your heart's going to need ongoing warming and not a single short, fiery blast, right? :}):

Picture an snowbound winter evening in Toronto: a blizzard, but warmish and therefore the Christmas-postcard snow is wet and slithery. It takes us hours to arrive at Ed's, where Jen has hot chocolate (and gently warmed Bailey's) waiting, along with little tart-sized warm quiches. We sink gratefully into the various armchairs around Ed's vast living room of the time, and chat wearily. Play takes a long time to get going, as various of us straggle in, so Ed starts us off on a warmer-than-usual winter morning in the Twisted Tower, as the Knights awaken and wander into the morning room in their robes [= housecoats/bathrobes/whatever you call them locally], where the servants have laid a breakfast (on the hob, in covered platters) and withdrawn. We dine and chat, discussing what we Knights should do next (and Jenny, bless her, quietly brings in bacon and sausages and waffles to make the illusion stronger).

When we're all assembled (and fortified with food), a six-foot-tall, nude, covered-with-strange-tattoos bronze-skinned woman we've never seen before bursts into the room, swearing, with guards pounding along after her. She vaults over and around us, snarling that she's Mourngrym, gods spit on all, and will we stop Tharth and Brengur here from gutting her?

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So we do, ordering them out and barring the doors while we interrogate the lass (and she wolfs down food like . . . well, like a starving Mourngrym). She tells us she's Mourngrym, she has no idea how her body got like this, but just woke up like this in a bed that didn't have Shaerl in it -- and promptly startled a servant who cried for the guards who went for her -- and so here she/he is, and will we PLEASE get to the bottom of this? Who did this, how, and WHY? But, she added (and this is what convinced us that it was Mourngrym, before any spellcasting or "What's the name of the guardsman Horl's pet frog?" questions were necessary), this MUST be a diversion (otherwise, why do it?) or a magic worked by someone needing to borrow HIS likeness, so we must be alert for mischief afoot in the dale or involving the Amcathras or perhaps diplomacy with Cormyr or the Zhents or other dales. And so we were off on another puzzling adventure, all of our cold and weariness forgotten, running around Shadowdale on the bright, warm morning of a sudden winter thaw...

Just another little bit of Ed magic. And the reason for the tattoos was REALLY interesting.

March 12, 2004: Thanks, Alaundo. I'm relieved. My display problems I can live with; I was just afraid I wasn't getting Ed's words to everyone intact. :}

Speaking of which:

Elfinblade, is the Lhaeo info okay?

Lashan, I'm curious about ancient treasures or ruins in the Vast, too. :}

The Earthspur Mountains, along the eastern boundary of the Vast, are riddled with caverns: natural, orc-hewn, and dwarf-made. These days, the dwarves are almost entirely gone (and their treasures with them), and the orcs dwell in those many, many caves and passages. The individual tunnels and chambers may be small, but I'd judge their combined space, with all levels added together, to be easily equal to the surface area of the Vast. (Mount Grimmerfang is one of the more northerly Earthspur peaks, and almost certainly not one of those "on the edge" of the open Vast.) There could be any amount of orc treasures scattered throughout this vast orc kingdom, but orcs aren't much for baubles. They often use gold coins as lures for humans (so trails of spilled coins and the occasional merchant's chest of wares can sometimes be found in caverns easily accessible from the Vast, but such finds are always guarded by orcs who can roll or rain boulders down on humans who come looking -- after all, a hungry orc doesn't mind a meal of tenderized meat).

In my opinion, most riches of Rolidar would long ago have been carried away by the retreating dwarves, and most dwarf holds and tombs of any sort long since broken open and plundered by orcs. An orc would covet a good weapon (of a sturdy sort like a sword), so finely-made or magical blades may well be carried by orc chieftans and war-leaders in the Earthspurs. However, I'd not expect to find enough treasure in the entire range to make the risk of battling through thousands upon thousands of orcs worth it.

As for dwarf holds, I know that a few small family holds (defensible clusters of caverns, with roll-rock doors and entry traps) are still (sparsely) inhabited in the Earthfast Mountains (where the might of the orcs has been broken, and surviving tuskers are few and scattered). Most of these dwarf-holds are self-sufficient, and have little directly to do with humans (individual dwarves sometimes make long treks to surface-connected caverns to go trading in Tsurlogol or Priapurl,

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but they take care not to be tracked back to their holds). I'd say most such holds have total populations of not much more than 70, of 4 families at most.

Certain intrepid dwarves do travel from hold to hold, trading medicines and carrying news. Elminster has given me two names of such 'farfarer' dwarves: Ethskrin 'Stonebrow' Shiverstone (a merry, reckless, agile sort "who acts almost like a halfling taken with drink!") and Maurhoun Sunderfist (a short, stout, magnificently black-bearded down to his toes grim traveler who forgets nothing, and can draw detailed maps from memory).

There are much larger dwarf-holds well to the east, in Impiltur, but they'd not come to the rescue of any Earthfast hold that suffered attack, or even trade regularly with each other.

A few of the Earthfast holds have veins of gemstone that they mine from time to time when they need wealth to sell (typically taking ship in Tsurlagol for Sembia, to unload the gems there for coin to buy boots, raw leather, textiles, preserved foods, and books -- yes, books: it seems many dwarves are avid readers of romantic and humorous human sagas (of the sort that are all the rage among young men and women of wealth and much leisure time, in Cormyr and especially Sembia).

As for the city-states, Calaunt and Tantras have sparred (little skirmishes in the farmlands between them, nothing larger) many times (the reason their road-patrols were started was to give warning of each other), but --since the current regime took over in Calaunt -- settled into a wary state of ignoring each other. One gets rich faster that way than by hacking at one's neighbour every night. :}

Calaunt's current rulership took power by poisonings and stabbings in the night among the self-styled lords of that city, until the present incumbent (and the evil mages who back him, making his rule supreme) could openly take control. The folk of Tantras, a wealthy and bustlingly prosperous lot, were busy at the time squabbling over whether or not the Church of Torm should be allowed so much power and influence over the city (a bloodless struggle that the Tormites eventually won, but not before some of the most unscrupulous coin-chasing Tantrans ["Let there be no laws that stand in the way of the coins that are rightfully mine! If I'd wanted to live under the yoke of Torm, I'd have gone to live in a temple of Torm -- let that temple not come to me, and raise its hand over MY city walls, and declare all that is free and Tantran to henceforth bow to the writ of Torm! This is no one-god city!"] had decided to relocate to Scardale or Sembia).

So saith Ed. Ye Hooded One, saying nighty-night for now.

March 12, 2004: Hello, all. The Hooded One posts among you again, to whit the words of Old Ed:

Hi, Dargoth. Well, as to "restoring" 1st Edition flavour to the Realms, giving Mourngrym and Caladorn cavalier levels, and so on: WotC controls the Realms, not me, so I've no direct say in what products will be published, what the topics or content of those products will be, and what exact words will end up in them (even if I write all or a lot of it, design text goes through a development team = rules rationalizers, and then editors), so I simply can't do things like that, whether I want to or not.

What I CAN do (again, through two levels of editors) is post Realmslore columns on the website, "filling in" gaps in the hitherto published Realms -- and there are still so many gaps to be filled that I haven't the time to go back over what's already been published trying to 'fix' it. After all, my fix would just be my opinion, and the Realms isn't my world any more: it's OUR world.

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Ah, the Risen Cult of Bane. Scattered from their base in the Moonshaes to several small underground 'congregations' in Amn, Tethyr, Scornubel, and Iriaebor, they have become the zealous 'police of the faithful of Bane,' rooting corruption and lax worship among the clergy of the restored god. There are rumors that Bane has personally given some of them highly secret missions -- and even new powers and forms (bodies) with which to carry out those tasks . . . but what those tasks and semblances are, or if this is more than mere hearsay, current clack across Faerun is unsure.

Foxhelm, beings in Faerun worship many gods: as a rule, only zealots and clergy venerate just one deity. In other words, a farmer will mainly reverence Chauntea, but also pray to appease Talos (to keep crop-damaging storms away or at least few and light), Malar (to keep beasts from attacking him or his folk in the fields, and to send vermin elsewhere), and so on. So tieflings and aasimar can turn to worship many gods (the rules entries tell you what large numbers of them do, and what god they are most likely to worship). If you want to have a tiefling who worships Clangedin of the dwarves or Ilmater, there's absolutely nothing wrong with that -- so long as the background story of the character makes sense, and the player can portray the character properly in light of it (it's no fun at all playing a self-tortured, conflicted, confused creature torn by clashing loyalties and natures, unless that's what the player WANTS to do).

Although I know that Jeff and Kate do still have some Alias-related ideas in the backs of their minds that they'd like to explore, some day (because they've said so), I don't think there are any current plans to use Alias vessels in fiction or game material (but then again, as I just told Dargoth, I don't control the Realms or run WotC, either, so if one was being written right now I wouldn't know :}). In my opinion -- and it's just my opinion; Skip Williams did the latest revamp of spellfire, so he'd be the real expert on this -- an Alias vessel copy wouldn't be able to wield spellfire, and if somehow magically 'given' spellfire, wouldn't survive for long (the body would start to crumble under the strain, 'melting' into blobby bonelessness and wisps of smoke).

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One signing off, but only after adding (for Adrian): the tattoos were all spell foci, of course, but unlike those worn by Alias, had nothing to do with powers Mourngrym's transformed body could use. Rather, his body was the 'storage center' for dozens of spells cast on other beings, who were engaged in murdering a family in Sembia, led by someone who was -- of course -- wearing Mourngrym's likeness and claiming to BE Mourngrym. A Zhent was behind this, of course; it was his intention both to enrich himself by taking the wealth of the murdered merchant family, and to cause Sembians seeking to avenge the loss of their investments to mount an attack on Shadowdale, destroying it or weakening it so much that the Zhents could easily conquer it.

March 12, 2004: The Hooded One here once more, carrying the words of Ed:

Prince Forge, well met! Your question concerns one of the great mysteries of Faerun -- and one, I'm afraid, that must remain largely mysterious. Eric Boyd may well be the sage who knows the most about Araumycos. All I could get out of Elminster is this:

"Araumycos is alive and sentient, but does not think as we do. It is magically bonded both to The High Forest above it and to the Weave which it in part anchors. The strong innate magic of that spot both feeds it and was the lure for those things it guards, simply by smothering them in its own body: the abandoned domiciles of ancient, now-vanished beings of several races who

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desired to master magic. Think of it as unslayable, un-conquerable -- and best left alone. There ARE a multitude of far easier foes and treasures in Faerun, awaiting even the most stubbornly foolish adventurers."

Hmmm. Sounds like a 'pay no attention to what's behind THAT curtain' warning to me...

Ed's words end, for a moment. I've decided to split his answers by questioner, in case the overlong posts are the cause of display problems for others besides me. Your Hooded One will be right back.

March 12, 2004: As promised, The Hooded One returns with more from Ed:

Karth, your hypothetical question is one I've been asked many times over the years by TSR staffers, as we wrestled to all come to the same view of the root nature of the Zhents. Getting rich by control of that "shorter, cheaper, faster, and all ours" trade route betwixt the Sword Coast and the (mineral wealth of the) Moonsea North is what -- originally, anyway -- the Zhentarim were all about.

Future secret projects prevent me from discussing one of the 'ends of the route' you mention in any detail, but thankfully the 'given' you postulate doesn't make that necessary: the 'end' is assumed lost, and we're looking at alternative routes. So here they are:

The Zhent reaction would of course be to change the route rather than abandoning it, and in the long run seek to re-establish this 'best' route, as all of the alternatives are longer, slower, and more expensive.

The worst (from the Zhent point of view) route, the "fallback/defeat/failure" route -- which they use for a comparative trickle of goods right now, keeping it open 'just in case,' is via Tilver's Gap and the Stonelands. To make this work for the full workload the Zhents would need it to carry, they would have to establish dozens of legitimate costers to perform carriage through the Dales (all traffic east of Tilver's Gap), and beef up Darkhold to be ready to defend the western end (bringing caravans onto the existing roads at various points around Corm Orp and nearby places).

The two more desirable alternatives both begin in the east at the Citadel of the Raven, and require hewing a 'safe' route through the Border Forest (probably by establishing two small citadels at either end of the forest trail, and patrolling heavily between them) to reach Anauroch. From there, the Zhents would have to spend a lot of coin sending forth caravans that carry only firewood, food, and water (out into the desert, dump at specific sites, and then return). In this manner, they would establish a series of "water and warmth" waystops across the frigid desert (thanks to the cold, spell-controlled rothe or as a less desirable alternative, caribou, would have to be the beasts of burden instead of horses). If I was the Zhent commander, I'd run the route along those three isolated peaks, Azrrhat being the most easterly, so as to use the heights as navigational aids and signal beacons. This icy route would of course damage some sorts of goods, and would reach the western edge of Anauroch at one of two places: either the north end of the Far Forest or the south end. Which of the two was chosen would depend on how fiercely Llorck is held against the Zhents -- in other words, can they barge down the Delimiby? This river will be their first choice, as it allows them to use their existing agents in Loudwater and elsewhere who represent the 'western end' of their present route.

If they can't use the Delimiby, then it's the harder way: west across the headwaters of the Delimiby and along the southern edge of the Nether Mountains to the valley of the Rauvin, and

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down through the Silver Marches. If I was one of the top Zhents, I'd give orders to try to establish all of these routes, but end up only heavily using the one that proved to have the lowest loss rate of men and cargo. I hope this helps.

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One signing off, with a "You're welcome" to Karth. I hope I can give you another big grin with this little gem: me leaving to walk to the bus to get to Ed's for the weekly Realms session, and my mother calling out the front door: "Dear, dear, you've forgotten your dice!"

Whereupon I, on the sidewalk, call back: "It's all right, mom: I don't expect there'll be swords out tonight!" (curious looks from other pedestrians)

Mom frowns. "No swords?" (not knowing that Ed's Realms are very different from the D&D games she's seen kids playing at school, which are ALL 'hack the monster, take the treasure, hack the next monster')

Me: "No. We start tonight with me lying nude on the altar."

(REALLY strange looks from two old men walking past on the sidewalk, in different directions) :}

To those readers who think our Realms sessions were one long orgy, I hasten to explain that they were actually . . . a series of short orgies. :} No, SERIOUSLY now: two female Knights were staying (without the other Knights) in the house of a merchant who was a devoted worshipper of Sharess. We suspected he was pandering for various temples of the goddess by luring unhappy and restless young lasses away from family and home with gifts and promises of rich husbands and the high life in distant glittering cities -- and that he was doing some tax dodging on the side by making these gals claim that certain coffers travelling in his wagons with them were their own personal property, rather than his wares. The other Knights were waiting to pounce if the merchant revealed any of this to be true, and my character was posing as a young lass smitten by his offers, who upon finding his private altar to Sharess is possessed by her manifested favour, and goes into wild raptures. My character didn't dare speak for the goddess [who might just smite her down for such blasphemy], but we hoped that her writhings and then wild dancings might unsettle the merchant enough that he would jump to the wrong conclusions . . . which he did. I had problems keeping a straight face during the roleplaying that night, though, because as Ed (playing the merchant) shuffled around wringing his hands and imploring Sharess to forgive him, I kept seeing the shocked face of one of the old men on the sidewalk.

Hmmm. Let amend my last post. Instead of "shocked face" let me correct it to read: "shocked and unbelievably delighted."

So there. :}

The Hooded One, not Ed. Ed almost always looks delighted.

Addendum to the above Realmsplay tale: the true beauty of Ed's original Realms campaign is that we've NEVER felt like he was running us through a prepared adventure. WE have council-of-war sessions and decide who to ask for news, where to go adventuring, what to do ... and Ed just shows us the unfolding world as we do our thing.

March 13, 2004: Karth, The Hooded One sends this reply:

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I'm reluctant to get very specific in answering this because a certain [must remain nameless] longtime FR designer is currently working on something [which must remain vague for now] near to this topic.

However, my personal opinion (which I'd follow if this befell in the 'home' Realms campaign) would be that Fzoul would be reluctant to try so obvious a ploy, because he'd know that Khelben would hold him responsible, whatever the 'letter' (specific wording) of their agreement was. They both entered into the pact knowing it would be broken, sooner or later; it was a time-buying affair for both of them.

Khelben would view Fzoul as in charge of any 'Western Zhents' whether he claimed not to be, or not. Due to the highly authoritarian nature of the Zhentarim, the Zhents can't fairly be equated to the Harpers, and Khelben did openly leave the Harpers to found the Moonstars.

If you look back over the history of the Zhentarim to date, Fzoul is an opportunistic survivor, who always tries to put himself into the 'right place' or position at any given time -- and it would be stupid (and therefore out of character) for him to pick a fight with Khelben over this.

After all, the caravan trade into and from the Sword Coast existed prior to their agreement, and can continue without challenging that agreement so long as the Zhents don't establish more agents at the western end of the route, increase investments and bribes in the Sword Coast lands, move important Zhents there, or increase their missions or political manipulations. Khelben is as interested as anyone else in goods flowing across Faerun and arriving at their destinations as cheaply as possible, because that lets commoners buy things without paying ruinous prices (rising prices would lead to people being in need, and eventually widespread unrest).

That doesn't mean that Fzoul wouldn't try to covertly influence a few individuals whom he could label as foes rather than rival Zhents into helping the Zhentarim. For instance, if Fzoul could get a Red Wizard of Thay or two, who are in trade enclaves in the Sword Coast region, into unwittingly furthering Zhent schemes or abetting Zhent trading, he'd do it in a shot -- but I doubt he's figured out a way to successfully do that, yet. Blow it, and that would be "dancing with the devil" far more than making an agreement with Khelben ever was.

After all, looking at what the Red Wizards are up to in the western Heartlands right now, they are becoming the true foe and threat to the Zhentarim by simply being bigger and better occupiers of the same market niche, if you will. :}

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One points to this for Candlekeep readers who may not give two hoots about trade or the Zhentarim, and I say this: Ed's word's here are a perfect example of how he 'thinks Realms,' always seeing consequences and alliances and 'the interconnectedness of all things.' This is one very important way in which any good DM makes a campaign seem alive, and can keep play going a long, long time.

On March 13, 2004 THO said: o arilyn742, I (the Hooded One) make reply: I haven't done much for the Realms beyond be part of Ed's band of ham-acting, extremely-demanding players. So you might say I've wielded one paint brush in adding colour to the great tapestry that is the Realms.

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Ed, however, IS the Realms. Everything you read about them was either created by him, or expanded by others from his notes, guidance, and direct aid, with a very few exceptions.

Ed DIDN'T create Vaasa, Damara, Bloodstone Pass, the people or folk of the Moonshaes (though the name is his), the Uthgardt barbarians, Drizzt or the drow (though he did give the drow lots of Realms rules and two gods, Eilistraee and Vhaeraun), Kara-Tur, Al-Qadim (though he did contribute some spells to that setting), Shade, some features in Anauroch, the Hordelands, or Maztica. He isn't responsible for the Egyptian pantheon of gods put into Old Empires, or most of the nonhuman deities (though he created a few gods for the dwarves). He didn't create Danilo Thann or Arilyn, though he DID create Elaith. Most of the lead characters in novels not by him were created by others, though he did name and create a surprising number of them, from almost all of the Uskevrens in the Sembia series to Myrmeen Lhal in *The Night Parade*.

Everything else came originally from Ed, even to the name "Forgotten Realms." The map of Faerun has been tinkered with a bit, but what you see today is, more or less, what Ed handed to TSR back in 1986.

Ed is very quick to credit others for expanding his creation and putting it into D&D form, from staffers like Jeff Grubb and Steven Schend to freelancers like Eric Boyd and many, many others. The Realms is a shared world, now, but as someone who saw it before TSR ever did, I can swear beyond any doubt that Ed Greenwood is THE Creator of the Realms. He even created Candlekeep (not this site, but the monastery it is named for . . . plus Alaundo, most of the Roll of Years, the Calendar of Harptos and Harptos himself, and so on and on and on).

As for Volo: I once heard Volo called the "Geraldo Rivera of the Realms," but I think that's a trifle unfair to the real Mr. Rivera. Volo is a young, amoral rogue itching with the need to learn secrets and trumpet them to the world. A minor mage and major rogue, he wanders Faerun penning acidic travel guides (the Volo's Guides, which are available as downloads and are ESSENTIAL to making a Realms campaign seem colourful and 'real'). There's even a Volo's Guide to Baldur's Gate II, which was meant to go with the computer game. Volo went so far as to write a book entitled *Volo's Guide To All Things Magical*, and was threatened (by various wizards) with dire consequences if it was ever published.

Inevitably, it was, and as a result Volo (for his own protection, the Old Mage insists) spent some time as an ornamental frog sculpture in Elminster's pond. He's free again now, and I fear we've all not heard the last from Volo. :}

March 15, 2004: Ed has sent me his latest responses, and accordingly:

Foxhelm, I've no idea if there will ever be a collection of the Wizards Three tales. Given that 2nd Edition is fading into the publishing past, I doubt it. I've always intended to write more of those wonderful evening get-togethers, and the fate of Dalamar was the impediment that slowed and then stopped them. As far as I understand the current Dragonlance licensing situation, there may still be an impediment. I do have a future DRAGON column in the works, but no time, just now, to get to work on it.

As I've said before, I've no control over what Realms products get published. To play the time-honored-among-all-gamers-of-a-certain-age "If * I * Ran TSR" game: if I'd been controlling Realms publications, you'd have seen a Border Kingdoms sourcebook, an expanded *Wyrms of the North* collection, a Wizards Three product, and a Nine Hells sourcebook long ago, to say

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nothing of about another dozen Volo's Guides, a Cormyr sourcebook -- and probably my tombstone, too: Here lies Ed, dead of overwork. :}

As for an all-Realms moot of mages, that's an intriguing idea that I'll have to talk to WotC about. (The original Wizards Three series began when the then-editor of DRAGON asked me to do something that would link all three TSR campaign 'worlds.')

Thanks for thinking of the Wizards Three tales. They were LOTS of fun to do, even if (by the end, with changes in editorship) I was being forced to cut back on repartee and characterization, and give more and more spells. (Originally, I'd intended to put in a lot more magical processes, such as how to make spell inks, the order in which to cast warding spells to create magical defenses around a keep or a tent, and so on.)

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, continuing with her promised glimpses of Realmsplay in the original 'home' campaign:

One session, the Knights spent a frustrating day travelling through Tilver's Gap and battling "highroad-blades" (brigands) and monsters all along the way. Just before nightfall, we reached an isolated way-inn (not on any Realms maps) just west of Daggerdale -- and, still hearing bugbear and hobgoblin calls around and ahead of us, and darkness swiftly drawing down, we decided to spend the ruinous prices and stay the night.

The Helm and Hearth looked like the onetime fortress it had once been, and its common-room was a tense, unhappy assembly of travellers (rival merchants, Sembians demanding debt-repayments from Cormyrean traders, Zhent agents, a family fleeing Hillsfar for reasons of their own, some half-orc hireswords who'd been firmly disarmed at the gates, a few dwarves who didn't think much of the ale on offer, and so on) who'd have been at each other's throats in an instant if it hadn't been for the numerous and well-armed inn guards.

Our problem was this: not only did some of the other guests recognize us and want us swiftly dead, Florin recognized some of the guards as longtime Purple Dragons -- AND was certain he'd seen the innkeeper lying dead (in bodies he expected the Zhent-ordered orc patrols would have soon gathered, cooked, and eaten) at the north end of Daggerdale on our trip out.

So there was a LOT of creeping around the creaking old upper floor (and roof) of the inn, all through that night, with daggers being plunged enthusiastically into bodies, someone setting a fire that someone else quenched with a spell (and we'd seen no other wizards!), and so on. Ed was masterful at playing all the NPC parts, and we all ended up in a very interesting confrontation in the inn pantry, with Jhessail and an undercover War Wizard both threatening to blast each other to greet the gods (with all the rest of us, and most of that end of the inn, too), RIGHT NOW.

When it all got sorted out, it was revealed that a Cormyrean 'under the cloak' (undercover) force had infiltrated the inn because of fears that the longtime smuggling base had been taken over by the Zhents. That wasn't true -- yet. However, they were suspicious of the innkeeper for the same reason we were: they'd arrested the man and carried him off to prison in Tilverton, so why was he here again, large as life, when they thought he was still safely manacled miles away?

The truth was that the inn was owned by a longtime trading family whose treasures included six masks that bonded to the flesh of anyone who put them on (though they could be removed at will), and these masks made their wearers all look like the same man. The innkeeper we'd collared was the third son of the original, who'd been killed by the Zhents for refusing their offer. The eldest son was the one we'd found dead in Daggerdale, the second son had taken over and

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promptly been captured by the Cormyreans, and now the third son was trembling with fear at his own impending death, and wondering what his two young sisters were going to do (after all, there WERE two masks left).

Learning of this, the War Wizard wanted the entire set of masks in the worst way (and settled for seizing all that were left to hand), the remnants of the family wanted to stay alive (and accepted an offer of accompanying us to a new life in Shadowdale), and we wanted a decent night's sleep. So in the morning, all the other guests were ushered out, the Purple Dragons fought and slew the Zhent agent and those inn guards who objected to losing their jobs, and then scoured the place for all signs of smuggling-and we barricaded ourselves in a stone granary with horses, wagons for the family's belongings, and the family themselves. When we emerged, the Cormyreans were gone, so we left too, arriving in Shadowdale safely.

Within the tenday, the Zhents stormed the place and burned it to the ground. A typical Realms adventure that left some of my fellow players busily making notes of the names of all the new War Wizards and Purple Dragons we'd encountered -- and all of us wondering just where those masks are now, and what use is being made of them.

March 15, 2004: Herewith, Ed's next reply:

Lashan, I think my opportunity to do dragons articles has largely slipped away, though I'll discuss your idea with folks at Wizards (Eric Boyd and Sean Reynolds have both tinkered with updating some of my Realmslore into 3rd Edition form, on the WotC website, and doing new dragons should be right up the old alley, so to speak).

I've always viewed the Vast as being rather 'dragon light' (in part due to the harvestings done by the mysterious power resident in Ironfang Keep), but you could certainly put a few keeping-low-profile dragons in all of the places you mention, including the glacier. After all, the orcs and various herds in the 'eastern tongue' grasslands of the Vast (the Fire River valley) provide ready food sources for some dragon types.

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, recounting very briefly another memorable night of Realmsplay: Shaerl Rowanmantle was hosting some of her fellow Rowanmantles, other noble Cormyreans, and courtiers (a visiting embassy to her and her husband Lord Mourngrym, whom the Forest Kingdom was most anxious to subvertxx ahem, gain as an ally in the Dales). Mourngrym asked we Knights to attend (and prevent any War Wizard funny business), and we did so-only to discover that a powerful War Wizard was present in the delegation and using magic against us that went awry when clashing with our spells. The result was a wild evening of people's minds temporarily inhabiting other people's bodies, without warning or control. Thankfully, most of us Knights ended up swapping with each other, most of the time, but the results were still dangerous and at the same time screamingly-British-farce-funny, as a Shaerl who wasn't Shaerl went off to bed with a Mourngrym who wasn't Mourngrym, a War Wizard tried to plot with another War Wizard who was actually Torm, an overamorous courtier tried to seduce a chambermaid who was really Rathan, another courtier tried to bribe information out of the scullery maid who was really Jhessail, and the sly, snivelling junior War Wizard whom everyone in the Cormyrean party disliked even more than his hosts of Shadowdale did ended up in Jhessail's body talking to a VERY suspicious Merith, whilst Florin ended up in HIS body.

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We literally laughed ourselves to tears a couple of times, but agreed that there was no way Ed could do this in a novel and not give editors too much of a headache to ever inflict it on readers. Ed capped the joke, months later, by having an 'aftershock' that only affected the junior War Wizard and Florin, who briefly swapped bodies again at a moment when Dove was angry with her husband and forcefully telling him so -- and the War Wizard was being caught red-eared eavesdropping on the marriage-arrangement negotiations of two Cormyrean noble patriarchs planning the hitch the daughter of one to the son of the other for purely financial reasons. The results were, well, hilarious all over again.

And to SiriusBlack and to Lady Elaine: point taken, but I was trying to polite -- and if you knew what Volo did to one of my characters, in-game, you'd know why I have no reason at all to be either charitable or polite to him! :}

March 15, 2004: Yes, I'm back with another of Ed's replies:

Dargoth, I'm a little puzzled by your question. Why would Darkhope's parentage matter to the current rulership of Scardale, one way or the other? Despite his claims at the time of his attempted conquest, Lashan isn't seen by many in the Dales to have been the "rightful" ruler of anywhere except by brute force -- and there haven't exactly been a shortage of brute-force rulers in the Dragonreach lands over the last few centuries. :}

Yet if this matter of lineage is important in your campaign, Atlar probably would be the nearest acceptable arbitrator. My reading of his alignment would be that he couldn't do anything but tell the truth about her heritage, as he saw it (it's up to you how good his temple records will be), and I believe you overestimate public knowledge of, or regard for, ties to the Harpers. (It's a little like hearing vague rumors that someone might once have voted for a fringe political party without quite daring to ask them, and not having any real evidence as to their politics at all, one way or another. Remember, rumors about the Harpers and other power groups and shadowy organizations fly around the Realms like birds in spring.)

As I've said before, it's quite incorrect to view most Realms NPCs (who aren't priests or paladins or something of the sort) as having a single deity: everybody makes appeasement prayers to all sorts of deities, tending to worship a single one only if their situation dictates it (farmers praying mainly to Chauntea and appeasing mainly Talos, for example). However, my play notes indicate that Lashan did openly pray to Bane on one occasion in his battles around Essemбра, if that helps.

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, signing off with just one more little Ed memory: we Knights carefully stalked, planned, and laid a trap for a certain wily Zhentarim wizard -- and when the time was right, we pounced. The place was a farmhouse on the northern outskirts of Voonlar, the battle was fierce (there were other Zhentarim mages with him, plus a nasty little spell-lure that we dubbed "beholder in a box"), and the place ended up as an inferno. We were satisfied that we'd finally managed to eliminate this murderer, and Torm was really pleased because he'd managed to loot the place first. His biggest prize was a gem the size of a small fist, which -- fighting still being fierce -- he stowed in his codpiece.

He was quite perturbed when the gem just vanished, after he'd put it on his mantle to admire back in Shadowdale and be called out of the room by Storm Silverhand (Ed) to apologize for a prank he'd played. We were ALL perturbed when we figured out that Torm had helpfully smuggled our

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intended Zhentarim target out of danger and into our midst (temporarily spell-disguised as the gem, of course). :}

March 15, 2004: As it happens, Ed and I are e-catching up, so here's an arrow-swift reply, SiriusBlack:

Glad you've enjoyed the little glimpse. I had a blast writing it; romp time! Romp time!

Yes, that little logo of Elminster's Eversmoking Pipe denotes a novel in the Elminster series. May there be many more. :}

Ed

And there you have it. Gods above and below, I can't wait for the Waterdeep book. I'll just have to make do with The Silent House, I guess.

THO

On March 15, 2004 THO said: Lady Elaine, Volo did the prying journalist thing, publicly trying to worm information out of some Cormyrean nobles that would have endangered Shadowdale in the face of Zhent mobilizations - and the worm did it in MY name (claiming he'd gotten this info and that info from my character, and just wanted confirmation, because "after all I was but a woman, and woman are given to such wild fancies."

I believe I judge him rather charitably, because he does such outrageous things with not a whit of Torm's charm.

March 15, 2004: Dargoth, here's Ed's reply:

Ah, my apologies. Here's where the simplification of the Realms to put it in print slaps us all. In the 'home' Realms, there were and are (though no one is daring to pursue them, any longer) several claims from various members of that family, and Lashan's was by no means the strongest/most direct. So there are persons still alive in Faerun who have a stronger claim to the throne than a daughter of Lashan, and the counter-argument that "yes, but he actually ruled" brings us right back to "might makes right/possession is all."

The public view of Lashan in the Dales is the same in Scardale as elsewhere: he brought death and strife and lawlessness and loss to us all by his cruel, grasping ambition . . . so now you want to give us MORE of same? If his daughter is anything like him we want no part of her, and if she's a shy, retiring flower, how could she make a good ruler? No, let the past be the past and a burial to all that - just as we buried so many because of Lashan's ambitions. Go from this house, and lash our ears no more with such foolishness!

And so on. There'll be malcontents who'd back Darkhope, but Sembia, the Harpers, Hillsfar, and Tantras (just to name a quick few) want no part of renewed strife in Scardale, and will act firmly to stop it.

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So there you have it. Of course (she said teasingly), an attempt to put her in charge anyway looks like great roleplaying opportunities galore to me, and Ed agrees with that. :}

March 15, 2004: Alexander, Ed says thus unto thee:

Great! Everyone should travel, but good travel books will give you photos enough to just 'see what I mean' if you want to fix the terrain in mind in a hurry. Yet I say again: go and see England, any chance you get. It was the founder of the Jesuits who said we all inhabit imaginary worlds . . . and whether or not anyone uses the Realms as one of them, the more reality one sees, the more colourful all of the worlds in our minds. Go for it, Alex!

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, signing off. (Hello, Blueblade. Yes, I loved that chapter too.)

March 15, 2004: Hello, Elfinblade. Here's Ed's reply:

Choosing my favourite Realms novel or Realms trilogy is a bit like choosing between children, or which of my hands or ears or feet I prefer (and yes, I only have two of all of those body parts :}), but I'll have a try at this. Please bear in mind that this is very hard for me to do, and the answers may change from time to time.

Fave lone novel: HOMELAND by Bob Salvatore, with strong competition from ELFSHADOW by Elaine Cunningham (sentimental fave because she got Waterdeep so right, and because Arilyn Danilo and Elaith are ALL fun), and a new challenge by THE FORSAKEN HOUSE by Rich Baker (when it's published, you'll see why).

Favourite trilogy: again, this is a squeaker, but I'd have to say Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak's Finder's Stone trio.

My fave series was the Harpers, but the strength of the writing in the Sembian saga is so strong that it's taken that crown, for me.

And my fave of the books I co-wrote, thus far, is CORMYR: A NOVEL (though that could soon change, too :}).

Yet please always bear in mind that these are personal preferences and they're all VERY close races, not clear walkaway winners in any of these cases.

So saith Ed.

Your Hooded One has very different choices, because I DO include books by Ed, and think STORMLIGHT is his best-written book, ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER his most fun romp, ELMINSTER IN HELL his most ambitious book (and just a darn good fantasy book period, in any company or competition), SPELLFIRE his most important-to-the-Realms book, the Elminster Saga his most important series and THE most important Realms series so far, and the Shadows of the Avatar trilogy his best Realms trilogy, and winner by a nose over R.A. Salvatore's trilogy of Homeland, Exile, and Sojourn.

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March 15, 2004: Ed speaks:

Hi, Lashan. The mages of Ironfang Keep are a real mystery. Originally Ironfang Keep was a "hands off" location because of a planned computer game tie-in that ended up being located somewhere else, but we'd already hinted that it was a mysterious, shunned place whose magic-using inhabitants had to be of VERY great power (to make Mulmaster, Zhentil Keep et al just go away and not keep trying to conquer them; the inhabitants had to be SO powerful that they could casually 'scare off' Manshoon, Fzoul, and so on). 'Mages who dabbled in plane-hopping activities' was a view advanced later, to support the then-not-yet-quite-published Planescape line. I had always used them as "beast experimenters" who from time to time, at random and totally without warning, would magically 'swoop' and collect dragons, orcs, dragon turtles, terrasques...whatever.

So they remain that sort of mystery today. :}

Go wild!

So saith Ed. hope that reply helps. :}

March 16, 2004: Hello, all. Presenting the words of Ed once more:

Well met, DarkPsion. Yes, part of me wants to publish two Knights novels a year, treating their careers as an endless saga -- and then again, there's this other part of me that worries I'm overloaded right now, and however would I meet THOSE deadlines, too?

As far as I know, stats for the Knights have never been updated in print beyond those places you're already familiar with, now that Kuj31 has swooped in done the swift Realmslore note for you (mentioned elsewhere, yes: FRS1 The Dalelands, Volo's, but not really updated). My 'home' campaign still uses 2nd Edition (because we vote on such things, and the majority of my players prefer 2nd Ed), so we've never 'recast' things for the new rules.

As for Nimbral, well, I strongly suspect you'll be seeing more about this place soon, but with an accent more on the place and less on magic or psionics or treasure.

So saith Ed. The Hooded One fondly remembers her in-character visit to Nimbral, and meeting a certain unicorn there . . . (happy sigh of remembrance)

March 16, 2004: Dargoth, the Hooded One once more reveals unto thee the words of Ed:

Okay, let me deal with the smaller matters first: officially, we don't know who controls the Flaming Tower now. In the 'home' Realms campaign, the Knights of Myth Drannor slew the giants who were dwelling there as a Zhent garrison, and then returned several times to "harvest Zhents" (of later garrisons) until the Zhents decided it would be more prudent to just withdraw.

The large, unlovely levitating rock whose hollowed-out interior was The Temple In The Sky was also scoured by the Knights, though again, several beholders in succession took up residence and had to be slain. The Zhents see this site as far more strategically important, and are very

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reluctant to relinquish it. The magic that causes it to 'stay up' is almost certainly Netherese, given its location, but could possibly be even more ancient. What is certain is that no one alive today has quite deciphered what that magic is (it resists normal dispels, attempts to manipulate the Weave in its location, and so on -- and utterly prevents the operation of all translocation [teleport, dimension door, etc.] spells within its confines and between any part of it, including the outer surface of the rock, and anywhere else in the known planes). Curiouser and curiouser, as Alice might say. :}

And now the biggie: Scyllua, Scardale, and all that. I agree that merchants would welcome stability and a strong leader, but I don't think many of them, regardless of alignment, would want "another tyrant fresh out of Zhentil Keep," not only because all Dale folk (merchants desiring to engage in unfettered trade in particular) dislike harsh, all-seeing, and competent authority, but also because they'd expect her to lead them straight into another war -- which for them simply means eventual impoverishment, destruction of their homes and wares and other property, and death. With all the wealth of Sembia pitted against anyone rising in Scardale who isn't a weak ruler or a puppet for Sembian interests, they can't see her as the ultimate victor in any dispute: Sembia will just go on hurling mercenaries at her (adventuring bands, Thayan Red Wizards willing to do this to establish another trading enclave, whomever). And with the ruler of Hillsfar not wanting Sembia to gain any greater influence in Scardale, the dale would inevitably get caught between the hammer and the anvil in any dispute between them, with disastrous results.

To put it plainly, the folk of Scardale are tired of occupation and fear and knife-wielding intrigues, but they're even more fed up with tyrannical rulers of any sort. Most of them would love Faerun to be a place where there were no rulers at all, and everyone could just get on with the business of working, eating well, and getting slowly wealthier, with intrigues just being spicy gossip to wash down one's evening ale with.

Yet of course we all know that's not the case, so: let's have a look at those other claimants. :} Anyone can, of course, feel free to create their own characters to add to this list; just consider this one mine.

--Maukthyn Harthin (NE hm Rog2/Exp6): a sly, swift-tongued, ugly man from a family that long ago branched off from the Aumersair clan (Lashan's bloodline), this longtime investor in Scardale spends most of his time in the capital of Sembia. He's grown VERY wealthy (enough to hire agents and spies in plenty, who are active throughout the Dalelands), and is said to trade in drugs and poisons (via some pirates of the Sea of Fallen Stars), as well as gemstones stolen from the Moonsea North, that pass into Sembia through Scardale and other ports (Scardale being his favorite because it avoids all Sembian scrutiny and taxation, and the Sembian port of Yhaunn being his fallback).

--Imbar Darthaun (CN hm Rgr4): a handsome, charismatic adventurer who recalls the more carefree Scardale of his youth (he's almost reached forty summers in age, though he looks and acts half of that), and would like to 'retire' to rule a cleansed, more peaceful dale in which Sembia, Cormyr, Hillsfar, and Tantras would together establish law and administer justice, leaving Scardale as a 'free port' (that he could enjoy all the ladies of, more than one dark rumor insists). Darthaun can call on some longtime adventuring companions and allies (most of whom see conquering Scardale as one last, wild challenge that could win them a home for their declining years, and perhaps trade-riches with which to enjoy those graying seasons).

--Jamrithra Sparmeth (CG hf Wiz2): this quiet, no-nonsense woman is plain, studious, and dignified. She came to Scardale only a summer ago, but claims descent from the lords of Scardale of old (about which, thanks to the tales told by some Aumersairs, there's much dispute). Some old local beliefs claim that the olden-times rulers of Scardale trained monsters, bred

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monsters to be even more horrific, and even bred WITH monsters -- and because Jamrithra is known to study the Art, some folk of Scardale believe she's one more "monster-tamer who'll terrorize us all, once she builds herself a tower and stocks it with her pet beasts." Those who've had more to do with Jamrithra doubt she has the character or the necessary magic to do anything of the kind, but say her temper and habit of insisting others obey her whims may well keep her from ever ruling the dale, even if Hillsfar and Sembia agreed tomorrow-morn that they'll both support her (which of course is very far from ever befalling).

--Peldra Ammarask (LN hf P3, of Tyr): this bewitchingly beautiful, petite woman is both blessed and cursed with childlike good looks, which makes many folk want to mother or humor her, rather than seriously considering her for ever holding any position of authority. She arrived from Cormyr earlier this year, and is widely seen as a "dunderhead" agent for that realm (most folk of Scardale are certain the Forest Kingdom has designs on Scardale ["They'll take Mistedale, and then Battledale, and then US!"]), and believe the Cormyreans are up to something subtle and long-term and devastating, but are sending ambitious little emptyheads like Ammarask in the meantime, mainly to keep anyone else from establishing a firm rule over Scardale). Peldra is, in truth, far from an emptyhead, and undertook to 'straighten out' Scardale after a suggestion from a senior priest of Tyr, who said he saw this both as a test of her and of great benefit to the dale, because "all places should know the security of clear, firm law and the alert, tireless enforcing of that law."

--Sturtle Telarandon (LN hm Exp4): this pompous, drenched-in-visible-wealth merchant of Sembia would love to turn Scardale into his personal fiefdom. Hailing from Urmlaspyr, he has made fortunes upon fortunes, and after sending some agents in to buy everything in sight, can't believe that so many folk in Scardale are so stubborn as to not accept his blandishments and just clear out, so he can tear down their hovels and build grand mansions for all of his friends and toadies. Said stubborn locals fear that Telarandon is so beholden to other Sembian investors and trade-allies that every last one of them would be sent packing -- and, as a rule, they neither like nor trust rich Sembians. The clack in Scardale is that Telarandon is quite likely to give them a wagon full of gold and an empty one to pile all their belongings onto, let them start out of town, and then accuse them of stealing the wagons and all the coins and swording them on the spot (claiming both loaded wagons as his own).

These five are just the most vigorously visible current claimants. Someone like Torm of the Knights would be just brim-gleeful watching the fun of all the unfolding scheming, but a lot of the folk of Scardale (who can't escape being caught in the middle of it, day after night) fervently wish and pray that all of these "ambitious daggers" would just GO AWAY.

Wow. No wonder Ed had so many NPCs discourage us from getting caught up in the messes of Scardale. He's right about Torm, and Victor would no doubt have dragged us all into protecting Scardale, as well as Shadowdale, Myth Drannor, and most of Mistedale.

A relieved Hooded One, signing off. :}

March 16, 2004: Hello, simontrinity. To you, Ed of the Greenwood doth make this reply:

Lanseril Snowmantle, the druid of the Knights of Myth Drannor (played by Ian Hunter, the first Lorelord of the Realms), was off in the Border Forest during the Time of Troubles, already engaged in a massive personal undertaking to cleanse that wood of the damages being done to it by the Zhents (who'd gotten tired of stopping arrows and similar attacks during their attempts to carve a trade-road right through the forest, to Anauroch, and released divers monsters into the place, to slaughter its inhabitants -- as well as setting many fires). So Lanseril was off busy being

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a druid at the time; as I've said before, my original players are all GOOD roleplayers. This fit in neatly with the TSR editors, who wanted me to keep the number of characters 'in play' in my novels as small as possible.

So saith Ed, and there you have it, etc. Exit the Hooded One for only a short time, because there's another Ed reply to post.

March 16, 2004: To The Sage, Ed replies thus:

Note the Shadow adept suggestion in the FRCS. This is probably not far off the mark, though I'd like to also retain my own views of some of the activities of the mages of Ironfang Keep: that they magically captured all sorts of monsters and used them as partially-magically-controlled forces in attempts to control various gates (portals) and regions around them in various planes. I see these mysterious wizards as not being interested in conquest or rulership, but rather in controlling Area A to get gems and gold with which to purchase (through servitor creatures) influence and substances useful in spell research from Area B.

Their true nature, their hierarchy, and the extent to which they act in unison or struggle amongst themselves must all, for the nonce, remain . . . mysterious. :}

Gosh, I can HEAR his light, mocking DM's voice, there. I recall once, during a play session, the most beautiful among us female players (not me) responded to such a tone from Ed by getting up, shimmying over to his table, leaning over and starting to unbutton her blouse, and inquiring throatily, "You'll not reveal a little more? Even if * I * reveal a little more?"

Whereupon Ed got up, minced around the table to grind his pelvis against hers, undid a few buttons of HIS shirt, leaned forward until they were nose to nose, and replied throatily: "No. But thanks for trying."

March 16, 2004: Thank you, Shadowlord. That's very nice of you. I shall.

Besides, Ed appended a note to his last e-message: "I'm really going to be slowing down on the answers for a time, Sweethips. Elaine and I are really starting to go at it hot and heavy."

Now, let's all avoid the OBVIOUS comments on that last line, shall we? :}

March 17, 2004: Hello, all. The Hooded One, passing on Ed's latest reply:

Well met, Thom. You're very welcome, and thanks for calling it "great stuff." I've had a blast crafting it, always, and hope to do so for years to come.

1. In the field: black cloaks with red "fist of Bane" in the center back (below and between shoulder-blades), with a breastplate of the same colors and decoration over black armor when going into battle.

Casual dress: anything (dark clothing preferred), with a fist of Bane [in those days, a closed human right hand, wearing a gauntlet, with fingers towards the viewer and spikes on the

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knuckles, with three drops of blood depending from the horizontally-severed wrist; note that this has since changed into a bare hand with fires or lightnings leaking from between the fingers] worn either as a hidden locket, somewhere on the body (if concealment was absolutely necessary), or (preferred) with a black sash tied at the hip so the red fist of Bane design is clearly visible.

In the temple: varied from temple to temple (poorer rural temples could get pretty casual, sticking to black cloaks as a minimum). Most elaborate height of ceremonial clothing, under the High Imperceptor's rule: supreme priest in temple: all black/senior officers of temple: black with purple sashes/senior priests: black with red sashes/upperpriests: black with fiery orange sashes/general clergy: black, with fist of Bane gorgets denoting rank (schemes varied, but generally followed the rule of more fists meant higher rank, usually from 2nd through 7th level)/newly-accepted priests [= 1st level]: black tunic over crimson breeches/novices: crimson robes/lay brothers: orange robes (newly-accepted priests and lower allowed to wear only black half-cloaks, not full black cloaks as other ranks).

All priests of Bane carried at least two consecrated holy symbols of Bane at all times: in a hollow boot-heel and mounted on their belts (when undressed, at least one symbol, worn on neck-chain).

2. Maces: all priests of Bane (magical weapons for highest ranks). Morningstars: temple officers, priests of any rank assigned to doorguard duties. Whips and Spiked Lashes: upperpriests. Novices and lay brothers: hammers and cudgels.

3. See my answer to 1.

4. Stationary defence: Hammerguard, a variant of Evard's black tentacles wherein tentacles didn't grasp, but wielded maces (actually part of the spell, not actual weapons that could be detached from the tentacle). Battle: Flailing Cloud (moving by caster's will cloud of darkness that bludgeons all creatures it touches [except those bearing a holy symbol of Bane], Mystic Lash, Flame Blade (black flames variant, same effects). These are the favourites, but Banites could wield almost any spell. Higher level priests always carried some formidable cause wounds spells, and the 'real bad ones' usually had flame strikes AND blade barriers ready to go.

Quiet confidence, and cold, clipped speech (whispers dripping with menace) was the preferred "style" among most Banites; swaggering, shouting and ranting were for lesser clergy of lesser gods. Note that in the Zhentil Keep mix, the clergy and the wizards tended to loathe each other, the beholders keeping both groups from erupting into open strife by "making examples" of those individuals who did. (This hatred wasn't divinely-dictated: in Darkhold and other outposts, certain clerics and wizards who had to work together daily became firm friends, or even lovers.)

Have fun! ;}

So saith Ed.

My, but I'm feeling all tingly, being called a "channel into Ed." Let me just pass over THAT mental image and try to answer your questions. :) Hmm. We Knights fought lots of helmed horrors, dark nagas, and banelar, but usually only when creeping into their lairs or Zhent strongholds (helmed horrors were used as "terrorize all commoners" doorwardens for Zhent caches in caves and old tombs, in Zhent strongholds, and in naga lairs. When encountering Banite priests in the open (i.e. a road patrol near Voonlar or Yulash), we usually faced twenty or so Zhentilar warriors, commanded by a priest (sometimes with an underling) and a wizard of lesser power than the priest (sometimes accompanied by an apprentice). If neither priest nor wizard had a lackey, they'd instead be accompanied by at least one mounted crossbowman of skill.

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We invaded many Banite temples, shrines, and covert bases, of course, and generally found more priests there (especially outside the large temples, the Banites seemed never to work in groups of less than five or six, and often had 'errand runners,' too).

And we did our share of hacking and slashing, though it became almost a party prank to dress up in the garments of priests or wizards we'd slain and go around issuing orders that would direct other Banites into traps or elf ambushes (or just order them to camp on a road on a foggy night, knowing a smugglers' caravan was rushing along that road with lanterns out :}).

And yes, get them more interested in the roleplaying. Toss lots of mysteries at them, from missing people to why that dead Banite is wearing your sister's face to what sort of treasure is this weird broken thing, and what happens when I push THIS?

(Answer: no, not an explosion or a genie popping out, but a ghostly face coalesces, speaks a cryptic message, and then races away like a comet into the night, obviously to deliver that message to someone else -- but who? And now what?)

March 17, 2004: Well met again. The Hooded One here, passing on another Ed answer:

Lashan, those factions should all be dabbling in everything, rather than specializing in and cornering one industry versus another. Covert competition on all fronts, so that a few bewildered independents and visitors can get caught in the middle and used by various 'sides' without things erupting into open civil war inside the city walls. Bribes, changing sides, double agents, all of that. Pitting the lumbermen against the dockers and suchlike would last about a month before Tantras would become a battlefield and then a mass graveyard. (Some in Calaunt might of course argue that that would be an improvement. :})

So saith Ed, ye social engineere. The Hooded One, now seeking a warm bath and my laptop to catch up on Ed's next missive...

March 17, 2004: So here I am again, Shadowlord, still toiling for Ed. Yes, ye olde slavedriving lash comes down on my bared hide again and again; 'tis a good thing I like it. :) Tell you what: you can flog me, too, for not just being myself.

In the meantime, Ed speaketh:

Why, it certainly SOUNDS like Nimbral will soon appear in something, somehow, but I can neither confirm nor deny . . . :}

As for the tale of how I created the Realms, well, one more time: me writing fantasy stories featuring the fat merchant Mirt, travelling along the Sword Coast from city to city working swindles and suchlike. (Following Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd & Gray Mouser tales in FANTASTIC, which are self-contained tales but share the same setting, and if you read enough of them, you can piece together 'the world behind the action'.)

Expand outwards from there (if this ship is carrying this and taking on a cargo of that, and these caravan wagons ditto, then in Distant Place X they must have a lot of this to sell and need a lot of that, whereas in Distant Place Y they need textiles but can spare timber, and here in this port folk

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obviously need . . . and so on. So then it gets thought out carefully, climate and trade winds and currents and geology and all -- and then TSR publishes it and entire continents later get grafted on and many minor changes are made and it may no longer look quite so cohesive and planned.

There. That's the whirlwind reply. :}

My favourite 'deployable and fiction fodder' race would have to be humans, with elves as the 'gleam and glitter race' to write about. I have a soft spot for the tomb tappers and wingless wonders (of the intelligent races among the literally hundreds of monsters I've created, down the years). I think the most neglected race of the 'big intelligent core races' is the gnomes, with halflings not far behind -- and I think the most neglected races with intriguing potential are the dragons.

My two personal favourites of my own racial creations are the Malaugrym and the weredragons. Someday I'll do a novel that includes a malaugrym/weredragon romance and pairing . . . heh-heh.

Oh, NOW you've done it! Happy dancing hobgoblins, Shadowlord, d'you know what he's emailing me?

"Diabolical glee" just about covers it. Yeesh! As if the Knights didn't have ENOUGH problems! Exeunt, muttering (and checking quickly behind self).

March 17, 2004: Here I am back again, Hood and all, with Ed's latest reply (my bath is growing cold, but at least I haven't splashed the laptop yet):

Rad, I'm afraid that it's going to be some time before you see the Tree of Life itself in print again (I know the waits seem long for all Realms fans, but we're writing just as fast as we can, believe me!), and Dawntree in my Realmslore WotC web columns is just an idea for DMs to run with if they want to, BUT . . . there's a superb Realms novel coming out by year-end (not by me) that is going to point the way in the direction you're hoping for. I shouldn't say more yet, but . . . consider the patience of elves, and try to do likewise, and in the fullness of time...

So saith Ed. Isn't he just the sort of tease you occasionally want to just whack? (Warning: he never whacks back, but he TICKLES.) The Hooded One, who shares your desire for a new elf realm, Rad, and is impatient, too...

March 17, 2004: To Rad, The Sage, and others: re. the elf realm, Ed asked me to add one thing to his patience request:

"Remember, please, that dire darkness comes before brightening dawn."

There. Cryptic enough? :}

March 18, 2004: Well met, all. The Hooded One returneth with more words from Ed (who is sick as a dog, but soldiering zombie-like through his working day at the library because it's Spring Break off school up in Ontario, Canada, so all the kids who aren't outside getting into mischief are in the library asking him to referee Pokemon and Magic rule disputes to them, despite him telling them frankly he's completely unqualified to do :}):

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Hi, Phoebus. Well, if I was detailing elves in Cormanthor right now, I'd lean towards this: women, children, and commoners dwelling around Lake Sember, with ward-spells, 'instant mist' spells, and strong armed perimeter patrols. Elsewhere in the forest, I WOULD have Tangletrees-style bands of adventurer/champion-types of various types and levels of skill, going on 'wide patrols' lasting a tenday or more, looping through the forest from encampment to encampment. They're still exploring the woods, making sure that ALL the demons and devils are gone, and taking careful note of where human activity is occurring -- because they'd rather NOT confront humans before they're strongly rooted and situated (they see it as "buying unnecessary trouble"). So, around the various dales, and around Myth Drannor's ruins, elves are going to flit along keeping to cover as much as possible, in warbands that are ready for almost any sort of trouble, but under orders to avoid combat if at all possible.

I don't see any buildings being erected (treehomes, yes) or elves vying for control of anything with each other yet. I urge you to rush out and buy Rich Baker's THE FORSAKEN HOUSE the moment it sees print, but in the meantime this 'softly, softly' approach to the elves allows you as DM to jump either way in the future (towards either "we hide" or "here come the little fortresses, all Myth Drannors of the future"). I DO see elves contacting the Harpers and other agents to work against any Sembian investors who make any moves to "just move in an harvest this or that bit of forest," or "make it our own personal hunting preserve, or only for our rich clients." I hope this helps.

So saith Ed.

Interestingly, the 'home' Realms campaign is touching on this very subject at the moment. But as for your question to me: I've always been most impressed with Manshoon.

Except for glimpses in Ed's fiction (which were of course trammled by the Code of Ethics 'evil can't win or even be seen to benefit from their evil deeds' dictates), you've never seen the REAL Manshoon in print.

We've met him in play many times, and from the first he came across as a menacingly polite, sinister, utterly-controlled gentleman who just happened to be plotting several decades ahead to bring most of Faerun under his personal dominance. All lives but his own were disposable, every entity existed to be manipulated or exploited outright (with the subtle former being vastly preferable to the crude latter), and outfoxing Zhentarim underlings or opponents in games of wits was his daily entertainment. He REALLY scared me, without ever raising his voice or uttering curses or being more rude to my character than offering her some gold to betray the Knights ("I'm merely interested in where you set your price, my lady") . . . and he still does.

I wounded him in battle, once, and he merely looked pained and murmured, "Regrettably, there will be a reckoning for this, and I never just get even. Permanent disfigurement won't be enough. Don't bother taking precautions. One day, when you're defenseless, I'll just be there. Right behind you."

Cheery fellow.

Ed has made me jump several times since by sidling up behind me and saying, "Well met" in his Manshoon voice, just before play sessions begin. Creeped me out but good, I tell you.

And to Rad and simontrinity, Ed says: "You're most welcome. Glad to be of help." To SiriusBlack, he replies: "It could well be. It could very well be." :}

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March 18, 2004: Hood adjusted and bells on my ankles, I skip onstage once more with Ed's latest:

Hi, Kameron! Well, this tale has been told again and again, so I'll keep it short. Starting in 1979, I started contributing articles to "The Dragon," as the magazine was then called, and most of these articles made references to my own world, the Forgotten Realms, which actually predates D&D by some years, having begun as a fantasy fiction setting for my own pleasure in 1967. I wrote a LOT of articles for Dragon (so many that Kim Mohan made me a "Contributing Editor") [TSR joke: "What exactly is a Contributing Editor?"/"You'll see when you get your paycheck."] and some of the TSR folks read DRAGON regularly.

I made those references to the Realms for two reasons:

1. Using a mouthpiece (Elminster) I could hint (e.g. "There are rumors of orcs being seen near the old ruins") rather than speaking with the omniscient rules author voice otherwise preferred for Dragon articles at the time ("Six orcs live in this room in the ruins . . .").
2. I could write up a monster and have it deemed "official" (as every Featured Creature was in those days; it said so right on the page it was printed on, in the magazine) and then throw it at my players feeling morally right in doing so. Extra fun for them, too, reading all about what had savaged them. Throwing new monsters at them forced them to roleplay, but if any of them had read the monster in their issue (EVERYBODY bought Dragon in those days) and remembered details, that simulated their character hearing about this monster in tutoring or tavern tales.

It seems TSR was looking for an "campaign world setting" for the forthcoming 2nd Edition of AD&D right about then (in the end, the Realms beat that edition into print, which brought about the Time of Troubles/Avatar adjustments, but that's another story), and TSR designer Jeff Grubb telephoned me one day and asked: "I've been reading your articles in Dragon. Do you really have a complete, detailed fantasy world, or do you just make it up as you go along?"

"Yes," I replied, "and yes."

"Good," he said, "send it!" (Actually, I'm telescoping here. Jeff and I talked for a bit, so he had a better idea of what beast they'd be buying, and then he asked me to call his boss, Mike Dobson, at home that night. I did, and TSR bought the Realms and me as a consultant for what is by today's standards a tiny amount, but I was quite happy because I was looking forward to getting professionally-printed maps for my players; if I did my own with pencil crayons, there was no way not to have the seas and deserts show pencil-strokes.)

I spent most of the spring and summer of 1986 sending weekly or bi-weekly typed packages to TSR (some 800 pages or so, in all), until they frantically told me to STOP (Jeff would say: "Do you have anything on dungeons? Holy symbols?" and I'd write up what I had and send it along, whereupon he'd say: "Okay, now we'd like . . ." It all started with the master map of Faerun and the various dale and city maps). Then Jeff and Karen Boomgaarden [yes, that's the correct spelling these days, and she's a heckuva good editor, if anyone wants to hire a freelancer] set about turning all my lore into what became the Old Grey Box. Bruce Heard (then acquisitions manager, which meant "guy who hires freelancers") assigned me to do a D&D module (which became The Endless Stair) to 'learn the ropes' (Karen doing the edit), and then I handed in my magic stuff (which got turned into FR4 The Magister, just as my stuff on the North became FR5 The Savage Frontier), whilst I got to work on FR1 Waterdeep And The North. I warned them and warned them that this was a REAL city, not "eight buildings and a dozen NPCs," and they were,

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well, flabbergasted when the 153 pages of maps (photocopiers distort at the edges, and I wanted all the distortions to end up in streets rather than making buildings misshapen, so I deliberately did overlaps) arrived and Jeff crawled around on the floor taping them together. The result impressed a TSR vice-president enough to make CITY SYSTEM happen -- and impressed the female design staff for quite another reason: they couldn't get to their washroom, with the assembled map all over the floor! That's why FR1 is in tiny or "mouse type," and my contracts for a time after that included the line: "Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Use Mouse Type."

Those were different days; I customarily cheerfully over-wrote on a subject by thousands of words, and it just got pruned and dropped into a bucket and tossed into a future product by someone else. And (as you can see, looking upwards) that's the Short Version. :}

Wanna co-write a novel? Say, "Storm Silverhand In Love," aka "Raging Bosoms of the Realms"? Or even something serious, rather than that title?

We could suggest it at GenCon, in person, and watch Peter Archer start to tear his hair out. That's always fun. :}

So saith Ed, and I don't think he's joking. Advice from Ye Hooded One: Finish and hand in the contracted one first, Kameron, before you take part in any such stunt. Ed's . . . well, Ed, and he's legendary for the fun he gets up to at GenCon.

March 18, 2004: Hail, all. Ed's latest replies follow, first this one (more probably not until late tonight):

Hi, Dargoth. In an epic battle, the Knights closed and destroyed the "Burial Glen" portal in westernmost ruined Myth Drannor. However, that doesn't mean they got ALL of the devils already infesting the ruins. Many hid in gates and extra-dimensional 'safeholds' (many elves of the city before its ruin constructed lone, secret 'refuge' chambers reachable only in certain ways, and most of these are still in existence), or just fled into the forest. Adventurer incursions and elven explorations of the ruins since have scoured all, or almost all, of the devils out of the ruins . . . but that still leaves a whole lot of Cormanthor for lesser devils to lurk in. If you do find any, they'll be lone, lurking individuals, not swaggering bands. (Either way, good luck ;})

Shudder. We 'found' unexpected devils, more than once, and my favourite character had half of her front torn off the bones in its initial attack. Ed spared my throat (and the neighbor's nerves, and who knows, perhaps those of the local constabulary) by saying I didn't have to roleplay the screaming.

THO

March 19, 2004: Hello, Karth. Yes, 'tis Sweethips, relaying Ed's replies:

Hi, Karth. Getting made noble varies from place to place. In Waterdeep: forget it. It's a "closed shop," wherein the 'old money' merchant families conferred a status on themselves (in return for their support of common laws that would bind them as well as "the rabble") that their descendants are now working VERY hard not to allow 'new money' merchants (or anyone else!) to gain. Folks in Waterdeep respect money, not titles, so if you're the visiting King of Hoola-Walla, that's nice, bub, now pay up. :}

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In most realms and city-states, you'd gain a title (either fill a vacant one or more likely receive one invented on the spot) by pleasing/aiding/becoming a convenient fall guy for the ruler. Cormyr even distinguishes between 'life' titles and hereditary ones (i.e. Azoun IV if he's not dead yet in your campaign, Filfaeril his queen whether he is or isn't, and Alusair as Regent if he is, can confer a title on you that gives your offspring no title or status at all). 'Sitting nobles' everywhere frown on rulers adding "upstarts" to their ranks, and will often treat you with disdain (as Jim Lowder used to so aptly put it, won't allow you to "join in any reindeer games") regardless of what title you've gained. There are also "court titles" (offices) that can give you great power, but aren't themselves a mark of nobility (although, just to confuse things, they're usually given to nobles, or if handed to commoners, are accompanied by at least a knighthood). For instance, Alusair as Regent COULD name the nearest street urchin Warden of the Western Marches -- I just can't see why she WOULD. :}

(In one famous 'original campaign' Realmsplay instance, a wounded Azoun wanted to send a PC to Filfaeril with a message, and not have any War Wizard stop them [because some War Wizards were traitors in on the plot that had tried to slay him and succeeded in wounding him], so he made a particular PC Lord High Marshal of Cormyr for a tenday, complete with royal ring, several copies of the royal commission, a War Wizard cloak, and Azoun's own dagger. Vangerdahast was livid, and forcefully took the PC into custody -- but DID take the PC to Filfaeril, without examining the message the PC was carrying.)

In Amn, Tethyr, and any land imperilled by monsters or brigandry, one can often gain nobility by offering to police a border area. As examples we have my Baron of Hawkhill in the northeasternmost mountains of Amn, and the standing offer from the Crown of Cormyr to make anyone "Baron of the Stonelands" who can occupy, tame, police, and patrol the place (from a castle he or she has built in the Stonelands).

Personal service to a monarch AND marriage to nobility usually wins you a noble title in your own right (as opposed to something lame like "Sir Consort"), but bear in mind that if the monarch is succeeded by someone who didn't like the monarch, the title may go away again (and your head with it!). Many nobles (like the out-of-favour families in Westgate and elsewhere) find that their status earns them exile in this way.

The Heralds govern heraldry (anything more elaborate than a 'personal badge' consisting of a single device) VERY strictly. In other words, if you proclaim yourself "The Dread Baron Bluto" and dress your followers in scarlet tunics with a yellow gauntlet making a fist on it, fine -- but if you add a hunting horn (a 'second charge') or a motto, or a formal coat-of-arms on a shield-shaped field, expect to soon receive an unfriendly visit from a Herald. What the Heralds DON'T do is police politics. They will announce the existing rules of precedence in a realm, or qualifications for a title, but they won't forbid a ruler to change things, or deft them, EXCEPT in matters of heraldic display (it's absolutely verboten to ride into battle in the colours or displaying the arms of someone else, as a deception, for example, and no mercenary will accept employment with someone the Heralds have deemed to have done so, for fear of themselves being declared "outlaw," and therefore reduced to brigandry).

The Heralds DO step in to make public rulings, as dispassionate third-party judges, in disputes over court rules or noble status or heraldry, when asked to by anyone in a realm (not just the ruler or courtiers). They do NOT take bribes for anything (if they decide your breakaway kingdom is legitimate, and worthy of having its own rules as set by you the new ruler, it's their decision, and nothing you can -- or should try to -- influence).

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In general, nobility isn't "portable." You can arrive in Cormyr claiming to be "Lord So-and-so of Athkatla," and be fawned over by innkeepers who want your business, but your personal influence will extend as far as your coins do, and the personal opinions Piergeiron and senior members of the City Guard and Watchful Order hold of you. You don't automatically get "special treatment," either in society or in law.

Many ambitious adventurers have set themselves up as nobility in the Border Kingdoms, conquering a few pastures and woodlots and declaring it a realm -- as well as giving themselves all sorts of grand (and often ridiculous) titles (such as "Lord Emperor of the Lower Middens"). That's the usual way adventurers become noble, aside from wooing and marrying nobility (lore is full of tales of rough warriors who forcibly wooed fair noble maids, who after marriage fell deeply in love with their new lords . . . but then, lore tends to be more romantic than daily real life; in truth, a large number of such force-taken maids have poisoned or daggered their lords, too). If you just want to be called "Lord," amass a staggering amount of money, take up residence in Sembia, and proclaim yourself a Lord; it's worked for scores of individuals in the last few centuries.

Guilds of mages vary widely across Faerun, and unofficial, secretive cabals of wizards are far more common than formal guilds. Trade in magic and lore will always take place VERY gingerly, in one of two ways: private (kept secret even from other members) deals between members, and formal deals (known to other members and regulated by intricate, written, and available-to-all-members guild rules that have been tested and refined and complained about and re-refined for decades or longer). Because of suspicion/paranoia, private deals are rare without a master-apprentice relationship or agreements that involve hostages or collateral or third-party scrutineers.

In the Watchful Order, senior members rule openly (in quorum council) on all dissemination of lore and spells between members, but often order such transfers "for the good of the Order" (i.e. to strengthen all members, or arm all Order mages to better defend Waterdeep or carry out Order aims). Claims of theft, cheating, and deception are always investigated by Order members who have mind-probing magics, and refusal to cooperate is interpreted as an admission of guilt, and usually punishable by expulsion and "defanging" (the Order sends a large force of mages to strip the offending member of dangerously powerful spells or items, to protect the Order against retaliation . . . and if a spell-battle results and the expelled mage ends up brain-burned or trapped in a beast-shape, so be it; the choice of action was theirs, so the consequences are also their responsibility). Of course, there can be a problem when the offenders in such matters ARE the senior Order members with mind-probing magics, but -- such is the stuff of Realms novels or the long-running secrets at the heart of a campaign.

The Watchful Order holds mini-moots whenever circumstances dictate, trying wherever possible not to hear matters involving specific members without those members being present, but also holds monthly moots at their headquarters or another designated place. The monthly moots are largely ('wine and cheese') gossip sessions wherein members are encouraged to point out trends and oddities they've noticed in the city, new arrivals selling or practising magic, rumors from afar brought by visiting traders, and so on -- and at any meeting Order members have the right to raise complaints and concerns with senior officers, in front of all other members present.

So saith Ed.

And no, I must not confirm my 'secret identity,' due to my real-world job. Acting mysterious has proved to be sorta fun, too. :}

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Yes, you can "guess close" to who I am, but Ed and I have both been very careful not to narrow it down to just one person. In fact, looking back, I can see where everyone but Faraer (who can narrow it down to two) is really left stuck at three possibilities.

Frankly, if it weren't for my real-world concerns, I'd tell you in a moment. Yet I AM growing sorta fond of the Hood. In fact, right now, it just might be all I'm wearing. ;}
THO

March 19, 2004: The Hooded One brings you more from Ed:

Prince Forge, you're quite welcome.

Wooly Rupert, I think Mirt and Durman are both a trifle OLDER than 120. Still unpublished is the "essential Realmslore" short story in which they acquired as treasure certain drinkables that might be expressed in AD&D terms (the D&D game came along after I wrote the story) as slightly-variant Potions of Longevity. So, yes, they appear to be rather leathery/fat/worn-but-vigorous 50-ish males. The way the published Realms has turned out, the careers of Mirt and Durman have been sadly neglected, but you will see their present-day selves adventuring together in my tale in the forthcoming Realms of Dragons anthology (end of 2004, I believe).

Phoebus, you're welcome, too. ;) For modern-day Cormanthor, I'd give more of the elves on patrol "well-rounded adventurer" status (sprinklings of prestige classes to bolster them), but with about half of a patrol made up of individuals roughly equal to that footman of the past (a Fighter of 1d6+2 levels). Arrr, now THERE's a line for the old resume: "The Man Who Sired The Realms. The Loins That XXXXX" whoops, enough of that. ;) Seriously, glad to be of help. In the end, match the power level to your PCs; they should ALWAYS think twice about tangling with a Cormanthor patrol.

So saith Ed.

Phoebus, when you say "most touched a nerve" in me, I'd have to say attending a GenCon when the Realms was at its height (1989 or so), and seeing Ed being asked to name babies, FATHER babies for Sharess' sake, perform marriages, bless children, and being showered with thanks by fans who sometimes wept as they spoke to him. He was asked for financial advice (bear in mind that as a Canadian, he could say little useful about American tax laws and so on), to act as a relationship councillor, asked his opinions on all sorts of things -- and people even asked to just touch him, as if he was some sort of holy person.

And he went back to his hotel room with a plastic bag full of slips of paper on which he'd jotted down names and addresses of sick or mentally unsettled or lonely people who wanted to correspond with him (this was in the days before reliable e-mail, of course), almost in tears himself, and sat down late into the night starting lots of replies, so he'd not forget who wanted or needed what, before he got home. That was a truly awesome experience.

By the way, most people don't know this, but at every GenCon Ed devotes some time and cash to quietly helping people out (who've used all their food money to buy games, or have lost their badges, or are lonely or lost, or to just give a game to kids in the exhibit hall whose parents can't afford it). I once overheard a Milwaukee Sentinel/Journal reporter ask him why he was doing so, and he replied: "If every single person who comes to GenCon doesn't leave with at least one happy memory of somebody being kind or helpful to them, then we've all failed, haven't we?"

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If you meant something in the published Realms that touched a nerve in me, it was one of the same things that 'got' Ed, too: reading Elaine Cunningham's novel ELFSHADOW and thinking, "My God! This woman's BEEN to Waterdeep! This IS Waterdeep!"

And as for comments and queries re. Sweethips: why, SiriusBlack, you can be just as bold as you dare to be. Don't jostle Blueblade; he's down there already. But let's keep this forum suitable for family viewing, hmm? :}

On March 19, 2004 THO said: Well met again, thom. Ed says you're very welcome, and here's my reply (ooh! A question for ME!):

In the 'home' Realms campaign, we Knights did indeed have 'patron' deities, and all of us Knights carried a token, holy symbol, or remembrance of our primary god, whom we normally prayed to briefly in the morning (if we didn't awaken under attack or in some emergency), at moments of crisis (such as healing a wounded friend, trying to keep a sick or poisoned person alive), and, in a more lengthy private prayer, just after our evening meal. We'd pray to our deities for guidance, which sometimes came in the form of dream-visions or even 'waking' mental visions (snapshot scene tinged with a feeling of favour or disapproval), and VERY rarely came in the form of a 'manifestation' (Lathander, for example, was a rosy glow, around a weapon, or one of us, or a keyhole or secret door, or moving along a route).

Upon arrival in a town or village with a formal shrine or temple to a patron deity, we would attend a service, and give an offering (if coin-less, trophies from fallen foes would suffice [for Tempus, of course, weapons from beings we'd defeated were considered the most valuable offerings], and if we had absolutely nothing, information about our doings and what we'd seen reported to a priest was accepted). Paltry or verbal-only offerings usually resulted in a priestly request to do a service, either something as simple as "help move this temple furniture" or "confess in full to the superior priest tomorrow" or "help guard the temple doors tonight."

If we found an untended or desecrated shrine of a patron deity during our travels, the PCs venerating that deity would cleanse it and pray there (one of the elaborate prayers, sometimes involving a chanted or sung ritual), and Ed had provided us with some prayers, small couplets of creed-advice, and even approved oaths for invocation of the god (which we uttered in play, sometimes causing great amusement). If we found a hermit or travelling priest of a patron deity, we would expect to share food and drink, and would offer to encamp with the priest and offer our protection.

If we were staying in one locale with a temple, we would attend services at least once every two days. Priests in Ed's campaign do a lot of "influencing the laity" work by dispensing news and gossip that's been carefully slanted to promote the importance of their god and the creed and aims of the faith, and to motivate the people hearing it to do certain things that further the work of the god, and they customarily do this at the end of formal services, sometimes while 'blessing' worshippers (the old "priest stands at the door to speak to everyone leaving" tactic :}). From them we also learned temple or priestly sayings that weren't part of the official creed (example, for Tempus: "We come in peace: smite to slay!")

Other gods were to be prayed and offered to in appeasement (we've got to cross the Neck in a boat, so Umberlee, please don't sink us, and Talos, send no storms . . . and if the body of water was large, we'd be praying for navigational aid, too), and NO gods were to be treated disrespectfully. Their worshippers and clergy, yes, and sometimes (for followers of good-aligned deities opposed to human sacrifice) their altars shattered, too, but the gods themselves were

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considered very real -- when thwarting their mortal servants, 'tis always best to NOT defame the god while you're at it. Mocking their holy sayings is about as far as it goes (example, when slaying a priest of Talos: "Send a storm -- now REAP a storm!").

In practical terms, except for the tasks set by priests for our cleric PCs at each level (and in one special case, given Florin personally by Mielikki!), once we were adhering to our faiths, this all faded into the background. Like driving a car, we no longer paid a lot of attention to: "Now I'm turning the key, with my foot on the brake pedal, and now I'm -- " . . . we just did it. Torm, of course, endlessly teases the rest of us: "Now, would Lathander REALLY want you to do that?"

Yet we've learned to ignore Torm or give him back as good as he gets ("Well of course I upended you into the horsetrough! Lathander told me to so serve over-clever, mouthy servants of Mask!")

I hope that helps, thom.

The Hooded One, signing off.

March 19, 2004: Well met again, all. Here's Ed's latest:

Lord Hobie, as far as I know, there are no gates/portals linking the Realms directly with Oerth, but a lot of portals that reach "the Wood Between The Worlds" (a la the classic fantasies of William Morris), a vast, endless forest of tall trees, blue mists, unicorns, little wandering trails, and gently rolling topography that's riddled with hidden gates [between these two trees, atop yon stone, step into that pool] leading to many worlds. If you know which gates lead where, and manage to avoid blundering into a gate you don't know about, first, you can easily move between Oerth, Krynn, and Toril. Among the elite magically-powerful groups (and lone, studious mages) in Faerun there's a lot of knowledge OF THE EXISTENCE OF these 'other worlds,' but very little about passing events in the other places. Those groups and individuals who have the means to travel and know about such events regard this knowledge as power giving them a trade and power advantage over everyone else, and guard it jealously, even within the hierarchies of their own groups.

They also tend to spread 'disinformation' (um, flat lies and exaggerations) about the dangers of portals and other worlds (such as: "anyone who uses a portal will be tracked, from that moment one, by an invisible stalking creature who will always be with you, who will watch you eat, sleep, make love, fight, study, EVERYTHING -- and aid your enemies and foes by revealing your whereabouts and intentions for its own amusement, as it SLOWLY feeds off you, draining just a tiny bit of your life-force, milking you for as long as possible, and thus ensuring that your life is long . . . but miserable") so that no one else will try to use them.

Moreover, most plane-hopping groups try to actively suppress practical "portals are here, here, and here, and this is how to use them" information. Getting it shouldn't be easy, which is why a majority of Faerunian beings discover portals by blundering through one, or seeing another creature emerge from, or vanish through, one.

So saith Ed.

I can add that as we Knights attained more levels and experience, Ed increasingly brought gates into our adventures (though most of them were from point to point in Faerun, not reaching other planes or worlds), and of course we unwittingly put ourselves on the 'hit lists' of groups already using the gates.

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THO

March 19, 2004: Soft swirl of cloak, and yes, 'tis The Hooded One here again, with Ed's latest replies. To Faraer's answer to you, *The Black Hand of Bane*, Ed adds just this: he believes the Knights novels will be published one per year, beginning in 2006 (the *Waterdeep* collab with Elaine being the 2005 novel).

Here's Ed himself on other matters:

Well met, Silas! Yes, I was privy to some of the FireWorks discussions (the announced Realms television series option that has expired) and have had other discussions at GenCon with other parties regarding Realms television and movie projects. If I can EVER find the time, I'll have a stab at writing a script (I've been assured I'm welcome to do so). Now, if I could only figure out how to survive without ever needing sleep...

My favourite time of the day is: whenever I can get the chance. After that, it's whenever there'll be fewest interruptions -- but I took formal journalism training so I'd never be trapped into the "I can only write when I'm in the mood" or "the sun is in the west" or "I'm wearing my favourite slippers" or some such. Again, I don't have TIME to indulge in any such prima donna-like behaviour. :}

Faraer has pointed you at a fairly good answer, but let me add some general principles: in general, even where clearly-codified laws exist, sentences are at the discretion of the ruler (the King can let a guilty party go free, or perform some task rather than enduring the usual punishment, or nobles can pay huge fines rather than being flogged and imprisoned, and so on). Also, as a general principle, no place that thrives on trade (such as *Waterdeep*, *Scornubel*, or *Athkatla*) will dare to allow OPEN bribery or "flawed justice." Any rigging of results must be done 'behind the scenes' (i.e. by not bringing someone to trial, or "arranging" a prisoner escape) rather than in public. Also, places that survive on trade DO have clearly codified laws, separate-from-the-authorities judges (e.g. the Magisters of *Waterdeep*), and also tend to have arrangements to let guilds partially punish their own members (lessening the court sentence in return for guild sanctions). There must be a common belief that visiting merchants will be treated equally to residents and citizens . . . or the merchants will stop coming.

In many places, Magisters, guilds, and priests (in any case where a crime or complaint involves priests or temples as defendant, plaintiff, or witness) all have the right to call on spell aid to determine truth and falsehood (who pays for this varies widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction). In most places, royalty and nobility have rights or privileges others in the society don't have. Trial by combat is rarely allowed in trade-reigns places, but may occur in rural rough justice or communities dominated by a faith that allows it (e.g. a hamlet around a temple), although in *Sembia* and other 'civilized' places, battle between hired champions (or even personal duelling) is often a public entertainment used in cases where no crime has been committed because there are no laws protecting personal reputations, but a noble feels slighted by another noble, or a young woman of high birth who hasn't yet wed is accused of being less than virginal or of good character, and wants to refute the slur (most places in the Realms have nothing resembling our libel and slander laws).

The Realms does NOT have barristers and solicitors, robed and wigged or otherwise. It DOES have some advocates, paid orators who will speak in court (always in the presence of an accused, not appearing in his or her stead) and who may know something of the law and can give advice to an accused. And yes, some orators are real 'showmen' who mimic the voices of people, act out things, tell jokes, and engage in furious debate in court -- which, being great

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entertainment, is seldom cut short even by angry judges or rulers, because the 'common people' like it. So by all means inject some Rumpole stuff into your play if your players like it. Mine do -- and fondly remember The Simbul appearing in court in the shape of an old woman accused of murdering a merchant (the merchant had really come to slay her, and she'd fought for her life, getting badly stabbed in the process, but managing to cut his throat with his own knife). The old woman was too badly wounded to get to court -- which would have meant a verdict of guilty, and her death anyway -- so as Harpers tended her, The Simbul took her place, and mocked a false witness (another merchant) by stabbing herself in all the places the old woman had been wounded, and then demanding of everyone in court if they seriously thought she could have killed the larger, younger, and stronger merchant when this badly hurt? (Her explanation for all the silver fire smoking forth was a local priestess of Mystra coming to court with The Simbul, to attest that the "old woman" was under the protection of Mystra so that justice could be done. The priestess neglected to tell the court that the old woman was The Simbul, but carefully told no untruths at all.)

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, signing off.

March 19, 2004: Well met again, all. The Hooded One returns, with more from Ed:

Good greetings to The Swordsage. Goldurnit, I HATE trying to choose favourites. A lot of Realms stuff has impressed me, for a lot of different reasons (just to grab a few examples, Bob Salvatore's HOMELAND and Rich Baker's THE FORESAKEN HOUSE for 'the power of the tale,' ELFSHADOW by Elaine Cunningham for the three fun main characters and for getting Waterdeep JUST right, and so on). I love Steve Schend's exhaustive weaving of history, and the Tethyr one in particular was great fun. Julia Martin and Eric Boyd did superb jobs, over and over again, of expanding the gods from my sometimes-sketchy originals into full-blown, detailed divinities. CLOAK AND DAGGER was great fun. And so on, and so on: there are a LOT of Realms things I didn't write that I enjoy bits and pieces of. Of course, I've had my fingers in so many of the passing Realms pies that I should disqualify myself from a lot of products...

As for freelance and still unofficial at the time of writing stuff, two things in particular:

1. A fan up in Canada who wrote and hand-delivered to me a BEAUTIFUL short story of a young lady mage falling in love with Elminster, going to Shadowdale to beg to become his apprentice, being a little shocked by discovering how different the real crotchety old man was from her hero-image, and coming to love him in a different way. I treasure it, and having read a LOT of fanfic over the years, can state that its quality is professional. It needs a tiny pacing-polish here and there, but is otherwise top-rank.
2. All of the longtime Realms enthusiasts (in no particular order: Grant Christie, Tom Costa, Eric Boyd, Bryon Wischstadt, George Krashos, and others) who have spent years quietly expanding my royal family trees and noble family notes into a wealth of information on Cormyr. Hopefully it will see print in official form some day.

Yet I must stress, Swordsage, that I've seen (and heard: some music comes to mind!) plenty of other impressive things over the years, from garments to new-forged swords to hand-drawn maps to model figurines to folks dressing up as Realms characters and getting the 'look' perfectly . . . as I said, it's VERY hard for me to choose.

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So saith Ed, and I'll echo that. We original players have seen just a little of the incoming flood of stuff, down the years, and often been impressed.
THO

March 19, 2004: Well met from The Hooded One, and hearken to Ed:

Hi, Karth. Glad you liked the first er, load. :) Let's have a go:

The easiest way would be to discover who one of the Masked Lords is, dispose of him/her, and impersonate him/her from then on. "Easiest," I said, not "easy." There are, of course, alignment problems with this approach for many PCs, and there's also a high risk of discovery (Watchful Order magists and fellow Lords mind-snooping, for one thing, plus all the pitfalls beyond mere changing face and form of trying to fool family, friends, business contacts, etc. of the Lord's "daytime identity" or 'true self.'

A slower, harder way would be to serve the city with distinction in exposing plots against it, legal transgressions, and the like, and to do so for long enough, and well enough, that you "get noticed" by the authorities and yet manage to stay alive in the face of angry surviving swindlers and plotters. This will get you VERY thoroughly investigated by the City Guard and some of the city's "secret agents" reporting to Piergeiron or to Mirt, as well as by the Watchful Order and the Watch. If you're truly clean of personal scandal (not ambitions, just shady dealings and intentions), you MIGHT be covertly approached to become an agent yourself. If and only if being a 'public face' agent would be the most useful way you could serve (not likely; 'known' agents are numerous already, and the Lords really need more unknown fresh faces), you'd probably be taken on in the Palace with some sort of official position, and could gain status thereby.

Of course, this would STILL mean you got looked down on by 'old guard nobles,' because they even look down on Piergeiron and Khelben (behind their backs, of course). Courtiers are mere "toadies" and "jumped-up power-snatchers" in their books -- but then, so are 'junior' noble families, because some nobles spend their entire lives ranking people and playing "I'm haughtier than thou" games. So, elevated, yes, complete with airs to match if you want to assume them . . . but don't expect to get the full cordial "you're one of us" treatment from certain nobles (who would cut you dead even if you married their parents, siblings, or offspring).

Aye, gotta watch those Hooba-Woppas. I hear they walk among us, just waiting their chance, and are especially bad this year. ;}

Vangerdahast is FINALLY learning to relax (not a century too soon, some say). For more glimpses of this, see ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER.

As individuals, many Heralds beyond the "local" level can defend themselves VERY effectively using magic items of tremendous power that come with their office. However, you're quite correct in saying they do nothing by force. What they do is censure -- and because they establish noble rankings (precedence) outside the walls of a city or the borders of a realm [explanation: those old-money Waterdhavian nobles may cut your newly-married-into-junior-noble family noble dead at a ball in Waterdeep, but the Heralds, not the old-money nobles, determine your ranking versus them if you both show up at a dinner in Scornubel and squabble over who gets the best seat; ditto nobles of Cormyr, and this is especially important for folk of Sembia or the Border Kingdoms, where all titles are recent, fanciful, and often invented by their current holders], and legitimize status, very few people dare to argue. For example, if I as a baron show up at a temple that stands in my own barony and demand audience, dinner, a bed for the night, or some assistance

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from the temple, and the Heralds dispute my title or my ranking, the priests will politely refuse me, as "an impostor," even if they KNOW I'm the rightful title holder -- because the judgement of the Heralds affects even THEIR status (again, not within their faith, but in the eyes of the wider Realms around them).

Mercenary companies bow to the Heralds too, because it's the word of the Heralds will be their only defense in instances of someone else using their battle-standards and committing atrocities whilst impersonating them. Again, the Heralds say nothing about the recruiting or behaviour of mercenaries, only about what blazons, "colours," and badges they use.

In the case of someone adding that second charge and it being reported to a local Herald, the local Herald would consult his/her rolls. If they had ANY suspicion that this use was unlawful, they'd report it to a superior right away (so if anything subsequently happens to them, the warning stands).

Mistreating, threatening, harming or slaying, or magically influencing a Herald is grounds for instant dismissal from whatever rank you have . . . so it's a meaningless punishment only to a brigand ("robber baron") or a royal heir, who will still be of royal blood whatever they do. Everyone else LOSES their noble or gentle status, and can expect to be pointedly NOT recognized in negotiations (no one will sign contracts or treaties with them, no one will swear fealty to them, and so on, until the Heralds publicly pardon them, which will usually take a LOT of redress and grovelling). Royalty in disfavour can still inherit thrones and the like, but can't rule effectively without that pardon, which means they must either abdicate in favour of offspring or rule through a Regent. All of this means the Heralds rarely have to actually enact censure; the threat is usually enough.

Remember, the Heralds do nothing if you practise regicide, have a civil war, unlawfully torture or trump up charges against rivals or rightful rulers . . . they only care about the arms you use, and how you use them, and the lineage you claim.

In the case of a self-assumed blazon (e.g. my earlier words: "but if you add a hunting horn (a 'second charge') or a motto, or a formal coat-of-arms on a shield-shaped field"), a Herald will show up, usually with a Harper or outlander merchant, plus a priest of Oghma and some outlanders with titles (knights of a distant realm) as witnesses/bodyguards, and politely insist on an audience with the offender.

At that audience, the Herald will explain the transgression, and request that the offender cease, immediately and forever, using this offending blazon or displaying any arms beyond a simple single-charge badge -- or on the spot petition the Heralds for formal permission to officially use the blazon. Most Heralds can tell at a glance if a blazon needs changes, and will order them, but there are a few "borderline" cases that will be passed to more senior Heralds for judgement. It's up to the Herald whether or not the offender has to obscure (or can use) the blazon until it's approved, modified, or denied. (In practise, this decision has a lot to do with the attitude of the offender.)

The penalties for failure to comply will be politely explained (and confirmed by the witnesses), and then it's up to the offender.

Fees, if any, come later and are modest, typically being demanded only if the person petitioning for the blazon wants the skilled artists the Heralds can call on (whose identities they keep secret) to render a full (huge plaque, for wall or door) coat of arms, a grant of arms (on vellum) in triplicate, a painted shield or shield cover, and a banner. Once these have been delivered and the fees paid, the petitioner is free to make as many copies as they like, and will be instructed on how

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much they can modify these copies without "offending against the Law of Arms" (the VERY complicated and ever-being-revised private code kept by the Heralds).

Battle-banners (of mercenaries or formal armed forces) can be augmented with devices to commemorate battles without express permission of the Heralds, do long as these augmentations are done in approved ways (which the Heralds will freely explain, if asked, and most sages and army veterans also know)

So NOTHING will physically "stop" your yahoo adventurer from making up his own full coat of arms and outfitting his private army in like fashion -- so long as he never has to enter into a treaty, contract, or any other formal agreement with anyone, or avail himself of any services of a priesthood. The choice is his. :}

The Heralds don't pass moral judgements on the taste expressed in blazons, or upon the legitimacy of holders -- as long as the holders haven't been informed by a Herald of the Laws of Arms as pertaining to them personally, and then ignored those instructions. The Heralds are kept so busy in the Border Kingdoms and Sembia that they DO charge up-front fees for blazons (NOT self-bestowed titles, only the use of arms, remember), typically 250 gp per person, once per grant of arms, in the Border Kingdoms, and 5,000 gp for the same thing in Sembia (reduced to 2,000 for unmarried sons and daughters of less than twelve winters in age, though the moment marriage occurs or the titled parent dies, the "short" 3,000 gp fee must be paid or use of the arms has to cease until it is paid.

So Sembia and the Borders are full of "Lords" who have no arms, or use only a single device (a crescent moon, or a slantwise dagger) as a badge. In practise, the Heralds will let an individual add a sheath/scabbard, ribbons, drops of blood, and a severed hand gripping a weapon without considering it a "second charge" and worthy of their attention, but adding a field or a second, crossed weapon is definitely a "second charge." The Border Kingdoms even boast dozens of Emperors of various sorts and stylings, and only a few of them have the right to a blazon. Land ownership, by the way, means nothing to the Heralds -- but it may matter very much to a kingdom, and if the King or High Chamberlain of Realm X says you can't be a Baron of X because you don't own a barony, maintain troops and castles for the King, and so on, then the Heralds will side with that complaint, and tell you to either depart the realm or remove the part of your title that alludes to the geographical region of the realm (i.e. you can still be "Baron Karth," but not "Baron Karth of the Stonelands"). The Heralds are VERY good at noticing and denying attempts to allude to a locale by an ancient name, or claim ties to a fallen or vanished realm, and so on, and FROWN VERY SEVERELY on such distortions.

If, on the other hand, you can prove your lineage entitles you to bear a title that the King or High Chamberlain is denying you, the Heralds will insist on you being accorded it -- which is why there are lots of titled folk permanently on exile all over the Realms, far from the lands they claim. And no, there isn't a lot of difference between "an openly acknowledged nobleman and a rich jerkweed with a fortified ranch house and a vivid imagination for making up silly titles" except for the Herald's blessing. :}

In the case of the trade in magic you postulate, I would say the two mages involved would call in a priest or priestess of Mystra to (secretly) handle the exchange. Only clerical superiors would know about it, and even then, they'd only know WHAT was being exchanged and not BETWEEN WHOM (unless they were personally nosy and did some eavesdropping). This is one of the chief "daily uses" of clergy of Mystra: being neutral dispute councillors and trade facilitators between justifiably-paranoid mages.

This "calling in" would work like this: "Will you accept Shreena handling this?"

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(Suspiciously:) "Who's Shreena?" "Anointed of Mystra, of the Weavehouse temple. You know, the tall quiet one with the green eyes and the hair down to here. Stands behind the scrying font sometimes, when you come to pray."

"Oh, aye. Her. All right. Shall you go to her first, or shall I?"

"You decide, but I want this to be open: whichever one of us goes tells the name of the other to her. I don't want her giving either of us funny looks for a tenday while she wonders who's going to show up as the 'other half.'"

"I'll go. Tomorrow morn acceptable?"

"Yes. Leave word here if you can't get to speak to her, and let that word be 'skyblue.' If no message is left, I'll assume you have, and go to see her myself tomorrow even."

And so on. Some mages view it as an honour to have a Chosen of Mystra act as their go-between, and others shun this because of the notice others may take of what they're up to, as a result. In some VERY rare instances, mutually trusted persons who have no magic will be agreed-upon as go-betweens (other clergy, a monarch, perhaps even a person beloved by both mages).

So saith Ed.

As for me Karth, I have several day jobs. Book editing is one of them, and it's not the one that demands discretion. I could tell you a little about the other one, privately, but then (as the saying goes), I'd have to k---

Clear enough? so yes, please drop the potato, and step back. Drop the potato NOW. (And so on :})

And as for my sweet hips, it refers to DANCING. Agility, looks clad or unclad . . . and that's enough because we're exciting Blueblade and, it seems, upsetting Bookwurm. I find all the attention flattering, but I'm really here to discuss the Realms.

Speaking of which, let me acquiesce to your request and share another short Knights story: Florin Falconhand was the tallest, most handsome, and most charismatic of us all, and often acted as the Envoy of Shadowdale. Many outlanders, especially Sembians and Cormyreans, mistook him for the Lord of Shadowdale (either Doust or later Mourngrym). We came to see this as useful, because it allowed us to learn what business they had (or wanted to have) with Shadowdale, and what they were prepared to do to get it (bribes, etc.) before the person actually got to the real lord.

One stuffy Cormyrean noble didn't tumble to his error, or cease in his clumsy attempts at bribery, until Florin actually conducted him into Mourngrym's presence -- whereupon he flew into a proper rage, blazing from one end of his bellowing mouth to the other, challenging Florin to a duel on the spot, and complaining up and down that he'd been deliberately made a fool of.

His explosion ended when the nearest servant (upon catching a signal from Mourngrym) leaned forward and murmured, "Excuse me, milord, but, ahem, * I * have the honour to be Lord in Shadowdale."

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Immediately thereafter, Rathan stepped out from behind a tapestry that had been concealing him and announced that, no, HE was Lord of Shadowdale. Torm revealed himself, in a grinning pose, and corrected them both with the news that HE was actually Lord of Shadowdale, and the preceding gentlement were actually just two brave bodyguards trained to deal with angry visiting nobles.

He was of course followed verbally by the lordship claims of a passing Illistyl, the one-eyed old forester Willum, here to deliver some fresh coney to her Ladyship, Mourngrym himself -- and finally Shaerl Rowanmantle (the Lady of Shadowdale, and as a Rowanmantle of Cormyr, personally known to the furious noble) spoke up: "' I * am the Lord of Shadowdale, sirrah, and no one here made a fool of you. As all Cormyr knows, you made yourself a fool long ago. Now get you gone to the inn: I'll give no house room to men who try to bribe honest rangers."

To which Florin added with a smile, "Or even me."

As the red-faced noble stormed out, he almost bowled over Storm Silverhand, who'd heard the fun. She took a stance and held her ground, so it was he who ended up bouncing on his behind, whilst she stood with hands on hips exclaiming, "Excuse me, but 'tis MY turn to be Lord of Shadowdale this even! Sirrah, your bribe should have been directed at me!"

When he rose, she slapped him across the face hard enough to knock him senseless, and then caught him up on her shoulder and carried her down to Elminster's Tower for Lhaeo to give the man a good feed . . . and her and Elminster to scare the very liver out of him when he awakened, with an oh-so-gentle interrogation as to the why of his attempted bribery. A VERY interesting little plot was uncovered that day.

March 20, 2004: Dear thom, you're quite welcome. I find it simply a pleasure to 'hang out' with fellow fans of the Realms and share some of the fun that we've had with Ed over the years. If it makes your campaign richer, GREAT!

And with that guiltless high surging through me, I pass on these next words of Ed, direct to Realms author Paul Keep (one of most impressive of the "new blood" Realms fiction writers, in my opinion both as a book editrix and one of the first Realms fans):

Hi, Paul! Thanks for the kind words, but I don't think I'm all that brilliant. Mentally overloaded and increasingly forgetful, yes, but brilliant, no. I've just been at this for a long time, now, and have had time to mould the ever-increasing mounds of my personal production of horsedroXXXXer, Realmslore into something that lures some, and fools others. :}

And, hey, your writing's not shabby either. I'm looking forward to reading the entire Cale trilogy, and plenty more Kemp books after that!

As for the compilation of oaths, I handed one to TSR back in 1986, in the original Realms turnover (both straight-Realms equivalents of our dirty words, for use when you didn't want characters to just say, "Oh, DUNG!" and turns of phrase like "By the steaming loins of Shares!") . . . and they promptly 'lost' it. Several times. Until I got the message. ;}

We've all added dozens of naughty expressions to the Realms since then, of course, because we NEED cuss-words when doing Realms fiction. Not just for comic fun, but for realism when characters are upset, facing imminent death, and so on.

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Yes, I DID pull "Dark!" and "Dark and Empty!" out of thin air, because my mind works that way, but it also works like this: after they pop out, and get written down to banish the Dread Devil of Forgetfulness, I take a look at them.

Okay, for serious swearing purposes, at an author's rock-bottom minimum, we need one short, sharp, heartfelt, pungent, and multi-purpose strong epithet (the equivalent of our "F * * k!"), and it should be a contraction of something longer, that can be gasped or said with slow emphasis by characters who are awed, or dismayed when they realize they've been tricked (the same way some real-world Bible-thumpers of my youth used to say, slowly and fiercely: "Hell's . . . brazen . . . HINGES!"). So, "Dark!" and "Dark and Empty!" work, sound-wise.

They also work because a terrible thing to a Sembian of today's generation, where money is king and everyone is greedy to get more and to splash it around, is an empty chest that one expected to be full of coins. Hence: "Dark and Empty!"

Okay, 'dark' equates with evil and thus can readily mean bad to most readers, but 'dark and empty' to a Sembian is worse. It just fits.

Having devised your cusswords, you then say them aloud, acting out a Sembian with accent and all (doing this in private is usually best :) and if they don't sound silly you can use them. (Anne McCaffrey invented one swear-word I just hate: "Fardles!" It would work if she was writing P.G. Wodehouse-style farce, but just sounds too silly to be true, in any other situation.)

So as a result we now have no actual dirty words to offend real-world mothers, teachers, librarians, and religious persons offended by profanity, but we do have the FEEL of someone swearing and meaning it.

This sort of detail is essential to making a setting seem real. That's what the Volo's Guides grew out of: I always put myself in the boots of a Dungeon Master or just an old man in your nearest bar, telling a story, and think: what "little touches" does he need to make the fantasy setting seem different? Well, he needs cuss-words. And different coinage, and names for it. And a few verbal expressions that tell you a little about his mind-set, and hopefully about the place he's from or is telling you about (example: a person from our real-world North American prairies using an expression along the lines of "As big as all outdoors!" or that refers to the huge, overarching sky or the flatness of the land). And a way of telling times of the day, days and months and years that aren't the same as ours. And so on: names for drinks and food, and things travellers have to do when they arrive at an inn or whatever you're going to call it. (What's the outhouse called? "Jakes"? "Privy"? "Garderobe"? Each one gives a different style, and it's that style I'm after.)

And so on. I can go on and on all day about worldbuilding, but that's how it works for me. I never want to read a fantasy novel that contains sentences like: "She flung the vhaeram wide and slaedeled out and down my thornbrar path without looking back once, tossing her yuthgla into my starntarrs, laedlyn and all, as she walked right out of my life."

Huh? What does all THAT mean? And no, footnotes won't make it better. :}

But I also don't want that same fantasy author to write the same sentence in that same fantasy novel like this: "She flung the screen door wide and strolled out and down my garden path without looking back once, tossing her Tom Collins into my rosebushes, glass and all, as she walked right out of my life."

Yup. Seems real different from our world to me. Uh-huh. Pass me a Big Mac, willya?

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I'll stop blathering now. (Chorus of: "Phew!" and equivalents, except for the guy over there who's happily snoring.) Please don't be offended if your question seemed to touch off a rant or a lecture. I just get enthusiastic, and out it all comes. :}

Ed

And there you have it. Yes, I can just hear Ed saying all of that. Right now, I have to scold him to get back to bed and get over his cold, because I'm sure he's sitting bare-skinned at the keyboard, down there in his freezing basement surrounded by books and games. So I'll sign off and start e-verbally lashing our Creator of the Realms. Who by the way is delighted that Steven Schend's posting here, and that Eric Boyd's back from his business trips.

THO

March 20, 2004: Well met again, all. Your Lady Hooded One returns (thank you for that naming, Wooly Rupert!), with Ed's latest:

Hi, Wooly Rupert. Well, now: Nobanion and Lurue are, of course, the Lion and the Unicorn of British nursery rhyme fame (with all the meanings that go with that, too; they are among other things the supporters of the royal coat of arms for that country, and in many other coats of arms associated with England).

Yet they're also MUCH more than that. For me, I have to be able to imagine a deity with some awe, and I often do it by attaching to them emotions evoked by other fiction. So, the Lion is also Aslan the Lion in The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis (Christian allegorical fantasy classics soon to appear in a Disney movie that * might * turn out to be okay, and already on film in any number of BBC adaptations down the years, some of them superb). The Narnia books are hated by some, loved by others, but chock-full of little heart-wrenching scenes regardless, and are among the top-selling English-language fiction books of all time.

I didn't mean my lion-god to BE Aslan, of course; as you saw in that DRAGON article, a lot of names were placeholders at the time, waiting for Mr. Gygax to round out the "official" (Greyhawk) pantheon. Aslan has that name because he has evoke that "awe" for me. The name "Aslan" is Indian in origin (India, not native North American), and the lion is of course a Christian symbol for 'the King' from way back, hence its lavish use in royal heraldry.

So "Aslan" went away the moment TSR decided to publish the Realms (mustn't lift central characters from other authors, even in homage, though I did unwittingly [i.e. I'd forgotten] sneak one direct homage into the Realms [Aglarond, for Tolkien], and beat another well-known fantasy author to a name by coincidence, coining the name "Ashaba" for the river that runs through Shadowdale years before David Eddings used it in his Malloreon books).

Lurue is my own invented name, but it started almost as the deity's 'private' name, with "Silvermoon" being her popular one (and, yes, the city of the same name was originally envisaged as the root and center of her faith). Not only is Lurue the Unicorn of "the Lion and the Unicorn," she's also the mysterious, eponymous unicorn from the children's book THE LITTLE WHITE HORSE by Elizabeth Goudge, AND she's also meant to evoke the Unicorn of Amber, in Roger Zelazny's classic Amber books (where the Unicorn inspires awe even among the jaded royal family who use her as their badge). She was always meant to be mysterious, and there's very little about her that didn't go into POWERS & PANTHEONS that doesn't now contradict the published Realms.

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Originally, Lurue WAS magic-before Julia Martin added the name "Weave" to my GenCon explanations of 'the great web of magic that's everywhere in Toril, binds Toril together, and IS Toril,' Lurue was the embodiment of the Weave. As such, she could teleport without error or limit, through all barriers and spells, was immune to all known magical [and psionic] effects, could raise dead, heal, regenerate and restore with the touch of her horn-and also spew silver fire from it-and so on. Her very proximity dispels illusions and curses, purifies and neutralizes poisons and taints, and purges diseases. And on and on. [To the usual chorus of "Look, yet another all-powerful Greenwood munchkin!" I reply: Yes. Of course. This is THE all-powerful goddess, and she's also whimsical. We can't understand why she does what she does, so she can't be controlled, or act like any sort of tyrannical munchkin, any more than a mountain range or an ocean can be.] She tended to be as curious as a newborn babe, utterly fearless, and kind to injured creatures. And yes, I tucked in the "patron of virgins, but can also make barren wombs bear" folklore, too. Only virgins could ride her, and those who did got that silver hair the Chosen who are Mystra's daughters all share, and 'wild talent' innate magical abilities, and were marked for special tasks and achievements all their lives.

The TSR designers quite rightly (given the humanocentric core of that version of AD&D, with its level and power limits on non-humans) wanted human gods to be front and center and of the greatest power and importance, so Mystra (most important to intelligent creatures trying to USE magic) became also the Guardian or Mother of the Weave, and Lurue sort of . . . danced sideways. To become the awe-inspiring mystery she is now.

Now, as for the Knights of the Unicorn, I do have more, but dare not pass it on right now for fear of trampling on something another creative person is already working on, in the Realms. That's one rule I'm going to be very careful not to break, no matter how much we all want to delve into lore and secrets of the Realms. So: sorry, and I hope you'll understand.

So saith Ed.

Thy Hooded One can add this much: we Knights met Lurue once, in the High Forest, on the banks of the Unicorn Run. She was dancing on her hind legs on empty air, about forty feet off the ground, in full silvery moonlight -- and we all grovelled. She LOOKED into our eyes, each of us -- and Ed had written out long, detailed notes for each of us for the dream-visions we received then. When we awakened, we were all reinvigorated, healed of all hurts, had maximum charges in all of our magic items, and so on. The one virgin among us (no, I'm not going to name her, but it wasn't my character, all you guessers) had been touched by Lurue's horn, and her eyes were two flames of silver fire. Also, her hair had gone silver and moved constantly by itself, as if waves of wind were passing through it. She gained feather fall and water walk innate abilities on the spot, and ironguard as long as the silver fire was in her. It remained with her as we travelled, until we had to fight a certain archdevil in Myth Drannor.

In that encounter, we were overwhelmed by devils and were going down, just being buried in numbers. The archdevil saw the silver fire and went straight for the particular Knight, and after they'd started to fight and the character was being badly mauled, the player (thank whatever gods there be) REMEMBERED Ed's notes of her dream-vision, and what she had to do. She fled onto the altar beside the devil (that was also a gate into the Nine Hells), and when the archdevil attacked her there, she embraced it and let it slay her.

And her silver fire went BLAM and took out altar, gate, archdevil, and all the other devils within a MILE, leaving all of us Knights lying dazed, unscathed, and alive . . . except she who'd sacrificed herself. She was gone forever.

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And at that moment, far away in Shadowdale, Storm Silverhand was helping a farm wife give birth to her first child, a girl-and it came out stillborn. Storm raised the tiny body to make absolutely sure before she wrapped it and turned to comfort the mother . . . and its eyes opened, and they were silver and knowing, and the mind of our lost Knight was in the now-living child and wondering how by Lurue to tell Storm who she was.

Hmm. I'm crying again, just remembering it.

Another of Ed's beautiful little moments, that will make me treasure our Realmsplay forever.

Ladies and gentlesirs, I give you: the Realms!
The Hooded One

On March 20, 2004 THO said: LOL! Yes, I can, Blueblade. Ed keeps a beautiful little hand-carved Indian wooden box (the top all pierced "filigree" containing four 90-minute cassette tapes. They are an experimental campaign record of a Zhent military expedition (one ambitious commander and his troops plus a posse of "new, ambitious" Zhentarim magelings, NOT a big army) trying to conquer Shadowdale. We did the wargaming 'move on the big tabletop map' procedure, and yes, it took even longer than those tapes cover, as various Knights raced back and forth from fire-fight to pitched battle to Zhents torching cottages to fire-fight again. The funny bit is this: one Zhentarim and one Knight engaged in psionic combat, using the AD&D rules of the day, and as everything else happens, there are these running-gag interruptions of said player saying: "But if my Intellect Fortress was holding up and I..." and Ed quickly doing a few rounds of the mind-wrestling, then back to the sweat-and-blood battle, and then the player saying, "Okay, I've recalculated the points, and I think..." Ed jumps back in to deal with this, and then back to the battle, and then back to the player saying, "But..." and so on. It goes on for ALL four tapes! Hilariously frustrating to listen to, even now. I recall Ed triumphantly ending the psionic combat with the Zhent's head exploding and the gore spattering the PC's front with three letters: FNA [Fuckking Never Again!]. :}

The Hooded One

March 20, 2004: Your Hooded Lady returns, with Ed's latest:

Hi, Karth! Yes, I'll look around for that list, but please don't hold your breath. I'm busier than busy right now, what with the Waterdeep novel and two long-overdue short stories and my tax deadline looming ever nearer . . . and if there's one thing that takes time, it's searching for Realmslore in this crammed castle. :}

As for 'junior' noble families: the 'youngest' of them were elevated in 1254 DR, and Waterdeep has actually 'lost' two noble families since then (Zoar and Gildeggh, "Outcast" [exiled] in 1273). There have been three noble families who ALMOST went extinct, and some evidence that nobles or Lords of Waterdeep quickly arranged some marriages to make no noble house disappeared -- both to avoid pressure from any ambitious merchants clamoring that "there's now room for me, isn't there?" and more importantly to avoid having dozens of mountebanks or serious individuals showing up for centuries to come, claiming to be the "long lost heir" of this or that noble house ("so where's my villa? what have you done with it? You OWE me for it!").

'Junior' in this sense really means that certain noble families play a sneering-on-others game (more often rooted in fancy than in reality) that their bloodlines are older and therefore better than

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those of other nobility. In truth, they're ALL jumped-up wealthy merchants, and some of them have even lost most of their wealth since being ennobled. It's akin to two ancient, toothless old men living in adjacent tumbledown shacks in a real-world village, but one of them looking down on the other because "his family wasn't originally from these parts."

Faced with an outsider, however ambitious, the nobles WILL form a united front, a fortress wall ("whatever happens, gotta keep the rabble out"). Again, you can MARRY into the nobility (especially if you happen to be good-looking OR very rich, of either gender), but although I quite understand that your player doesn't want to be a mere courtier, I'm afraid he or she is out of luck unless they can marry into, successfully dispose of and impersonate a particular noble, or successfully convince a particular noble family that s/he IS a long-lost relation (and s/he'd better be ready to withstand hired magical probings and various testings, and be pleasant to boot [because if unpleasant, a dagger in the ribs and a corner of earth in the deepest cellar will be MUCH easier than feeding and clothing and putting up with him/her]).

My records tell me that the Phull and Zulpair families were the last to be ennobled, and they seem to have managed it by identical methods: 1. Succeed at trade enough to be staggeringly wealthy. 2. Buy up huge amounts of real estate in Waterdeep, especially in North Ward and Sea Ward. 3. Attend all the revels, acting in a quiet, toady-like, subservient manner, and offer money to help with 'problems' discussed by grumbling nobles at said functions (as GIFTS and NOT loans). 4. VERY quietly loan monies to desperate noble houses. 5. Financially bail out/further the stated aims of a few Masked Lords ("cleaning up" firetrap warehouses in Dock Ward, having the sewers fixed, the harbor dredged, the city walls expanded and repaired, allowing the Lords to take credit rather than yourself. 6. Tell everyone, over and over again at revels (which you now attend dressing and speaking just as much like 'real nobles'), that you care deeply for "the good of Waterdeep" and "we must all think of the good of Waterdeep, so that it will be as great as it is now a thousand years hence." 7. When desperate noble houses discreetly approach you for even more money than you've given them before [in Step 4], willingly hand them more, and say, "This should be a gift, not a loan, but not being noble myself, I can't insult you like that. If we were both nobles, hey, all you'd have to do would be hint at the need, and this would always be just a gift." 8. Start marrying your daughters (made as beautiful as magic can make them, and trained in noble speech and deportment as well as money to pay retired or fired servants can achieve) into noble houses, and accompany them with staggeringly large dowries. 9. Hire spies to find out who just one or two Masked Lords are, and befriend them, financially helping their businesses. 10. Bribe some of the disaffected young wastrel nobles to verbally champion your family at revels as "acting like nobles should." 11. Bribe some servants, ditto [do both 10 and 11 through intermediaries, of course]. 12. Bankroll some young, disaffected nobles to pursue their dreams, however foolish or zany such schemes may be. Befriend THEM. 13. Watch for financial troubles among the nobles and try to repeat Step 4, aiming for a repeat of Step 7.

And, all this time, DON'T build a luxury villa of your own, DON'T openly challenge any noble, and NEVER openly ask to be a noble or pretend to be one.

Eventually, someone facing ruin will remember your Step 7 and start whispering that you should be ennobled. DO NOTHING (unless you can get real control over a few Masked Lords, and add their voices to the whispering). Let it happen.

As you can see, this takes KINGDOMS full of money (the Zulpairs found a remote island where monsters had devoured a dwarf clan and then perished for lack of food, leaving entire caverns full of already-mined rubies ownerless) and GENERATIONS of time, plus NOT MAKING A SINGLE MISTAKE. That's why it's never been done since. It worked for the Phulls and the Zulpairs (who have been scorned by many nobles ever since) because they practically bought up all of North

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Ward between them -- and then GAVE IT AWAY, property by property, to various nobles in winning their support for ennobling House Phull and House Zulpair.

So there's your template. Your ambitious player had better find some way of living for centuries and (like Khelben) somehow concealing the fact that he's actually the same guy (can't have any noble whispers of "he's really undead, he MUST be -- AND HE'S BEDDING MY DAUGHTER!"). Oh, yes, and becoming the most fabulously wealthy individual in all the Realms, of course.

Yes, that could be the basis of a long-running campaign. :}

The Heralds would automatically recognize anyone the Open Lord of Waterdeep treated as a noble. Again, they don't mess in "shoulds" or unfolding politics, but merely enforce the rules of how people use blazons.

Same goes for your question about a self-made ruler in the Border Kingdoms. Of course the Heralds will recognize his right to use a coat of arms, motto, colours, badges, and banners. They're not standing in judgement over his legitimacy at all -- they're just making sure that he doesn't deliberately or unwittingly use heraldry that copies, or is so close to as to be easily mistaken for, arms already in use by someone else. They really don't care if he controls land, has a certain number of troops, or anything like that. What the Heralds WILL do is impose fees and the existing Law of Arms to stop a commoner PRETENDING to be noble, or (in the case of our "yahoo adventurer") stop the children, friends, or creditors of someone who has a coat of arms who dies desitute all trying to use those arms as if the blazon now legitimately belongs to them (the Heralds will rule who can and can't use it).

To extend this to be Obarskyrs, the approval of the elves gave them rule, soon formalized into a crown, throne, and title arrangement. Clear, formal rule is always better than endless civil war (example: see our real-world Balkans, not just now but for centuries into the past), so the Heralds step in to explain to the Obarskyrs and their early courtiers that: "You have the say over who gets ennobled and what titles are granted, but if you want them --and therefore your rule, too -- to be recognized and respected, WE set the rules you work within, for all Faerûn, and no, we will NEVER challenge your rule or anything like that: we're neutral." A trick used by certain early Heralds (before the split with the Harpers) was to magically call back the wraith of a dead ancestor to privately tell a recalcitrant ruler that the Heralds were right and should be obeyed in this -- usually by awakening and scaring the ruler, in the dead of night. Worked like a charm. :}

And yes, you're right: the richest merchants in Waterdeep DID just get together (in the face of Raurlor's and then Ahghairon's authoritarianism) and say, "okay, we're special, and we get these special privileges, okay? In return, we'll support your rule instead of knifing all your agents and raising support against you and then fighting each other and destroying the whole damn city, okay?" And Ahghairon saw this as the perfect way to avoid the rise of another Raurlor, when he grew too old to stop it: these self-styled nobles would police each other as well as the "commoners" under them.

Again, the Heralds DON'T "recognize" this title or that title: they just say: "You can't have three green crosses on your shield like that, Lord Falling-Down-Stairs, because there's an emperor already using that design. May we suggest this? Or that? We've brought along a few drawings..."

If I was the DM and an elf "publicly, visibly saved" the entire Forest Kingdom, I would have the ruling Obarskyr of the day reward them with a handsome title: "Lord High Protector of the Realm" or some such. The Obarskyr would NOT publicly say if it was hereditary or not, and the title wouldn't be worded to make it sound so [in my suggested title, the implication is that the title refers to the protection THAT individual has conferred on the realm, so it DOESN'T hint at

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heredity]; only the War Wizards and the local Heralds would know, one way or another (and after all, public sentiment would probably enthusiastically support bestowal of the title at the time, and the Obarskyr is banking on the lifespan of elves to make sure that the nature of the title, hereditary or not, won't come to public notice). Cormyr's early history would argue against public acceptance of hereditary elven titles, yes.

Now, as for basic courses on heraldry, here you point right at a can of worms. To put it plainly, Cormyr can be said to follow the "classic" rules of British heraldry (as enforced by the College of Arms, whose main offices are in London, England, just south of St. Paul's and north of the River Thames). Waterdeep does not follow some of those rules (in most heraldry, you're not supposed to put "metal on metal" [gold and silver are metals, for example, whereas blue and red are colours], but in Waterdeep some nobles have, so by precedent it's okay to do so.

There are any number of good books, and a lot of bad ones, too, with titles like "Simple Heraldry." The wider problem in our real world is that even though a lot of individual wealthy Americans try to "buy" British titles and so on, the United States officially DOESN'T follow British heraldry (something to do with a long-ago War of Independence :}), so American corporations, for instance, use heraldry that's by British standards rather dodgy.

However, the Realms are medieval-to-Renaissance, and still have that daily practical need for blazons to be painted on shields and recognized in battle so you don't gut your own father (er, unless you're planning to). So what I'm really talking about is: the Heralds of the Realms stop people copying other people's shields too closely or exactly. If you want a bunch of coats of arms, hit your local library and dig up a heraldry book (if the place uses Dewey rather than Library of Congress, you want the 929-point-whatever section, which heraldry shares with flags and books of names for your baby), and copy the ones you like. If you avoid "differencing" (marks to show descendants; a good heraldry book should have examples), quartering (the shield split up into different sections with different arms on them, to show that two or more individuals with blazons have married), and anything more cluttered than the examples in the book, you'll be okay for basic roleplaying purposes.

Oh, one other thing: in the real-world, women usually use lozenges and other "non-shield shapes" to show their arms, rather than the shields men use, but in the Realms arms and arms and women use shields too.

A student of heraldry (and I am one) will be shuddering at my simplifications here, but really this topic demands entire websites (and libraries FULL of books) to deal with properly.

A "charge" is simply something you put on a coat of arms. For instance, if I have a plain orange shield, and I paint a boar's head at the center of it, that head is one charge (and the Heralds of the Realms will leave me alone, even if I then use that same boar's head as a badge on the armored breasts, backs, and/or shoulders of all my men-at-arms for battle recognition). But if I then think my shield looks rather plain and add a horizontal sword UNDER the boar's head, that's a second charge and the Herald comes calling. (If I change the boar's head to have it impaled by a sword, I've just changed my single charge, and the Herald will only come calling if I've spread around a lot of contracts and other documents, banners, and the like that still display my original boar's head -- because then he'll want to make sure he doesn't have two boar's-head-using persons dwelling near each other, and want to warn me that there are rules to heraldry, and I should always talk to him before making changes, okay?)

I hope this first stab at things heraldic helps. Feel free to ask more specific things; I'm not trying to dodge answering, I'm throwing up my arms and saying, "Geez! This is like trying to give you the history of the world in four paragraphs! Nooooo!" I recall a slender hardcover book entitled Simple

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Heraldry that had pen-and-ink humorous illustrations throughout covering the REAL basics of heraldry; if I can find all the cataloguing info for it, I'll post it via the Delightful Hooded One.

Ooh, Lady Delightful here. Yes, Karth, I know what you mean about "and then my character killed Asmodeus" stories (yawn). Shut me up if I ever start to sound like that, okay? And yes, we DO sound alike, Ed and all of us players, when we 'talk Realms' -- because we've been doing it together for so long. There are worse fates than sounding like Ed, I suppose. I could look like Ed but still be of my own gender, for instance. :}

On March 20, THO said: Thanks for that very nice post, thom. Let me try to answer your priests of Bane and Zhentarim questions.

As far as play went for we of the Knights, Ed deliberately kept so many balls in the air in our campaign play (subplots upon subplots upon subplots) that if we wanted to choose our destinies at all, we had to forego most chances at vigorously attacking the Zhents and try to 'get on' with dealing with everything ELSE.

Which of course meant that we were rarely pouncing on the Zhents. Instead, we were usually defending Shadowdale while they attacked it (one more time). This meant that we were generally reacting to their tactics, which tended to follow this model (with variations, of course):

Zhentilar troops (fighters, bolstered by a handful of trying-to-prove-themselves Zhentarim magelings with their own personal bodyguards of crossbow-using veteran Zhentilar, usually one each) would attack. Priests of Bane would magically observe from a safe distance, with their own stronger bodyguards and with defensive spells prepared. Their job was to observe and then report back, fighting only to win free of "enemies" (us, or sometimes a few Harpers who'd been visiting Storm). And a trio or quintet of experienced Zhentarim wizards, usually accompanied by a few magically-controlled monsters they could unleash on us, would wait with full battle-spells at the ready, to smash at us when we were engaged with the first force (the troops).

The magelings might have ANY sort of spell (including experimental disasters), and would fling their magic recklessly. They were out to prove themselves and spared little or nothing on defense. They WOULD run like rabbits once their troops became mincemeat -- though of course that was usually too late.

The experienced Zhentarim wizards wore teleport rings to whisk themselves out of danger, and attacked in co-ordinated unison, seeking to strike hard, do damage, and get out, rather than to rescue any other Zhents or to "win the field." They were operating under orders to reduce Shadowdale to helplessness through attrition, not become glorious heroes by conquering it soonest. Time and again we'd end up in such fights, looking around for where and when the experienced mages would hit us from. We learned not to try to go after the priests, because they'd lead us to more powerful priests, who'd spring blade barriers on us . . . and after you've staggered through two or three of those in succession, continuing to pursue becomes uninteresting fast; Ed even once put a trio of cooks from Zhentil Keep waiting with large silver basins to catch our blood in, "for a special recipe," as we emerged, more dead than alive, from our third blade barrier. Guest players were running Islif and Dove that night, and burst into astonished laughter -- giving the timid, frantically-thanking-us-and-wishing-us-all-a-fair-day cooks time to scuttle away. Jhessail flashed their basins with a fire spell to prevent fell magical uses being made of our gore, but let the poor terrified gourmands go.

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What Ed was doing, of course, was handing us the same challenge over and over again, with our foes acting a little smarter each time, waiting for us to try something bold, dramatic, and different. Eventually, with the aid of a shield that helped Florin to fly and some "can the Harpers help us like this?" talks with Storm, we did, and wiped out not just that Zhent force but the observing priests, too.

Manshoon's response was to soften us up with monsters, helmed horrors and other magically-animated perils, and suchlike for a time, and then try again -- hurling the experience wizards at us first, this time, and then throwing the troops in at us when we were engaged. Inferior numbers were always our problem; I vividly remember Islif staggering towards me in play with FOUR Zhentilar wrapped around her, one of them using the blade he'd thrust into her like a handle. That sort of thing can slow you down. Manshoon was hoping we'd either all get killed or get sick of this and just go away, as all profit-seeking adventurers would be tempted to . . . but he got us enraged, and we stubbornly decided to stay in the face of everything he could throw.

At the same time, we were providing Manshoon with a handy testing-ground for Zhentilar warriors and Zhentarim magelings, because he knew that his repeated attacks weren't going to provoke counterattacks from a large army (Cormyr was obviously content to sit and use us as a shield, and we weren't on the direct trade-road to Sembia, so they weren't going to hire mercenaries to go and teach Manshoon a lesson as long as he kept busy beating up a trade-route-rival: us).

Torm eventually hit upon the impudence of penetrating Zhentil Keep and slaying some really high-ranking Zhents to show Manshoon we could take the battle to him whenever we felt like it -- and that, of course, almost got us killed but did set off infighting among the Zhents, as various priests of Bane and beholder allies pounced on our forays as an excuse to challenge Manshoon's "bad leadership."

As far as specific spells go, Ed usually stuck to 2nd Ed AD&D Players Handbook spells for most of the spellhurling Zhents, BUT 'twisted' every single spell a little, so its area of effect or incantation or material components were different. This kept us roleplaying, reacting to what we saw rather than to what we'd memorized of the rules, and so was far more exciting.

I know I'd go home after play sessions not pissed off at the amount of my school homework I'd neglected so as to go to Ed's, but rather very satisfied at having saved Shadowdale and fought off the bad guys one more time. And whenever we could sneak away from the recurring Zhent attacks, we'd go and have ourselves a REAL adventure. :}

THO

On March 21, 2004 THO said: Stupid or funny deaths, Shadowlord? Are you kidding? How long do you have to sit and read posts? I could spend WEEKS (no exaggeration) just listing the 'Darwin Awards of the Realms' passings of various unfortunates. Most of them are, of course, of the "brief pratfall with black humour-amusing utterance like they'll never be able to hit me here" variety.

Let me restrict myself to just a few of the most 'useful campaign interesting' demises:

1. The Zhent assassin who decided the best way to kill a Knight of Myth Drannor was to wait until we spent the night at the northernmost paddock in Shadowdale, guarding the local horses a passing drover was going to buy the next day (for several years before our arrival in the dale, thieves had mysteriously stolen the best horses the night of the drover's arrival at the Old Skull

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Inn, just before his buying tour the next morn -- and the fed-up ranchers of the dale wanted our help).

The assassin knew Sylune always cast a quell-the-vermin spell on the two-holer outhouse at the paddock, because so many people would be using it in a very short time. After she'd done that and departed, he had a Zhent mage cast a silence spell on the little shack, and then slipped down the pit to, ahem, run a spear up our bums at the right moment.

His primary target was Jhessail, to eliminate her magic before he went after the rest of us -- but unfortunately for him, a Thayan spy whose cover Jhessail just blown at the Old Skull furiously decided to kill her, too. He lurked in the trees, trailed her to the paddock, and when she headed for the privy, raced there first and plunged down the hole, weapons drawn.

The startled Zhent killed him and was still struggling to 'get out from under' when Jhessail arrived, relieved herself all over them both, noted the utter silence, and told Torm and Rathan.

They decided it could do no harm to tip the flimsy structure over on its back and make sure all was fine. Whereupon the filthy, dripping assassin boiled up out of the pit, hurling murder in all directions -- so Rathan calmly dropped the outhouse back into place, braining him. He and Torm didn't know the assassin had just torn loose a bauble from his necklace of missiles, and they leaned the outhouse over backwards again to make sure he was sprawled and helpless. He was, and Torm and Rathan were just chuckling and dusting off their hands when the outhouse, assassin, dead Thayan, and all the dung from the pit burst high into the air.

They survived the explosion (as did the watching Jhessail and the rest of us), but the drover's little band of sneak thieves, approaching the paddock through the trees just then, weren't so lucky.

And there was Torm, murmuring to a swiftly-arriving Mourngrym: "Well, no, actually, Lord M, I wasn't quite PRIVY to the manner of the deaths."

2. The beautiful Sembian lady mercenary who tried to seduce and slay Azoun IV on an undercover tomcatting trip he made to Shadowdale (in the wake of her exploits in STORMLIGHT, he wanted to renew his friendship with Storm Silverhand in a very thorough and personal manner). A traitor among the War Wizards had arranged that the murdered Azoun would be impersonated by a Sembian at least long enough to cede the mountain passes and easternmost Cormyr coastal lowlands to Sembia (it was the intention of the Red Wizard behind this scheme to end up, after the inevitable war damaged both countries, with a lot of land and influence in whatever was left of Cormyr, and able to manipulate enraged Cormyrean nobles as "avenge our realm!" forces for years into the future).

The War Wizard traitor hired the lady mercenary, but agreed with her that she didn't stand much chance of disposing of the real Storm or fooling any Harpers who might be visiting her farmhouse, so she and the War Wizard cast some spells to make her look like Storm and installed her well west of the dale, at an encampment on the road Azoun and his tiny disguised-as-adventurers bodyguard were riding along. The bait worked, and he stopped for the night, delighted to find so many beautiful women gathered warily around a fire. (The other women were Sembian prostitutes hired for a few days by the disguised War Wizard, who overpaid them handsomely, told them a cover story about going to Tilverton to do pleasure work and also that they were to give pleasure to the men they'd meet at this camp without demanding pay, and told them they'd receive even more coin after -- intending instead their deaths, of course.) Afraid she might not be able to fool him for long, the false Storm introduced the king and his merry men to "these lasses she was guarding on their way to Tilverton, who should be safe now that you're here to stay the night with

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them," and promised Azoun she'd be back in a few hours to sport with him, after she'd done a little Harper errand and he'd "warmed himself up sufficiently." He agreed enthusiastically, and she slipped away to prepare herself (she'd sharpened all of her fingernails, and was going to dip them in paralyzing poisons and return when it was full dark-in a gown that should make it clear to even the most suspicious Cormyrean that her only weapons were those nature had given her).

Azoun and his men set one of their number as a guard, and set to, ahem, work. This irritated left-out Purple Dragon decided to at least WATCH all the fun, and neglected to 'report in' to Vangerdahast (via a magical bracer the Royal Magician had ordered him to wear) at the agreed-upon time. Vangey, fearing the worst, teleported a large War Wizard strike force right to the man, and there was a brief chaos of embarrassed Purple Dragons and King fleeing for cover, the highcoin ladies exchanging glances, shrugging, and deciding to just follow their orders and so try to seduce the arriving War Wizards, and one of these War Wizards catching sight of the traitor War Wizard (who was lurking watching).

Confused battle follows, the mercenary lady decides to take down the traitor who hired her so his testimony won't doom her own pretty neck -- and Florin and Merith, accompanying some Shadowdale foresters on a stealthy road-patrol, burst into the middle of all of this and are mistaken for brigands or part of a kingslaying plot by the Cormyreans.

Utter farcial chaos follows, during which the mercenary lady kills the traitor, embraces Azoun to avoid having another War Wizard immediately blast her, the traitor's death causes her Storm disguise to melt away and she frantically tries to off Azoun -- only to learn the hard way that she doesn't have enough poison left on her nails or that it's one of the toxins he's been magically protected against.

Azoun decides he's enjoying all this and might as well enjoy HER, too, and a War Wizard farcalls Vangey because he knows Queen Filfaeril was planning to use her own magical locket to contact her husband this night, and might just slay him if she observes what he's up to. A second War Wizard who knows the same thing sees a glow at Azoun's neck (where he wears a matching locket) and frantically tries to cast a spell that'll switch Azoun's face for that of Florin (who's about the same size), and so on.

We were all so amused and confused by the end of this that by the time an amused Filfaeril (who was quite used to her husband's amours) and a furious Alusair (who thought he should know better, and had drawn her sword to prove it) arrived with Vangey via teleport, everyone but Ed had lost track of who was alive, who was dead, and where and what they were doing.

Which was when a Zhentilar patrol, who'd heard and seen all the shouts and spells, charged out of the night to the attack.

Vangey and the most powerful War Wizards threw up some hasty barrier spells and snarled, "And who are YOU?"

And the Zhent leader, realizing just how doomed he and his men were, pointed at the various nude highcoin ladies and said in as angry a voice as he could manage when terrified: "Their husbands!"

3. A little-publicized-for-security-reasons official visit by Queen Filfaeril to Shadowdale, to congratulate Mourngrym and Shaerl on the birth of her son. War Wizards galore to keep everything safe, armed-to-the-teeth Purple Dragons, and a few haughty senior courtiers. Some of the latter are standing around in the sunshine outside the Twisted Tower talking to Illistyl (because she's a beautiful lass), not knowing that Zhent agents have cunningly put a 'teleport

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focus' item on a hippogriff returning to the 'flight deck' high up on the Tower, and Zhentarim wizards with wands and spells galore are now arriving, intending to murder Filfaeril and anyone who tries to get into their way.

Unfortunately for them, Torm and Rathan have been stationed up on that level of the Tower to guard against any such attack, and to keep their clever tongues far from Filfaeril-and start to efficiently slaughter Zhents (and as they're wizards, T and R behead, just to make sure).

Cut back to the courtiers, condescendingly observing to Illistyl that it must be boring, living in a backwater like this, where nothing ever happens.

"Oh, yes," she agrees calmly, "'tis peaceful enough."

Thump, the first severed Zhent head lands on the turf beside them.

The courtiers gape at it.

"Nothing much ever happens, 'tis true," she continues, keeping a straight face and not looking up.

Thump, thump, thump, the heads land and roll...

4. Then there was the mighty Zhentilar commander (higher level and hit points than any two of us Knights) who was using an upper level of an old tower as his campaign HQ when a few of us Knights attacked (my character was one of them, but Florin, Dove, Merith, and Jhessail were fighting elsewhere). We fought our way up the tower through all of his under-officers, taking damage (the only way up was via a ladder, up a central shaft, and we had no spells by then to send up it), to finally reach the topmost room, where we planned to hole up and heal ourselves. The swaggering commander grinned with glee, and started carving us up. We fought each other, all around that deadly open shaft, until he finally downed Rathan. Chortling, he went after a wounded and grimly-crawling Torm. Trying to distract him (in character here), I gasped loudly, "I can't remember the command word!"

The Zhent spun around and peered at me -- I flashed my breasts at him, and gave him a cheesy grin to boot, just trying to buy Torm more time to get out a dagger or something. The Zhent saw that I had no magic item at all. He burst out laughing at my feeble deception -- and stepped right into the shaft. He broke his neck at the bottom, and for weeks of play sessions afterwards I had Torm pawing at my character, gasping teasingly, "Oh, no! I can't remember the command word!"

5. Then there were the Zhents who ambushed Dove when she was driving a coach alone into Shadowdale -- who reacted in sneering disbelief to her admission that it contained a dragon, and smashed it open with swords and axes.

Unfortunately for them, she wasn't lying. :}

That's enough for now. I think you get the idea.
THO

March 21, 2004: The Hooded One here (thom, you're very welcome), with Ed's latest:

Hi, all.

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thom, I'll definitely get to some of those 'balls in the air' (very important because the heart of the 'home' Realms campaign has always been interesting NPCs and subplots galore, all unfolding at once, so the PCs are like kids in a candy store, having to choose which goodies they'll grab for -- and yes, the key is that almost all of the time, THEY get to choose) when the Waterdeep novel is done. Right now, I just can't spare the time.

Karth, Baerovus didn't REALLY believe the full extent of Storm's powers or abilities, lifespan included. He thought she was a very powerful sorceress masquerading as a minstrel, who'd done something for Mystra and gotten rewarded as a result, with all of the tales of the Chosen being exaggerations of the sort his own courtiers spread all the time. The implications you allude to didn't even occur to him. (Unusual for a king, that. :))

As for the Obarskyr bloodlines pervading the kingdom: the royals haven't ALL been champion tomcatters, by any means. Azoun IV, however...

For their own "see who everybody looks like, because you'll need to be able to recognize some of them later" reasons, some of the Knights once attended a debutante ball, whereat the beautiful, marriageable young ladies of the nobility were presented at Court.

Lass after gowned lass was presented, paraded by proud fathers out onto the vast cleared area in front of the throne. And lass after lass bore more than a passing resemblance to Azoun himself, one way or another -- until finally Vangerdahast, standing in his usual spot just behind the king's shoulder, leaned close to murmur mildly (in an oh-so-quiet voice that magically carried to all corners of the vast chamber): "MODERATION, my liege?"

Foxhelm, you pose a rules question better answered by a WotC staffer than by me, but if I was DMing a Realms campaign, there's no logical way I could accept a priest more powerful than the divine being the priest's spells come from.

As for the faith of Finder, I view it as largely being an 'upper room' cult -- that is, Finder is worshipped by small groups of folk who gather in secluded rooms of private homes owned by believers. I don't mean that the faith is evil, suppressed or frowned upon, just that it has thus far taken the low-profile 'we know these divine secrets that the temples of more famous gods have missed' route. There are some priests of other gods who are angered by 'false' beliefs and claims of those who venerate Finder, because it differs from the teachings and beliefs of their own faith. In Waterdeep, worship of Finder occurs at the plinth, in the 'upper rooms' I've alluded to, and yes, I believe a modest temple of Finder (no larger than the average Trades Ward 'shop at street level, two floors of living suites above' building) is being built, and in use for worship in its half-finished state.

So saith Ed.

The Hooded One, signing off with just one more stupid/funny death to er, pass on to you all:

A sadistic young wastrel noble (idle young titled man about town) in Suzail by the name of Elendar Torchwinter, who was offended that so much respect was accorded so swiftly and discreetly by his parents to a lone, barefoot woman of cold tongue, ragged-looking black gown, and unfriendly eyes -- causing the temporary displacement of him and his friends from the Torchwinter 'town house' they'd been gleefully trashing in a series of host-the-local-highcoin-gals parties.

Inquiring as to this stranger's identity, Elendar was warned that she was "a queen from somewhere, on the run from some Red Wizards," and thought it would a real hoot to use the

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secret passage into the main bedchamber in the dead of night to sneak up on her and rudely slap her awake whilst pretending to be a Red Wizard.

The next morning, the upper floor of the town house was found to have been rather violently transformed into a single chamber with a large window or opening in its outer wall, at the far end of the house from the main bedchamber.

On the facing wall of the mansion next door was a reddish stain shaped like a spreadeagled man -- and Elendar Torchwinter hasn't been seen since.

The Simbul thanked the Torchwinters for their hospitality, saying she'd slept well and had one VERY satisfying dream. :}
THO

March 21, 2004: The Hooded One here, with just a quick aside for Silas (I'll have more of Ed's replies soon, promise):

The last I read re. Castlemorn was an expanded "core" book, now to be published in July (maybe June, maybe August). Try check out Mr. Ward's columns on the FFE site (I THINK they're called "900 Words" or something like that). He mentioned something about the new date in the last five or six columns somewhere. They're also "good reads" all by themselves.
THO

March 21, 2004: The Hooded One again, passing on the wisdom of Ed:

Hello, folks. Well met, Ceremony!

I dealt with your requested character sketches for THE SEVEN SISTERS at great length in the book of that name, but let me give VERY brief thumbnails here. The names that follow are those by which the Seven are commonly known.

Storm Silverhand: the Bard of Shadowdale, a warmly affectionate midwife and mother to the children of others who gives shelter, refuge, aid, and advice to many; a guide and tutor to fellow Harpers; a singer and harpist of skill; fearless in battle, and an increasingly cynical strategist when viewing Zhent activities and politics in general

Alustriel: the High Lady of Silverymoon and founder and current head of the Silver Marches, a diplomatic friend and lover to all who by her sunny personality and giving nature has forged the Gem of the North as a city of culture and concord; lacks all sense of shame but has her own dignity that overrides all the 'free love' that pervades her court; very like Storm, but aims high (ruling, society, alliances) rather than low (Storm prefers to work with farm wives, orphans, loners, and other individuals); see my Realmslore column on the WotC website for details of her current consort [four parts]

The Simbul: Queen of Aglarond, a wild-eyed, unkempt woman who spends much time flying about the Realms shapechanged or slaughtering Thayans (she's less than sane in her glee over destroying Red Wizards). Swift to fury and recklessly mighty in her hurlings of magic, she's currently the lover of Elminster of Shadowdale, who's trying to mellow her as fast as he can. She plays a part in the action of ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. Laeral: the Lady Mage of Waterdeep

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and consort to Khelben 'Blackstaff' Arunsun, Laeral is quieter and more prim than her sisters, but that's a matter of style more than any prudishness or lack of humour. She prefers the velvet glove, but her tongue can be as sharp as the rest of them when need be. Prefers to teach folk to master magic (working on their characters and foresight for consequences as much as technical mastery of spells) in Blackstaff Tower, and takes a longer, cooler view of life than either Alustriel or Storm. You'll probably see her VERY briefly in the Waterdeep novel Elaine Cunningham and I are working on right now. See HAND OF FIRE for brief glimpses of her working in concert with Alustriel.

Dove: married to Florin Falconhand of the Knights of Myth Drannor (they have one child, and all three of them enjoy the freedom of Evermeet, and means of teleporting there at will), Dove enjoys the plain life of the warrior, viewing 'losing oneself in magic' as a character flaw that can blind one to the simple joys -- and hard truths -- of life in Faerun. She prefers blunt, honest speech to cleverness and deceit, sleeping and living in the open to cities and high fashion and intrigues, and exercise over idleness. If you need help branding or rounding up cattle or raising a roof in Shadowdale, expect to be able to call on Dove -- and don't be surprised to see her hefting logs unaided, joking and sweating along with everyone else, doffing clothes for comfort just as the men do, and alone wrestling a steer off its feet so it can be roped, branded, or whatever.

Qilue Veladorn: [accent grave missing over the "e" in "Qilue" thanks to my primitive e-mail] the Chosen of both Mystra and Eilistraee, Qilue looks like a drow, albeit with silver hair, and in manner, speech, and expression, is the least friendly and approachable of the Seven (except when compared to an angry Simbul), and is as restless as the Simbul, torn between "her two mothers" and unsure of her destiny and what she should be doing; enjoys human company (see SILVERFALL) but prefers dancing in worship of Eilistraee in moonlit forest with fellow drow more than anything else; half-fears and yet is strangely excited that either Mystra or Eilistraee intends her to wed someone she might not like (she has no idea who, this is just a notion); is most like an adolescent in lack of confidence of all the Seven. In dealings with strangers, will be polite, wary, yet quick to warn of offense (and servile to no one).

Sylune [ditto missing accent]: formerly the Witch of Shadowdale, Sylune perished a few years back, and lives on in a unique undead form: she can materialize as a wraith-like being, or in a seemingly-solid-to-the-eye-but-intangible image of her body, when within a certain distance of a stone (no matter how small the fragment) that was formerly part of the floor of her now-vanished hut in Shadowdale. Many Knights and most of her sisters and a few other persons carry such fragments, or have them stored in various places, and she can 'jump' from one to another -- as well as possessing the bodies of the living under certain circumstances. In undeath as in life, Sylune is a kind, motherly healer, midwife, loremistress, and herbalist who delights in learning and knowing lore (not gossip) and freely passing that knowledge on to others. Like Storm, is happiest dealing with individuals -- but like Laeral, can take the long view and see it more clearly than any of her sisters.

If you want to "hear" something of the characters of the Seven, check out my novel SILVERFALL, or my two-part 2003 Spin A Yarn tale on the WotC website, ONLY A WOMAN CAN TAKE THIS SORT OF ABUSE. Each year, this story is concocted from audience suggestions (and this year, that included the title, too), so it tends to be wildly silly, but this year's offering includes some repartee between some of the Seven that will help you capture their natures when irritated. The Sisters are deeply bonded friends, with only Qilue standing a shade apart, and it shouldn't be possible for PC or NPC machinations or events in your campaign to make them enemies of each other.

I hope this helps. I wish I had time to provide more.

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Regarding Susprina Arkhenneld: we've not seen the last of this proud, wary, dangerous lady, but I can say she fled from the Underdark to the surface as a young woman, and is both a sorceress and has training as a mage, making her -- well, let's say a 'formidable opponent.' I'll add this much more: she's passed 7th level in one of her classes, but I'll not be more specific now because of some future plans.

If you were to visit Shadowdale, I'd not expect to find lodging at Elminster's Tower -- but if you don't mind spending a night or two in an upper bedroom at Storm Silverhand's farmhouse, after a pleasant evening of converse with Storm herself, her rather ghostly sister Sylune, and the Old Mage himself, I believe that can be arranged. Please bear in mind that the will of the gods might well bring other house guests onto the scene, and that if you're unfriendly to Those Who Harp, that unfriendliness may be returned. Moreover, no matter how bitter the weather, few have found Storm's bedchambers less than welcomingly warm. :}

So saith Ed, practically purring in his arch diplomacy. :}

The Hooded One, signing off with a careful lack of comment

March 22, 2004: Hearken once more to the words of Ed:

For purposes of not unduly upsetting plans afoot at Wizards of the Coast AND so as not to harm play in my own campaign, I'm going to avoid giving a complete roster of the Knights, with levels, et al. What I will do is turn the floor over to our beautiful Hooded Lady, to answer Damian's and Wooly Rupert's requests about the characters of a few of the core Knights:

Why, thank you, dear. I'll just settle myself comfortably in your lap so you can correct me if I go too far, hmm?

What follows is the heart of the Knights, but a little less than a third of its membership, down the years. Absence of information about faiths and about the children of the Knights is at Ed's request, for both the reasons he gave (set forth above). I've done what Ed did with the Seven Sisters, listing people by the form of name they're most widely known by, and omitting titles, middle names, and all of that.

Florin Falconhand: A tall, handsome, square-jawed charismatic hero of a man. Looks like a king, is ordinarily 'forceful but quiet' of manner, and half the women of the Dales swoon at the thought of him. Grows angry rather than fearful when faced with doom. True nobility of character, being far kinder and more understanding than he's ever had need to be. Favoured of the goddess Mielikki, who practically ordered his marriage to Dove, deeming it "needful." Our war-leader and envoy. Typical saying: "We must do what is right -- and be very sure as to what 'right' is."

Dove Falconhand: Speaks little, cares little for looks or pretty words. Very close to her husband Florin in character. Often says, "Gently," which is short for: "Gently, carefully -- do it right, once, rather than thrice badly." Absent for long periods raising the child she bore Florin, and never hurls her status as a Chosen of Mystra at any of her fellow Knights. Typical saying when among us: "And so?"

Doust Sulwood: Retired from the Knights, a priest now resident in Cormyr. Quiet, reluctant to make decisions, a little aloof, far-sighted. A reluctant former Lord of Shadowdale. Never really the leader among us, but for a long time the central figure who tossed converse, decision-making,

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and center stage skillfully from Knight to Knight, binding us in friendship. Typical saying: "Let us see more."

Jelde Asturien ('Semoor Wolftooth'): Also retired from the Knights to Cormyr, and a priest (the second listed name was his own, his better-known one the naming he chose when confirmed in his faith) of sharp, sarcastic tongue. A cynic and pessimist who was all too seldom wrong in his judgements. Wooed Jhessail with little success, and was always ready for a fight or an adventure. Typical saying: "Colour me unsurprised. As usual."

Islif Lurelake: A strong, lusty warrior-woman of few words -- also now retired from the Knights to Cormyr, and married to Doust. Usually visits Shadowdale once every spring, and leads local (Eveningstar) patrols of the verges of the Stonelands. No-nonsense, given to deadpan black humour or none (visible) at all. Slow to anger, tends to be amused by insults. Typical saying: "My sword speaks for me."

Jhessail Silvertree: A gentle, affectionate, merry-spirited wizardess of large-eyed, almost elfin beauty. Longtime beloved and then bride of Merith, hardened into stern and motherly manners by her adventures and motherhood (she and Merith have a child). Subtly (and reluctantly) became the central 'heart' of the Knights as Doust withdrew. Typical saying: "Sunrise, sunfall, and as inevitably, here we go again!"

Illistyl: The impish longtime apprentice of Jhessail and sometime lover of Torm, Illistyl is good-natured but has a waspish tongue. Loves adventure, has a swift temper and 'spirit,' and has remained petite and rough-and-tumble agile as she's matured. Once nicknamed (by Jelde) 'the Dare-me Girl,' because she so seldom refused his dares, and in doing so impressed him repeatedly. Typical saying: "Really? Deeds, not words: impress these eyes!"

Merith Strongbow: A quiet, darkly handsome elf whose looks have smitten scores of human ladies (including some fellow Knights). Kind and good-natured, he usually hides an impish sense of humour -- but not too deeply. A battlefield strategist (whereas Florin is our war-leader). From time to time, affects a mustache. Capable of devastating mimicry, and has dressed up and acted as a female to lure foes with no shred of embarrassment. Typical saying (spoken with heavy irony): "I see." This is short for: "I see all too well."

Lanseril Snowmantle: Casually flippant, sees all and REMEMBERS all, and so has a head as stuffed as any sage. Casual of dress and courtesy, but empathic enough never to be unwittingly rude. Like most druids, happier alone in the wilds than indoors or in crowds -- and spends much time off cleansing the Border Forest of Zhent depredations and damage (his pet project). Always appears calm. Typical sayings are innocent-sounding derisions like: "And your sword just fell out of its scabbard and into him, is that it? Enlighten us all, as far as your own enlightenment crawls with you."

Mourngrym Amcathra: Of the Amcathra noble clan of Waterdeep and a little awed when he joined the Knights, Mourngrym has retired from us to be Lord of Shadowdale, and is growing daily in commanding airs and confidence. Always darkly handsome and eloquent, highly educated and trained in all courtly graces (singing -- which he's lousy at -- dancing, writing, oration, fashion sense, all the rest), Mourngrym is revealing a dry sense of humour and far more determination than he had in our collective shadows, as a Knight. Now married to Shaerl Rowanmantle (a noblewoman of Cormyrean birth and Lady of Shadowdale), Mourngrym has a son and is settling down to becoming a stern, just ruler. From time to time, he regards our freedom to go adventuring with open envy. Typical saying: "Justice demands no less."

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Torm: The always-flippant, say-anything, deliberately outrageous thief of the Knights, agile and quick-witted. Also rude, impulsive, and pranksome. Close friends with Rathan, whom he teases mercilessly. Almost as much of a scourge of the ladies as he thinks he is. Delights in swindles of those not his friends, and even more in outwitting everyone. Is notorious throughout the Dragonreach lands, and many folk would love to see his comeuppance -- and even more would like it to be brutal. Typical saying: "Who, me? But of course."

Rathan: A jovial, apt-to-adopt-a-false-crustiness priest who loves his flagons and is best friends with Torm, whose constant teasing he tolerates good-naturedly (occasionally getting even). Has a fierce sense of what's right and just, but is otherwise very understanding of different creeds, views, and values. Believes that those who join the Zhentarim, Cult of the Dragon, or Red Wizards place themselves outside the bounds of deserving fair treatment. Comfortable with commoners, deeply dislikes the airs and assumptions of the wealthy and nobility. Typical saying: "I perceive less than agreement in thee."

Sharantyr: A shapely, sleek, hot-tempered ranger governed by personal loyalties to her friends above all else. Is hopelessly in love with, but also in awe of, Florin (after all, the man is personally favoured by Mielikki!), and is deeply grateful that the Knights trust her enough to let her fare forth often to adventure on her own. Has a sly sense of humour and isn't above using her beauty to get her own way. Restlessly searching for her own destiny or 'proper place' in the Realms. Except when angered, her converse is often a series of gentle challenges. Typical saying: "Care to be a whit more honest with me?"

Someday we'll say rather more about the Knights (certainly something as the published Knights trilogy gets underway; until then, the Shadows of the Avatar show the Knights in action, and HAND OF FIRE gives Sharantyr a minor spotlight). The Knights have been neglected in the published Realms for too long, but that's as we all wanted it.

Ed didn't want our home game ruined by published revelations, and wanted the accent to be on the wider world, not have the Realms be the backdrop for the exploits of a vitally important center-stage bunch of heroes like the Heroes of the Lance or the Fellowship of the Ring.

And we . . . we still wanted our characters to be ours. Which is one of the reasons Ed delayed in writing a Knights trilogy for so long, and why he's proceeding so carefully with it now.
THO

P.S. Yes, Damian, we fared forth briefly into the Vast, exactly twice. I've passed your dream list on to Ed, who e-groaned, said, "Me, too!" to a lot of it, and promised to get to a few of the easier Realmslore questions in May, during his book signing tour -- when, as he put it, "I should be able to snatch a FEW moments for the Realms. I hope."

On March 22, 2004 THO said: Sorry, thom, re. your Postscript: Ed has finished the Gods of Castlemorn (and details of faiths, too) and they're different from the Realms. A far smaller pantheon, and a different view of portfolios.

Nice try, though. :}

And to Shadowlord: me? Drop clues? THIS lil' ol' Hooded One?

{dimple} My, fancy that. And this. And this . . . ;)

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On March 22, 2004 THO said: Oh, and one little postscript more, Shadowlord: there's a mistake in your listed assumptions.

Just to be fair. Wouldn't want o lead you astray (she said archly). :}

March 22, 2004: Hello, everyone. More from Ed:

Damian, you're a man after my own heart (and gizzard, and . . . :}). I've printed out your wish list and put it with the bulging packet of things I need to discuss with various folks at Wizards. Hopefully at GenCon, where I can get them druXXX persuade them in person. :}

Josh, I'd say your "walking dead-magic-zone" man would be shunned by clergy of Mystra if near a temple or magic-strong location (get away from here!), and physically prevented from getting too close, by fists if need be. His existence, appearance, and whereabouts would be promptly reported, and higher clergy would seek advice in prayer and by asking any Chosen they could get into contact with. Certain servants of Mystra (see the SECRETS OF THE MAGISTER rulebook I did for 2nd Edition) and all Chosen know how to deal with dead magic zones, and he's small enough to handle. It would take a sufficient sacrifice of silver fire to cancel out the dead magic zone, and this nullification would have nothing to do with the character's wishes (i.e. it's not something a PC would have to beg or pay for, or be left alone to keep if he wanted to retain it).

Just killing him would be the "last choice," because doing so might destroy the dead magic zone or anchor it at the site of his death -- but might also, just as easily, free it to 'drift' (towards magic!).

So the PC would likely get a personal visit from a Chosen, carefully pumping silver fire into them to nullify the dead magic. A painful experience, but one that would ultimately cleanse their body of all taints, diseases, poisons, spells affecting them, curses, and wounds. And hey, they'd get to meet a Chosen and very much come to the attention and interest of that Chosen, so they might then get offered a task, or friendship, or a swift trip back to Vangey with the Chosen along to assure the Royal Magician that this particular Purple Dragon Knight was okay, now.

That's how I'd DM it, anyway (and of course any power groups who'd heard of the character's power would be interested in him, even after he was "fixed," so 'twouldn't all be sweetness and light, but it WOULD be lots of interesting play opportunities). As all too many people in our real world discover, from politicians to people who get their pictures taken in war zones to Chicago Cub fans who happen come into contact with the right or wrong ball, notoriety is a powerful, life-changing thing.

As for your question about villains, things have changed. TSR had a rather strict Code of Ethics (revised at least once that I can recall) that was hard to live with for two reasons: judging from what got published, some writers seemed "exempt" from it, where others of us (me being one :) got it applied to us pretty thoroughly; AND it pretty well said that evildoers can't be seen to benefit from evil actions within the confines of a product (meaning: you could START a book with a Great Evil Empire, but you couldn't have them defeated at the end of a trilogy but "win" along the way, until things looked more and more dire [example: The Lord of the Rings]: they had to lose in EACH book of the trilogy or series). This is why the Zhentarim so often came across as the Keystone Kops of the Realms in early Realms novels. Frustrating as heck, believe me.

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Wizards has a much broader (but more 'sensitive New Age,' i.e. more sensitive towards offending real-world female consumers) Code of Conduct, that I can by and large live with just fine. Folks who read my books carefully will notice that I've been "pushing the barriers" a little with each novel so that what's deemed acceptable is a little broader next time, giving me more storytelling room. Yet for all the complaints hurled my way for being fixated on sex, being mad for nudity and gals with silver hair and all that, I've never in print gone as far as Bob Salvatore did way back in his great novel HOMELAND (the female drow valedictorian of the graduating class summons and has sex with a glabrezu of the lower planes? whilst the entire class participates in an orgy? Wow!). So what one can get away with does vary. As for your concerns with rewriting: all Realms novels are works for hire. Wizards of the Coast owns the copyright and can control the text. All novel authors rewrite until their editor is happy with the result. And that's true almost everywhere in the publishing world. That's just "the way the game works." Down the years, I've had seven book and game products go straight through editing with no requests for changes or additions. Seven (no, I'm not going to say which ones), and my prose usually gets tinkered with. One must accept that, or stop participating in the process. Obviously, looking back over the hundreds of published things I've been involved with, concerning the Realms, I've accepted it. :}

So saith Ed.

I can confirm (on some of the early novels, at least, where Ed was discussing scenes with us players because our characters were involved, and part of the original Realms agreement was that he would do so) that prose does get changed -- but I can also confirm that the FEEL and SPIRIT of the Realms made it into print, early on. Elaine Cunningham's ELFSHADOW novel is proof of that: she couldn't have "got Waterdeep right" from what was printed in FR1 Waterdeep And The North if Ed hadn't managed to convey the feeling in that root product.
THO

March 22, 2004: Hello, all. More from Ed:

thom, your coin questions are JUST the sort of thing I can properly deal with here. Not too huge a topic, not too trammled with stuff that has to be kept secret. I'll get to them later tonight, except for Question 1: YES, the coins of Cormyr and Sembia are considered the 'regional' standards for the Dragon Coast. They ARE generally accepted at face value by most merchants PCs would deal with. More later!

Dargoth, for answers to your questions, see the classic Mere of Dead Men series of adventures published in DUNGEON. I was invited to be part of this series but just didn't have time (I was already doing six projects at once, at the time), and Eric Boyd did a superb job on the concluding adventure. The disposition of the magic items you refer to depends on which events outlined in that classic, first-rank adventure have occurred, in your campaign.

So saith Ed, who's still juggling library work, his cold, and of course the Waterdeep novel. I'll relay his next replies ASAP (which will be this evening after he does all the recycling and compost and takes out the garbage, unless his library shifts have changed :}).
THO

On March 22, 2004 THO said: Wooly Rupert, I can start to answer this question without checking with Ed (don't worry, I will, later :}), because he wrote the first accessory for Spelljammer (SJR1, I think: "Lost Ships" was the title), and had a LOT of fun with it. I recall overhearing him GIGGLING

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when Jeff Grubb (designer of the setting) was describing some of the "wacky science" of the setting, on the phone.

Bored guard on ship, smoking (against rules): just before superior officer comes around checking, tosses pipe sideways over the rail, nods to officer, officer moves on, guard reaches out and catches his pipe again -- which has circled around amidships to pop back up again...the same trajectory (smack in back of head warning!) vomit follows, when projected 'over the side.'

:]

THO

March 23, 2004: Hello, all. Ed finally weighs in on the coin questions from thom (and yes, I can confirm that we found 'curious' coins once or twice that we took to sages to identify, nut never had any troubles spending any treasure coins we found. SAVING, now . . . THAT was harder :}):

1. Yes and yes.

2. Sembian coins have the arms of Sembia on one side, and the denomination (above) and the date (in DR) curving around a proof stamp [mint mark] on the other (yes, curving, regardless of the shape of the coin). Sembian coins often have a bluish tinge to them from being cleaned (of the grease they get on them from the stampings) by being held in a flame. The grease is deliberately "cooked into" the iron coins, to inhibit rust (it does a fair, not foolproof, job).

3. Modern Cormyrean coins bear the monarch's face and name on side, and a date, denomination, and mint mark [almost always a full-on bearded, hatless wizard's face, known as "Old Vangey," which denotes the Royal Mint in Suzail, but in about ten percent of coins two parallel crescent moons, horns to the dexter, denoting a High Horn minting] on the other. There's only been one minting since the death of Azoun IV, and these Regency coins bear the Purple Dragon royal arms with five parallel bars on its body, rather than the face of the infant monarch or of Alusair. Elder Cormyrean coins (eighty years old and older) don't have dates, but instead "first minting," "second minting," and so on, these numbered mintings denoting times during the reign of that monarch that coins were issued (there were eight mintings in the reign of Azoun IV, but three mintings is as high a count as most of the early kings got). They are otherwise identical to more modern coins of the Forest Kingdom.

Cormyrean coins are of very pure metal and heavy weight, and age well, Sembian coins slightly less so -- but the coinages of Waterdeep, Luskan, Mirabar, Silverymoon, Amn, Tethyr, Cormyr, and Sembia are considered the best-made in Faerun, and are most highly valued in trade.

Acceptance of older coins depends on condition and metal: gold coins are accepted everywhere at face value unless they're broken, unusually small, or obviously impure. Silver coins that have tarnished to black are seldom accepted, but if PCs clean them WITHOUT highly abrasive means that take much of the markings off, they'll probably be accepted, too (again, unless broken, impure, or small). For everything else, yes, go to a moneychanger (most cities on any coast have several).

Tradebars are widely accepted, because they MUST conform closely to a given size and weight to be accepted at all. They are the best way to melt down and re-use "suspicious" coins, because an existing tradebar can be pressed into clay to easily make a mold for the new one.

A 25-gp tradebar is a "brick with rounded corners" (squared corners broke off too easily, and unscrupulous persons deliberately broke off corners whenever they could, so the custom of

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rounded corners became the norm) of just over an inch thick, three inches across, and six inches in length. Calishite tradebars (also used in Tharsult, Tashluta and the Tashalar, and other Southern trade) are seven inches long, but both 'long sides' bow smoothly inwards half an inch on each side, making the bar easier to grip.

50-gp tradebars are the same dimensions around their bottoms as 25-gp bars, but are three inches thick, and taper inwards as they rise (to look more like our real-world 'ingot bars'), so their top surfaces are a half-inch smaller, all around. There are no (legal) bow-sided 50-gp tradebars.

A 75-gp tradebar is an inch thicker (taller) than a 50-gp bar, with no taper to its sides at all.

A 100-gp tradebar is two inches thick, three inches across, and nine inches long, with a central hole (for carrying or for passing a cord through, to tie into bundles). The hole shouldn't be much more than an inch across.

Proof and ownership marks are commonly stamped into the bottom surface of a tradebar, and don't affect value.

Very earlier tradebars vary widely in dimensions and value, but are either weighed and valued at that time when traded today, or melted down when they must be transferred from one owner to another.

So saith Ed.

thom, I can tell you that we found very few tradebars as treasure (but then, not being Zhents, we weren't throttling merchants and then pillaging their homes to find our treasure). I suspect most tradebar hoards are hasty burials in the face of advancing foes or fierce weather, and are snapped up when nature or chance digging shifts enough earth to reveal them.
THO

On March 23, 2004 THO said: Damian, I'll get a proper reply from Ed later, but I can take care of three of your questions right away.

No UK leg of the book tour this time, sorry (believe me, Ed LOVES to be in England whenever he can get the chance; his wife Jenny is from Surrey).

Sharantyr is lovely, yes, and she is modeled pretty closely on a real-life lass, but it's not me (sigh; cuddling with two handsome, strong-as-panthers Harpers; sigh).

What you did in your campaign is EXACTLY what happened in ours: Doust and Islif relocated from Arabel to get away from all the bloodshed and politics. :}

More from Ed later.

THO

March 24, 2004: Hello again, all. Ed apologizes for the delays in replying; a family emergency ate up his Tuesday. However, to paraphrase Charlie Brown: "The Sage Is In." Hearken, all, to ye words of Ed:

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Well met again, Lashan. Hmm, I know there are some things I should be telling you about Tantras, but the only things that spring to mind right now are these:

There's a tangle of wreckage in the 'deep hole' at the center of the harbor (a small shaft or pit that plunges about sixty feet deeper than the surrounding harbor bottom) that's full of the tangled wreckage of two merchant ships who unintentionally rammed each other one stormy night. There are the usual rumors of valuable cargo and even more valuable contraband sunken and presumably there for the taking -- but there's also DEFINITELY something unfriendly down there, that causes creatures who explore the 'deep hole' to simply vanish. The harbor bottom is clay, and swirling mud obscures all vision near it (including the entire 'deep hole').

The favored drink in Tantras is a 'red and blue.' This potent tippie is made by mixing the "blue wine" made locally (a thin, sour wine whose only claim to respectability is its glorious, almost glowing 'royal blue' color, derived from the sour local wild grapes) with the best 'red brandies' concocted in Saerloon and Selgaunt. Drinking two red and blues in rapid succession leaves most people reeling drunk and causes others to pass out, but it has one useful documented effect: in humans and demi-humans, it deadens ALL pain and nausea for about 3 rounds (useful when performing amputations and other 'brutal surgery'). Repeated exposure to this beverage causes individuals to soon lose this benefit (at different rates for each being). A red and blue has a rich sweet-and-sour taste that some folk swear by -- and a few swear at.

A 'baeranth' is the most popular everyday evening meal dish for Tantrans. The word means other things elsewhere, but in the City of Torm it refers to a meat pie or tart baked golden-brown and with a peppery gravy inside. The smoked meat of beef, goat, and hogs are minced in a 3-1-1 proportion to make a 'real' baeranth, but there are the inevitable tales of dogs and even humans going missing and winding up in baeranth.

"Sarkul" or smoked fish are also popular in Tantras (caught in the Reach, beheaded, immersed in honey and seasonings, and then hung and smoked for several days in closed sheds, but fish are NEVER put in a baeranth (in Tantras, for some unknown reason, the very idea of fish pies is considered sick and revolting).

Baeranth's vary in price from 1 sp for six to 2 cp each, depending on size, reputation of the shop, and freshness, and are always sold hot. They can be bought from about highsun (midday) to dusk, from dozens of serving-shutter-on-the-street-wall shops with names like Karvin's and Thurnan's Oven and The Meltmouth.

Tantras has many taverns, but few dining-halls or anything approaching what we would call a restaurant. Its inns typically serve warm mulled cider and cold ale, plus buttered bread (a very dark, rich nutbread akin to our real-world pumpernickel), up to the rooms of guests, and lack dining rooms or taprooms. The taverns of Tantras serve the usual drinks and 'hot buns' covered with melted cheese (some taverns putting sliced olives or slices of sausage on the cheese so they'll stick, to make their buns distinctive and popular), but little other food.

Tantras does have lots of fresh fish and eel shops and stands, and its streets often reek of cooking fish in early evening.

Tantras is known for having good ropemakers and netmakers. A typical shop is owned by a master or masters, who employ six to eight skilled workers and a handful of apprentices, to 'weave' the ropes or nets by hand. A small array of fairly standard wares (40-foot-coil of waxed line, 1 gp; 26-foot-coil of light cord, 4 sp; 50-foot-coil of rope, 1 gp; 50-foot-coil of heavy rope, 4 gp; 75-foot-coil of rope, 5 gp; 100-foot-coil of rope, 12 gp; 100-foot ship's hawser/mooring cable, 150 gp [overpriced because these items, of which at least 2 will always be available, will only be

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bought from 'ready stock' in an emergency) will be hanging and ready for sale, and everything else will have to be ordered, with a tenday or longer wait.

There are also a few skilled brass founders (casters) in Tantras, who make small, simple household wares (bells, lantern cages, candlestick bases, handles, catches, simple bowls and trays, pouring spouts/funnels, hooks, and the like). The best is probably Teth Rundlelor of Bauntaman Lane, but Adluth's Fine Hooks and Castings on Varmor Street and the cavernous secondhand warehouse Oddlings on Roardragon Way are also good sources.

The wildest festhall in Tantras, Warm Wondra's, is also on Roardragon Way (the main street running along the southern edge of the docks), and it truly is a festhall: nightly shows are held there from dusk until dawn, beginning with contortionists, comedians, jugglers, and players who perform short bawdy works, and progressing through minstrels who put on rousing sequences of drinking and 'slay the dragon' songs, to a farce play involving maidens who get disrobed by monsters or villains (the audience is encouraged to boo, hiss, cheer, and even help deliver lines if they buy drinks for the actors), and finally to out-and-out exotic dancing and sex-for-coin activity (all of which is legal; the masked, cudgel-wielding Watch of Tantras are there -- just as they are on their frequent street, dockside, and tavern patrols -- to keep order, arresting persons who draw steel, wound others, or start fires, and ejecting the unruly onto the street).

And that should be enough to get you going. There's something niggling in the back of my mind about someone who was walled up in the city walls and is now trapped there, undead and able only to clutch and whisper, but the notes for that are [gulp] in my basement and will have to wait until May or even later (post-Waterdeep, post-taxes, and perhaps post-publicity tour).

So saith Ed.

We Knights hit Tantras only once: at night, in a SOAKING rain. We waded along (some of the streets become streams emptying down into the harbor during a real cloudburst, and this was an all-night real cloudburst :}), wet to our knees, and were challenged by an equally soggy Watch patrol. Jhessail sourly told them she was the Queen of Waterdeep, and they then tried to arrest her, and Florin started picking them up and tossing them into the harbor. One managed to ring his alarm-gong (oh, yes, they use gongs and not horns in Tantras, and bloody noisy three-rattling-cup affairs they are, too) and summon another patrol, so Florin sent them swimming, too -- whereupon the madam of a nearby festhall offered us shelter if we'd just stop throwing her best clients to possible deaths by drowning, please!

So we spent a cozy night in a festhall, trading stories [and NOTHING ELSE] with the working girls -- and left the next morning hidden under their dirty laundry, on the cart that took 'the dirties' out of the city to the stinking laundry just south of it. From there, we went on our way. I don't THINK any of the Watch drowned, but we never went back to check. :}

THO

On March 24, 2004 THO said: thom and Wooly Rupert, I can remember one Lathanderite oath off the top of my head:

"Redblood!" (used about the same as some Brits use "Bloody!" and some Americans say, "Damn it!" or "S**t!")

I'll pass this to Ed so he doesn't publicate, when we get a reply from my Master, himself. :}

THO

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March 24, 2004: Well met again, all. Ed has found time to spin more replies:

First of all, to all of you who've showered me with thanks: hey, you're all VERY welcome. Thank YOU. It gladdens my heart to do this, believe me. Writing is an essentially lonely process, and it's like walking down the street getting waves and smiles whenever I need to. :}

Damian: Yes, the attacks on Arabel (see BEYOND THE HIGH ROAD and DEATH OF THE DRAGON for some that still lie in the future for the Knights) and rebellions in Arabel were the last straw for Doust and Islif (particularly when some traitors to the Crown revealed themselves in the temple!) and they relocated back to Eveningstar. BTW, Islif definitely 'wears the pants' in the Doust/Islif marriage and, these days, in the temple as well! Locally, she's as respected a war-leader as Alusair (in some quarters, moreso, because no one can imagine Islif bedding a young noble or breaking any law or rule, whereas the princess makes her own rules, and some farmwives view their handsome sons as in dire peril whenever she's in the vicinity). Someday I'll write a short story describing an epic sword-practise duel between Islif and Tessaril Winter.

As for Jhaele, she continues to be the brisk, motherly, hair-now-shorn-off-short so she can wash it in a water-butt in a trice because she's SO busy central character of Shadowdale, in the same way that a really good publican (and aren't THEY scarce, these days?) is the social centre of a small British village. She's also fiercely interested in the women of the village 'making good' (especially when their husbands have been killed in the various Zhent attacks on the dale, or are wounded or gravely ill, or are drunkards) and invests in a lot of local craft-businesses (women weaving warm clothes or making cloaks, leggings, drinking-gourds, or belts, for instance), and lets the crafters sell their wares 'for free' [she gives them free space and one of the inn lads as a bodyguard, and even gives them free mugs of broth] to travellers who stop at the Old Skull. Jhaele also has a secret in her past that only Storm Silverhand knows -- and her only because Jhaele recently had a very 'bad night' and rose, weeping, in her her nightgown to march over to Storm's farm for a little fireside comfort and sympathetic ear. I'm not yet going to reveal what it is, because my own players know only this much, and our very own Hooded Lady is, after all, one of them and can't help but read this as she posts it for me. :}

Yes, I'm afraid the mingled book tour (two publishers: TOR's getting in on the act, too) is only one province in Canada and two cities in the USA, this time around. I'd love to do one in England again, or even snatch time and money enough to visit on my own (a la the old One Tun days or the various Terry Pratchett fan moots, I wouldn't mind meeting fans in a pub somewhere . . . I loved meeting Faraer during my last mini-tour [and everyone at Gencon UK, too!]) and one of the most touching memories of a trip through England I did about twenty years back is shopping in a games store in Edinburgh; a fan who was too shy to speak to me rushed out of the store after Jenny and self to offer to show us the city [skipping school and his evening job to do so]. We had to refuse because we'd already arranged to meet local friends and had to get on our way to doing so, but the guy was SO enthusiastic and gobsmacked; I hope he got the bundle of TSR stuff I shipped him, once I got home). As for collecting the Knights to bring with me: not a chance. Some of them have to fly back to Canada from Japan and elsewhere for play sessions, these days, and although two of them (John and Ian Hunter: Florin and Lanseril, respectively) grew up in the UK and love to go back when they can, getting all of us together is REALLY hard. Perhaps if the United Nations really worked at it . . . :}

Yes, you're correct that Florin, Semoor, Doust, Islif and Jhessail all came from Espar, but everyone else in (or ex-of) the Knights hails from elsewhere.

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simontrinity: Very magical, in that there IS a lot of magic (spells, magic items, and ongoing enchantments/wards) around, there are a lot of wizards and sorcerers, "everyone" has heard tales of magic, and most city folk see magic daily (glowstones and similar magical light sources).

No, your average common laborer, crafter, servant, farmer or shopkeeper has never felt magic cast on them, handled anything bearing a dweomer or that could be called a "magic item," or hired anyone to cast a spell (or had such a person under their command). Many people have seen magic used (usually at a distance, or the illusion-trickery spells of traveling hedge-wizards who entertain, some such illusions not being true magic at all, of course), and most people are fascinated by it and will rush or creep to watch it 'in action' (full of awe but also fear). And no, to most folk of Faerun, there's nothing 'everyday' or casual about magic.

Figgas: No, no one's contacted me about doing EverQuest novels, and I doubt I'd have the time right now (NOR the time to get familiar with the setting, in order to do a half-decent job of writing anything about it!).

thom and Wooly Rupert: Lathanderite oaths coming up, probably tomorrow (my wife is already yelling at me to stand away from the keyboard and pay HER a little attention, and I trust you know the fate of any man who ignores the desires of She Who Must Be Obeyed)...

So saith Ed.

As for your question about the weirdest place the Knights went, Damian, that's another of those hard-to-choose answers. It comes down to three places, though:

-- our real world (we arrived in a ravine in the wintertime, near an old 'haunted house' some of us explored as kids, and Ed wanted to see how long it would take us to recognize where we were

-- an endless void inside Mystra's mind, where we "fell forever" and had dream-visions in which we conversed with her and saw some important past events

-- shrunken to tiny size, we were teleported into a suit of armor in Azoun's bedchamber, and managed to topple it across the bed just as Azoun and Filfaeril were, ah, experiencing royal pleasures together. Boy, can she shriek! (And wow, can he curse! And whoops, can we flee fast, even at four inches tall each, when Vangerdahast is sent for!)

:) Hope that helps.
THO

March 25, 2004: 'Lo to all, again. Herewith, Ed's latest:

Hi, everyone.

Hey, Lashan and Rick, you're both quite welcome.

Dargoth, the short answer is: yes, and yes again (Kuje, thanks for the redirect!), some were in PRAYERS FROM THE FAITHFUL. This is a topic I'll address properly in April, when the Waterdeep book (and my taxes!) are handed in.

Likewise the Silverymoon queries from Alex. :}

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Damian, Kuje has got it right re. Dawnspire. As for your law vs. chaos query: oh, yes, the 'home' Realms campaign (and as much as I can possibly make it, the published Realms) has always abounded in 'shades of gray,' with even the good guys differing in approaches and judgements of other players, and many, many examples of people just trying to get along in life, or doing 'good' things that had terrible consequences, or disagreeing on matters of style. Many of the struggles in Cormyr, for example, haven't really been to unseat an Obarskyr monarch so much as they have been to get whoever is monarch, one way or another, to make Cormyr more like THIS, or that, or the other.

Which brings me to thom's Lathanderite oaths request.

Here, for you and Wooly Rupert and all who are interested, are my relevant notes on the topic.

Realms exclamations appear alphabetically, followed in parentheses (with asterisks to lessen the obscenity impact) by the real-world equivalent:

"Beard!" (contraction of "[by the] Beard of Omthas!") [Omthas was an early prophet of Lathander, last heard from over six centuries ago]

"Bitterblood!" (contraction of "By the blood of Alathan!")

"By the Beard of Omthas!" ("Holy crap!" or: "Jesus!" [profane amazement])

"By the blood of Alathan!" ("Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" or: "Bloody hell!" or "Jesus fucking Christ!" [profane shock or disgust]) [Alathan was a high priest of a Lathanderite temple who was martyred four centuries back for preaching the faith of Lathander by the local Tethyrian duke -- who hated and feared change, and didn't want any commoners getting uppoty ideas about starting ANYTHING new]

"Darkrose!" ("Blast!" or: "Fuck!")

"Dawnfire!" ("Shit!")

"Dusking!" ("Damnation!")

"Redblood!" ("Bloody hell!" or "Damn!" [upset Lathanderites have been heard to say things like "They even stole the redblooding candles!" so "redblooding" is the form that lets this word be used directly in place of the real-world "bloody" or "fucking"])

"Star of the Morning!" ("My word!" [usable even when speaking to superiors in the church 'polite oath' that denotes surprise or dismay])

"Starfall!" ("Damn!" or "Blast!" [ancient oath, now considered almost poetic or flowery])

"Zustrin!" ("Bloody marvellous!" or "Fucking wonderful!" [used only when pleased, but so shocked or surprised as to burst out into profanity; considered poor form by clergy of Lathander])

So saith Ed.

Faraer, I'm afraid I have both a great memory and thorough notes. Both of my jobs require these. The memory can be a two-edged sword, though: I remember all the deaths of family and friends all too well.

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Damian, there was a huge 'gold rush' of adventurers into Myth Drannor after word spread that "the demons and devils were gone," but the various fights against the devils (Mistledale holding them off, Voonlar holding them off, Battledale holding them off, Yulash and Hillsfar ditto) occurred before our arrival in Shadowdale, and everyone was too exhausted, between the devil raids and the Zhent attacks, to join with us.

And that's it from me, for now. Must go fix someone's redblooding stupid book. :}
THO

March 26, 2004: 'Lo, everyone. Thy Hooded Lady here, fresh from an e-chat with Ed, to bring you a few handy oaths used by Banites. Ed speaks:

Here are some naughty words apt to be uttered by worshippers of Bane today. Where the curse seems an invented word and no 'name origin' is given, it derives from an ancient, ill-remembered 'temple tongue' or cant used by the very early cult of Bane, to keep secret the nature of converse between priests.

"Aumarrath!" (contraction of "In memory of Aumarrath!" [Aumarrath the Tyrant-King was an early prophet of Bane, and this oath is polite enough to be used to superior clergy, denoting holy awe or satisfaction, somewhat akin to the real world: "Blood of the Virgin!" or "Name of the God!"])

"Blackfire!" ("Blood of the God!" [used in awe, admiration, or profane amazement, but never when angry or disgusted; is much less formal than "Aumarrath!"])

"Clathenar!" ("Holy crap!" or: "Jesus!" [Clathenar was an unintentional martyr of Bane whose long-ago holy service was one long sequence of disastrous screwups, so this oath is always used like a groan of dismay or spat out in despairing anger, when something has gone seriously wrong]; pronounced 'CLATH-en-ar')

"Embarranar!" (a gloating thanks to Bane for something that's gone well, or a victory, or unlooked-for aid or good fortune, roughly equivalent to a delighted: "Son of a BITCH!" or "Don't that take all!"; pronounced 'Em-bar-RAN-ar')

"Hand of Hate!" ([contraction of the rarely-heard "Feel the Hand of Hate!"] an expression only snarled at foes or victims being slain; rough equivalent of a real-world: "DIE, motherfucker!")

"Holy Fist!" ("Jesus Christ!")

"Krisk!" ("Shit!")

"Lurruk!" ("Bloody hell!" or "Damn!"; pronounced 'LUR-uh-kh')

"Sark!" ("Blast!" or: "Fuck!")

"Talar!" ("Well, damn!" [a mild expression of surprise or dismay])

"Tondrabbar!" ("To the God!" [a war-cry or exulting expression uttered when an offering is touched aflame or broken, a foe is struck, or an attack is launched (i.e. it would be the first shout of a surprise attack); pronounced 'Tawn-DRAB-bar')

"Whiteblood!" ("Bloody hell!" or "Jesus fucking Christ!" [profane shock or disgust])

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This is of course the very sort of detail dropped because of the original TSR Code of Ethics AND the desire to simplify speech (doing away with dialects/accents, and so on) to make the game more accessible when it first appeared. If your players don't feel comfortable using any of these expressions, or they seem silly when uttered, don't use them. Bane will understand. :}

So saith Ed.

To this I can only add one curse I remember from play: a priest of Bane being slashed open by Florin on a bridge, and falling to his death howling, "Terror forever!" (or rather: "Taerrrrrrr Forevvvvvvvurr!"). That may actually have been a Zhentilar warcry rather than a strictly Banite saying.

Better gaming through frank converse, as always,
THO

On March 26, 2004 THO said: Well met, all. The Hooded One here again. I'm faithfully sending all of your questions on to Ed, but his replies are going to slow down somewhat as he gets the Waterdeep novel finished.

I can answer a few of the questions myself, right now:

Dargoth, Ed's contract and NDAs prevent him from doing more than hinting at contents of Serpent Kingdoms. WotC employees may reveal more (presumably with permission), but Ed can't. If Ed's answers sometimes seem convoluted or missing some juicy bits, that's usually why.

Crust, Ed posts through me here because I dragged him into doing it. We're very close friends, and I've been one of his players for about 26 years. Ed is one of the busiest people I know, and has very little free time. He also lives in a rural area with very bad Net access (no choice of ISPs, and a slow dial-up connection), working on old Macs that lack Flash and have only a crippled smidgin of Java, so he can't even SEE most of what's available on most sites out on the Net (unless he's using a computer at his workplace, the library). He was once asked by WotC to post on their boards, and just couldn't do so for technical reasons (when they do an online chat with Ed, they PHONE him, and he dictates his replies, and the long-suffering Mat types everything in at WotC). He was invited to post on Bob Salvatore's boards, and briefly did so, before (for some technical reason beyond his understanding) the software simply stopped working.

Years ago, Ed and Eric Boyd discussed whether or not Ed should post on the Realms list (which he does only through friendly moderators or former moderators), and Eric advised against it, for two reasons: his ISP would crash the moment all the e-mails from folks who could now "see" his e-mail address flooded in, and people would censor themselves (or, if they were trolls, come out of the woodwork to bait and flame) knowing he was reading their every keystroke. Ed didn't want that to happen here. As he told me: "No Realms forum is of any use to me or anyone else if people don't dare to speak honestly when posting to it. I need to hear what's bad or disliked, not just praise or demands for more of this and more of that. I'm not talking about politeness, just people hesitating to speak their minds."

So there you have it. All of your queries are saved by me AND sent on to Ed. And I trust folks here understand by now my reasons for not revealing my own identity. Have a good one.

THO

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March 27, 2004: Hail, all. Your Hooded Lady again, with Ed's latest.

Prince Forge, we visited the High Forest twice (briefly, both times: the first involved a northwestern fringes foray in which we met korred and Turlang, and spoke with him about a matter we Knights pledged to keep secret; and the second time, a heartlifting, lovely visit to the Unicorn Run, where certain of us spoke with some divine beings, and that, too, must remain private. Ed has read draft text of Rich Baker's forthcoming THE FORSAKEN HOUSE and recommends it highly to all Realms fans, but he'll say nothing about what locales it uses or who features in it. Mr. Baker has imparted some information about it here at Candlekeep; if you want more, he's the one to wheedle. :}

Now, heeere's Ed:

To Dargoth and to Crust: I confirm and echo The Hooded One's replies. She's exaggerating not a whit when describing my bucket-and-string computer hookup. I moved from all-fibre-optic, thousands-of-competing-ISPs Toronto to . . . nothing. Just getting a 'touch tone' phone was big news locally, when we first moved here. There were even still party lines then. I had to wire the house for phone jacks myself. And so on.

As for Realmslore:

BrokenRulz, Faraer has answered your query very ably. As it happened, my 'in game' explanation predates WotC's "new look" for Elminster by over twenty years. :} My players all remember my habit of mentioning passing birds or squirrels, and much later revealing that certain parties knew all about their activities -- whereupon they'd look disgusted and say, "That crow -- that was The Simbul, right?" At Christmas we even exchanged postcards of stumps, and tulips, and canoes on tranquil lakes, rusting old jalopies, wagonwheels, cowskulls in deserts, and fashion models strutting down runways in the most ridiculous garments, all with gag captions like this one: "The Simbul, as she appeared on the fourth of Mirtul, just east of Ashabenford."

Yes, it's an inherent natural power, using the silver fire to effect a shapechange on their bodies, NOT a magical effect. (Distinction: a healing spell mends a wound by magical means, but the actual changes that magic wreaks: restoring cell walls, moving blood back to where it should be and cleansing it, expelling infections and foreign objects, knitting together damaged or severed organs and tissue, are the same natural processes that psionics could bring about, or [far more slowly] a body could in some cases manage by itself in the right conditions. The force that does the healing is magical, but the healing itself might not always be -- and in the case of the Chosen, their internal control of the silver fire, which mixed with their blood upon accepting Mystra (or, in the case of the Seven, as they were growing in the womb) and circulates in their bloodstream, is now a natural process for them. Their bodies have changed from the human norm.

That's the 'how.' As for the 'why,' the governing rule is this: the Chosen have all been alive long enough to outlive their childhood friends and acquaintances, and to have experimented with dwelling in different cultures, climates, and even being different genders. They've settled on the bodies that they like, that best fit the image they want to present to the world. Alustriel and Storm like making love, for instance, and find it easier to end up with willing partners when their own shapes are pleasant and enticing. And so on. One thing DMs should bear in mind when running the Chosen: their experience and their shapechanging powers allows them to make subtle changes in their looks that can strongly influence the reactions of beings they meet (Dove once fooled a murderous noble into thinking she might be related to him by subtly shifting her eye color and face to resemble that of his dead mother, and Storm made a man fear her by knowing what

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his aunts who'd reared him looked like, and changing her features JUST enough to remind him of their strict authority).

Re. space hamsters and Woolly Rupert's response: "Let me guess, they're actually extradimensional beings making amazingly subtle experiments on humans, right?"

To this, Elminster replies, "Indeed. And that should lead ye to readily accept this advice of mine, freely given ye: don't breed with them, no matter what they offer ye. Just don't."

What he had to say about tinker gnomes I won't pass on, even in this broadminded and tolerant forum. :}

Woolly Rupert, re. the Roll of Years, Faraer's posted a nigh-perfect answer. I postulated that many realms would have different year-numbering systems (to commemorate the founding of a kingdom, etc.) but that the year-name method (besides sounding more cool; note that such a thing was in the first line of the first Fritz Leiber Fafhrd & Gray Mouser story) would be the commonly-accepted-across-the-Realms method, to make trade-talk easier.

I named about 120 years, as I recall, and Steven flew up to my farmhouse for a winter Realmslore visit and we sat at my keyboard adding several hundred more, together, and THEN the Monks went to work.

To Rick Day: Lashan is right about why the Watch are masked: to prevent corruption and to prevent their faces being noted and reprisals taken against them ("Ah! THERE he is! That's him, aye . . . so NOW we know where he lives! And that lovely lass must be his wife! Heh-heh; well, now, I think we've the means to stop him from ever asking us inconvenient questions about what's in our cart again! In fact, why don't we make HIM bring the cart to the smuggling dock for us?").

As for how heavily they patrol, it goes roughly like this: in peacetime when there's no known peril inside the city (like rival ships' crews both in port at the same time, lots of traders cramming the city, or -- gasp! -- adventurers known to be 'in town') or outside the walls, minimal patrols apply. Scale up from these in frequency and strength of patrols if any gongs are rung, murders or thefts-and-chases occur, or known perils ARE present.

Assume seven Watch barracks around the city: a main, central citadel (armory/jail/courthouse), and six smaller 'posts' (jail cells, ready room, tiny armory in each).

From these bases, the twelve-man Watch patrols pass along main streets and the 'inside the walls walk' the equivalent of about once an hour (twice an hour at dawn and dusk). In addition, two 'roaming' patrols take different-every-time routes through alleys and side-streets throughout the dark hours, roaming right across the city. Patrols carry shuttered lanterns, cudgels, grappling hooks and lines (mainly used for fishing drunks out of the harbor before they drown), capture-nets, and manacles. They've been known to shackle miscreants to handy hitching-rings and leave them to pursue other suspects, when necessary.

Roardragon Way and all of the dockside streets ALWAYS receive heavy patrols, as do the lanes around certain warehouses (to prevent thefts, arson, and smuggling). 'Heavy' means about every ten minutes or less, at unpredictable intervals. Taverns and inns receive almost as heavy a watch (about once every fifteen to twenty minutes).

Temples are policed lightly, because temples are assumed to police their own grounds and buildings.

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Which brings me to the question about paladins and temple guarding. If a temple is large or grand enough, its guards might be commanded by a paladin, and priests of most faiths can call on paladins to render appropriate-to-the-faith military aid whenever the need arises, but as a general rule paladins work 'out in the world' to defend believers and further the faith, not do guard duty in a temple (except on special occasions such as particular holy rites, presiding over the choosing of a new high priest in circumstances where there's controversy or a voting system, and so on). Most temple guards will be skilled warriors (certain prestige classes are naturals, if you're using 3e or 3.5e) who devoutly believe in the deity, and are closely supervised by priests of the temple. They may be TRAINED and occasionally tested by paladins, yes.

And I'm afraid that's all for now. Must finish novel... must finish novel... must finish novel...

So mutters Ed, shuffling off into the distance with his manacles trailing. I'll be back with a second missive from him VERY soon, I promise.

THO

March 27, 2004: Well met again. THO, with the promised second message from Ed:

Well, I have some good news, and some not-so-good news. Alexander, re. Silverymoon: I'm afraid that thanks to some future WotC plans, my Silverymoon replies are going to be shockingly brief and terse. Sorry, but that's the way it is. As you read these, please bear in mind that my brevity now means that, in half a year or so, you may end up with something FAR more substantial, okay?

1. No official wards or districts, but local citizens speak of various 'neighborhoods.' The Market clearly divides the eastern end of the city (which contains the Palace and some important civic buildings) from the remainder, and the river of course divides Northbank from Southbank.
2. Within the 'old city proper' (Northbank west of the Market), the stretch between the remnants of the old city wall and the river is the oldest part of the city, and buildings here tend to be smaller, less fanciful, and more fortified. Otherwise, there isn't a lot of visual difference in architecture that lets a traveller know at a glance what part of the city he's in. Yes, there are a lot of buildings with fieldstone street levels and half-timbered upperworks.
3. Striking sights depends on where a visitor goes: there are exquisite gates and miniature garden waterfalls and other beautifully-crafted things EVERYWHERE, and everyone's tastes are different. Myself, I'd like to visit Alustriel's room-sized pool when it's in enthusiastic use, and see one of the 'dancing floors' by moonlight (courtyards throughout Northbank where spells allow dancers to levitate, 'dancing' on air).
4. No, flooding and the resulting laws and drainage system and protective spells have all made underground cellars as small as the buildings above them, and prevented much in the way of passages EXCEPT well-guarded and -warded ones in the part of the city east of the Market. Most dwarves live in homes 'dug into hillsides' (said hills being artificial, and often the gardens of someone else's abode, next door), or in normal aboveground structures -- but in both cases, the interiors are of carved stone, and often made to look cavern-like.
5. Many nobles from elsewhere visit Silverymoon, but its past history of abuses by those in power has aided Alustriel in making sure that there are no true nobles or ruling merchants or merchant families. The wealth, personal powers, and widely varying backgrounds of the traders, crafters,

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and artists attracted to Silverymoon also works against families or even stable cliques holding power. There are moves to set up shadowy trading cabals, but there are a LOT of Harpers in the city, and they watch for such things and try to thwart them (usually by sewing suspicions within said cabals, until they break apart from within). They also make VERY sure that any guilds that form are guilds in name only, and have no true power to set prices or control supplies of goods or the behaviour of their members.

6. Yes, Silverymoon is made up mostly of free citizens, crafters being the most numerous and artists (musicians, singers, dancers, actors, students of magic) the next most numerous, with shop-owners and repairers being the next two most numerous groups (before Alustriel, crafters and artists were far less numerous and important).

In Silverymoon, everyone wears weathercloaks (solid, dark hues preferred, usually greens, dark blues, and browns) against the morning and evening river-mists and damp weather, and has heavy fur outergarments for winter. Most folk go about booted up to the knee, and with to-the-elbow gloves. Underneath, they wear whatever they want to, usually whatever they wore where they came from. Silverymoon is a riot of different forms of dress, not conformist: i.e. there's a high degree of tolerance for partial nudity or hairstyles and dress far different from 'your own,' and only a small strata of folk care about 'following fashion.'

7. Priests in Silverymoon dress as everyone else does: their usual vestments or approved garb underneath weathercloaks or winter furs, high boots, and those big gloves.

8. Silverymoon's from-everywhere-in-Faerun populace has brought their various cuisines with them, and the result is a cosmopolitan mixing of dishes from here and there, drink ditto. Food and drink. You can get almost anything. Local fare includes moose, bear (a strong-tasting meat usually served smoked), the various fish of the river, and deer.

9. Coinage from all over the Sword Coast is circulated and accepted in Silverymoon. For details of its local coinage, I'm afraid, you'll have to wait. The Market opens everyday with an 'outer ring' of stalls manned by visiting merchants, and whenever trappers, hunters, and farmers come in with 'raws' to sell (pelts, or dead or captured-live animals, or livestock, butter, cheese, eggs, and vegetables), they go to the Market and use the waiting pens and tables there.

Local citizens sometimes peddle small wares (especially hot food and drink) in the Market, but usually sell from their homes or shops, or by arrangement in the shops of others.

10. Adventurers, like everyone else, are tolerated as long as they don't like to drink and then fight or smash things or engage in open butchery. In winter, they'll often get offered (hirers coming to them personally by word of mouth, or visiting the inns and taverns, or posting 'wants' in the Market) missions as armed escorts for persons who MUST travel, or supply caravans. Merchants are almost always the clients adventurers'll be working for. City authorities will offer pay to adventurers willing to stay and fight (under orders) if the city is threatened by orc hordes or other attacks, but otherwise won't hire adventurers.

And yes, there are Harper "bases" or "safehouses" in the city. :}

11. If there's warning of an orc raid, some folk will be offered a chance to leave (sledging along the river ice, etc.) but warned that once escorted to a certain point, they're on their own. Yes, there are both 'must bear arms' laws and detailed defense plans. The gates are to be blocked by cartloads of stone rubble dumped on their insides, and the walls manned. The fallback is to certain fortified buildings east of the Market, and ultimately to the granary, armory, and defensible living-quarters caverns beneath that part of the city.

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12. The University is an integral part of everyday life, with little 'town and gown' friction. Students are obliged to help with one inquiry from a visitor to the city or a local citizen, per day. Outsiders can only use the library with student guides AND payment of fees (depending on what they're asking, either something simple or something requiring a lot of research). Students do everything they need to, to pay for their fees and lodgings, from working as crafters' assistants to dancing nude in festhalls (most work stocking shelves in shops, as musicians and table staff in taverns, or as cleaners in inns).

The University sells nothing but single-page-copying services (from books in its own library, and only pages NOT bearing spells or magical instructions or processes) but quietly sells a trickle of scrolls, potions, spell components to city shops, who resell them at a markup.

13. Yes, there are at least a dozen good shops in Silverymoon that adventurers MUST check out. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for more about these establishments, however. :}

So saith Ed.

This Hooded One isn't going to spill more about Silverymoon, despite some ah, interesting memories. :}
Ciao for now!

March 27, 2004: Good morning, simontrinity. Ed is off at his library job by now, and will be pounding out Waterdeep chapters for the rest of the day, but he e-spoke to me about your Eilistraee questions, and says as follows:

What happens in Ravens Bluff depends on the fate of that city in your campaign, but in general the followers of She Who Dances have been worshipping and dwelling in sylvan rural areas, leaving the urban experience to followers of Vhaeraun. A (very) few she-drow of the faith work as exotic dancers in Scornubel and Starmantle by night, and dwell in the woods by day (thus earning coins to buy goods from traders), and a few more harvest woodland herbs, berries, and roots and sell same for alchemical uses in various communities, but these are the exceptions; most of the faithful keep to the woods, and hold a very low profile. This in turn means very little 'hot news' to pass on to you -- with one exception: certain faithful of Eilistraee are reported to have begun clearing out old elven ruins in deep forest areas to reinhabit them, and in at least one case unleashed a long-imprisoned and fearsome monster in the process.

So saith Ed.

Have fun, all
THO

March 27, 2004: Your Hooded Lady once more, with a reply from Ed to Bruce D:

Hi, Bruce! I'll post details about the "wheres" and "whens" of the tour as they get finalized, okay? THO is a little miffed at you (her words were: "He thinks I'm JHAELE? ME?!?" [Her character and Jhaele once engaged in an impromptu mud wrestling match in the stableyard of the Old Skull, but they're friends now.]

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As for the Srinshree: sorry, classified (WotC plans).

So saith Ed.

I'm going back to bed.
THO

March 27, 2004: Hi, all. The Hooded One here.

Yes, Bruce, I have real-world reasons for not confirming who I am, or my character is (which will allow someone to easily figure out who I am).

digitalelf, your Red Knight query has been passed on to Ed, who will reply as soon as he can.

Silas, Ed fired back a barrage of questions about YOUR question, which go like this:

Sorry, to do a half-decent job of answering this, I need to know more. How many players? What level characters at start? What classes of characters? What SORT of adventures preferred (hack'n'slash, endless dungeon crawl, intrigue, other)? What setting(s) preferred (urban, wilderness, Underdark, desert, arctic, tamed countryside, underwater, seaborne, piracy/evil power group)? What races of characters (monster races? Mix? The usual human-dominated with a few demihumans?)? Stay in the Realms, or planehopping? What do your players want (or don't you or they know yet; i.e. do you want to serve up a variety of things to try, or settle in on an existing favourite style or setting or direction)?

Will you be using commercial adventures/modules/DUNGEON magazine, or mix-n-match, or crafting your own challenges entirely? How much DM design time can you devote to this campaign, and how long do you want it to last (real-world time)?

So asketh Ed. For the record, putting on my editor's hat (or corset :)), I agree with him; he needs these design decisions made by you before he can give you a proper answer. So write back soon. :]
THO

On March 28, 2004 THO said: 'Lo, all. Your Hooded Lady back again, with my own reply to Bruce and SiriusBlack: no, this mud-wrestling wasn't any sort of sexual fun thing. It began as a misunderstanding, in which Jhaele thought I'd stolen a key left in her care, and was racing off to use it to unlock a coffer hidden in a particular chamber in the Twisted Tower.

The truth was that a Zhent agent staying at the Old Skull had already stolen the key and gone to the Tower to try to use it, but been intercepted by Shaerl, who knew her of old (and had no idea she was now working for the Zhents). Shaerl had invited her to dinner, and the Zhent was trapped into dining, but awaiting a chance to slip away (or get invited to spend the night as a guest at the Tower).

A Harper mage who'd met us at the Old Skull and revealed the woman's Zhent loyalties had by spell communicated with a (very low level) War Wizard who was also visiting the Tower (as a part of a Cormyrean delegation bringing private Rowanmantle business matters to Shaerl, not affairs of state) to learn about the dinner and the whereabouts of the Zhent agent.

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After some swift conflagration, my character was given a false key and told to get it to the War Wizard and help him temporarily 'sleep' or somehow bewilder the agent so we could switch keys (the false replacement had been personally made by the Harper mage, and so was a 'familiar object' if he wanted to trace its whereabouts and movements with a spell).

Jhaele thought my character was stealing her key, and came out the back door of the inn like a tigress to pounce on "me," downing me right in the muddiest part of the stableyard. I was in a hurry and didn't want to be stopped, so a brief wrestling match ensued (Rathan and Torm OF COURSE came to the back door to make bets and dispense smart comments). I've always found that temporarily blinding people with their own clothing AND removing their footwear tends to make them slow to pursue, and tried to do this to Jhaele -- and she was bound and determined not to let the "thief" get away.

In the end, not wanting to hurt her, I appealed rather profanely to Torm to 'deal with her,' and he, well, being the outrageously irrepressible imp that he is, decided that this would be his best ever chance to er, become intimate with the half-naked, slick-with-mud, and furious Jhaele (who was quite sharp-tongued in rejecting his endless teasing advances), and joined in.

I left them wrestling and sprinted for the Tower, deciding to just plunge into Elminster's Pool on the way and so clean off the worst of the muck.

Jhaele brained Torm in a few seconds flat and came running right after me -- and it was the Old Mage himself who rescued me.

It seems Elminster was floating on his back in his pool, bathing, when I came crashing through it. He sat up in startled anger just in time to become an obstacle that Jhaele was running too fast to avoid.

There then occurred what Ed described variously as a "meaty thwack" and a "splat," and . . . Jhaele was no longer chasing me. :}

Considering the reputation I'm already giving myself in this forum, can you see why I neglected to tell this entire tale the first time around? :}

By the way, Ed has always injected this farcial element into play. It doesn't dominate play the way it must seem to when I'm just relating these 'highlight' stories, but he sneaks it in whenever we get too upset about bad things happening or puffed up over our successes, as a reminder that no matter how high and mighty the Knights or anyone else in the Realms becomes, we're all just a pratfall away from our own humanity. :}

(That's an Ed-quote, too: "We're all just a pratfall away from our own humanity." Just another of the reasons I love and respect him so much.)

And to Bruce, thom, and SiriusBlack (well put, sir): it's okay, I don't mind explaining over and over why I'm being mysterious about my identity. Really. I don't get upset about it (and really wish I COULD level with you all). But being as I'm stuck with it, there IS this tiny little thrill that goes with it -- as in: I'm sitting typing this entirely nude . . . EXCEPT for my full-head iron mask that conceals my identity completely, so I could be your co-worker, lady boss, that nice lady at the bank, one of your teachers, or that lady who stared at you on the street, just for a moment, a week ago, or . . . any female at all, in fact. Whoo-hoo. :}

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But enough teasing. To avoid that weird formatting problem (it creeps back for me from time to time, so just in case I'm not the only one), I'll end this post now and come right back with Ed's latest.

Love to all,
THO

March 28, 2004: 'Lo again. Your Hooded Lady, bringing the words of Ed:

Hi, SiriusBlack. The Srinshree plans aren't mine, but have come to involve me. (There. That ought to be cryptic enough. :) Sorry, but I can't say more at this time.

digitalelf, typical offerings on the altar of Red Knight are coins won in wagering over games of skill (such as lanceboard) but never in 'games of chance,' and [the greatest possible offerings of all, if the games themselves are well-designed] new strategy games (board, pieces, and rules) personally devised by the worshipper.

If given in a temple, these always vanish from the altar (taken by the clergy of the temple, of course). If offered in private, in the open or at a shrine, such offerings are to be buried with a symbol of the goddess (a crude horsehead chesspiece design scratched into a piece of bark or onto a stone will suffice, if nothing better can be had), in earth into which a single drop (or more) of the worshipper's blood has been spilled.

It is sinful to the goddess for the same worshipper to unearth such things and re-use them as offerings, or for other faithful of the Red Knight to knowingly use the previously-used offerings of another in their own prayers to the goddess, but it's quite acceptable to use them in other ways (spend the coins, and play, sell, give away, or bet on the games).

Note that devout faithful of the Red Knight often have scores of red horse-headed lanceboard pieces made for them to carry, and use in just such situations. If non-clerical worshippers of the Red Knight are travelling with a priest of the Lady of Strategy and make prayers to the goddess, it IS acceptable for the priest to collect and carry along all such offerings, to turn them over to a temple of the goddess at the first opportunity. If this becomes impossible, such 'sacred goods' are to be buried if this can be managed.

Typical prayers to the Red Knight are whispered pleas for insight into the thinking of foes when planning strategies against them, and requests for inspiration (and a true follower of Red Knight believes that all tactical thinking or dreams of battles and battle-strategies are bestowed by the Red Knight, and will thank her for her aid: in other words, a devout worshipper of Red Knight NEVER takes credit for brilliant strategies or tactics, believing they have all come from the goddess).

When a devout follower suffers defeat, overlooks some stratagem of an opponent, or is outwitted, they typically make offering to the goddess by procuring a shard of good-quality battle armor, gashing themselves with it, and leaving the bloodied metal on the altar with a prayer, not binding their wound or seeking healing for it until their prayers are complete. Many worshippers of the Red Knight take good armor from opponents they've personally felled and shatter it, so as to have a ready supply of such shards awaiting times of failure, in order to properly 'square their standing' with the Lady of Strategy.

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Great victories are also celebrated on an altar of Red Knight by placing trophies of the defeated foes on it, with prayer (weapons, armor, and even blood and body parts). If no altar is handy, the prayer may be offered literally ON the body or trophy of the fallen, on the battlefield or place of death.

Prayers to the Red Knight often begin "Oh, Lady of clear calm" or "Great Lady of Armor Blood-Red" and the goddess betimes gives long-worshipping individuals a secret name by which they can call her (imparted in dreams, these names are different for every individual, and are NOT thought to be even echoes of her true name, but rather a personal token or 'pet-name' symbolizing her favour of the devotions of the individual; typical examples are: "Divine Arlanna" and "Divine Elmrara").

Formal priestly prayers often include the lines "Lady whose armor is drenched in blood for us" and "Armor blooded to remind us of our faults and defeats, but eyes bright to make us mindful ever of unquenchable spirit and battlemastery of fields to come."

Battle-oaths to the Red Knight (given when smiting foes or launching an attack) include these:

"Bright wit, clear thought, keen sight!"

"Forward the Game Undying!"

"Let this game now be ended!"

"Smite smart!"

Obscenities uttered by faithful of the Red Knight when personally upset include these:

"Alavaerthus!" (equivalent of "God-damn-it!" or "Jesus fucking Christ!" [this word, pronounced "Alah-VAER-thus," was the name of a member of the Fellowship who had a large hand in founding the church of Red Knight, but went mad in a battle and sent his forces to their dooms through a series of stupid or reckless commands; "playing Alavaerthus" is an informal Fellowship expression meaning to 'totally screw up'])

"Blood of the Lady!" (equivalent of "Oh my [insert strongest personal obscenities here] God!" [used as a stronger replacement for "Alavaerthus!"])

"Checkmate!" (formal, usable-in-polite-company equivalent of "Damn!" or "Shit!" or "Blast!" [invoking the name of the Lady's blade])

"Keltor!" (equivalent of "Damn!" and pronounced as "KEL-tor" [spat out swiftly])

"Teskyre!" (equivalent of "Shit!" and pronounced as "Tess-kEYE-ur")

"Witless!" (equivalent of "Fuck!" [the strongest personal oath of a faithful of the Red Knight alludes to stupidity in strategy or tactics])

So saith Ed.

Hmm; almost all of this is new to me, and goes straight into my Realms notes. By the way, Ed recently gave a public reading of 'A Small Sort of Dragon' from ELMINSTER IN HELL for a library charity fundraising event, and reportedly wowed an audience of non-fantasy-reading, non-gaming seniors (largely because he did what he always does: put on voices for the various characters

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and ACTED his way through the scene). I miss the author reading sessions from the old GenCons, which were always lots of fun.

Yes, Dargoth, I've passed your dragon mount query on; poor old Ed is just up to his eyeballs in Waterdeep and is taking longer to reply. He'll get back to me ASAP, I promise.
THO

March 28, 2004: Well met again, all. The Hooded One posting a reply from Ed once more:

Hi, Dargoth. As you know, there have been several Manshoons since the 'one' who appeared in SPELLFIRE. Yes, Orlgau has been replaced several times by various Manshoons (with various dragons, war bats, and the like; one of the Manshoon clones perished while trying to tame a hellfire wyrm to do his bidding). One of the Manshoons surviving today uses a magically-bound 'very old' black dragon by the name of Hauthendrammagarh. It formerly laired in a vast marsh on another continent of Toril. This same Manshoon is said to have trapped various lesser black dragons in stasis, and hidden them in caverns, so he can replace his steed with a dragon of inferior powers at short notice, or even unleash a flight of black dragons under his command (in fact, the threat of doing so is one of the weapons that has kept Fzoul from destroying this Manshoon, who also demonstrated his ability to cause magical explosions over great distances -- blasts that slew several beholders and priests of Bane).

To Bruce Donohue: in your calendar example, Ches is the month, and "Ches 23" is indeed the 23rd day of Ches. "Ches of the Sunsets" is the poetic name for this month. An earlier month (Alturiak, now rendered "The Claw of Winter") once had the poetic name "The Claws of the Cold," and later scribes mistranslated ellipses in the names of several of the subsequent months of the calendar to mean "The Claws of the X" instead of just "of the X," but this misnaming has 'stuck.'

The Realms equivalents of weeks are ten days long, hence "tenday" (also known as "rides" and by several less popular names), but I'll leave the rest of the explanation for another time; must run now and get this novel done.

So saith Ed.

This Hooded Lady recalls that Fleetswake is a later addition; could any of the scholars perusing this (George Krashos? AJA?) step in and answer Bruce? And a hearty hello back to you, Mr. Krashos! Ed regards you, Eric, Steven, Grant, Tom, and Bryon as his Merrie Masters of Realmslore, and says you're always welcome!
THO

March 28, 2004: 'Lo again, all. Your Hooded One again, posting for Ed:

Hi, everyone. Dargoth, asking me 3.5 rules questions is like asking them of your mailman (whom I'm assuming DOESN'T play "crazy satanic D-and-D" :}). I'd tend to give Manshoon the Dragon Cohort feat because he doesn't use aerial steeds of any sort all that often, and can't be said to be a truly skilled rider -- but on the other hand, he can cast spells from dragonback all right, so . . . your call. Any opinions, scribes?

George! HI! Well met again, and all that! Stuff on the Triad coming up . . . doled out slowly, when I can snatch the time around this novel. And thanks for the catch, finishing the calendar reply for

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me (I had to go, as my ISP kept crashing and it was getting VERY late, and I'd promised myself I'd have certain scenes done to send to Elaine).

digitalelf, you're very welcome. I'm always happy to help, and have discussed doing these oaths with WotC: owing to the subject matter (and the inclusion of real-world naughty words, albeit with asterisks), it's something they'd never publish, so they're okay with it appearing here. To everyone: PLEASE take it easy with the flood of "do MY god next!" requests, because I do still seem to require a few hours of sleep every night, and my deadlines are racing up to meet me as it is.

To TheHermit, I'm glad you can READ the inscription I wrote, all those years ago. :) Keep at it!

John Rateliff was my editor on City of Ravens Bluff, which came out a year after I wrote it and had to be updated (by him, presumably) to match the unfolding events of the RPGA Living City campaign during that time. What I was given for the project was a huge pile of cryptic, disorganized lore (over a thousand pages of photocopies from POLY and sometimes handwritten notes) and that splendid computer-generated map of the city with key numbers on certain buildings . . . and NOTHING to go with them (no key at all). :)

I compiled a list of "need answers to these questions" and received back from the RPGA: no answers beyond "dunno; just make it up."

There were endless shops to include from POLY (and no idea which one was located where, in most cases), some but not all of the orders of knighthood were done, and there were some big gaps -- such as: how did the nobility work, how did guilds work and details of all the "missing" ones, how the city fed itself and who owned the surrounding lands, which had been auctioned off to players in a process I had utterly no notes for (!), how did the harbor function, yadda yadda yadda boo yadda.

I had some pet things I wanted to include (like the "walkthrough" chapter and the longterm-campaign-intrigue-producing nobles) to make the city come alive for RPGA members and non-RPGA buyers of the guidebook alike, and secrets about the RPGA campaign that I was duty-bound not to give away.

So I sat down and started typing furiously, adapting and truncating and creating at a furious pace to meet my deadline -- and ending up furious that I had to do it all in such a breakneck whirl when it turned out editing wouldn't even begin for another 6 months! I could have USED those months to write and refine. I also had no involvement after handing it in, so rather than give-and-take in the editing, it was: open the published book and discover what got changed. Not good. So I'm surprised that what you touch on ("I've always wondered why the one I would have never expected was used and the others left out") didn't happen more than it did. It was my understanding, when the project began, that the guidebook would be a free handout for all (paying, at that time) RPGA members -- but what I was trying for, by the end of the project, was a city guidebook that anyone could use in any campaign for a rather wacky fantasy city (filing off the silliest names and concepts if not to one's liking).

Regarding your campaign idea: a great one. It's happening in the 'home' Realms campaign, as it happens. :) The reaction of the folk of Essembra (so long as no Sembian tried to muscle any of them out of THEIR farmland, or stop them woodcutting) would be shrugs from some, "ooh, let's watch the fun" from others, and enthusiasm from the rest. They WANT the Ghost Holds scoured of bandits and undead, and look forward to the coins folk living there might spend locally (although like most Dalefolk, they expect "those haughty, do-anything-to-swindle-you-out-of-a-copper-bit" Sembians to have as little to do with locals as possible). There'd be no fees for taking

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the properties: "this is ours now" would more or less be what happened. Essemбра doesn't tax landholders, either, only transaction licenses and fees on sales of livestock, so the Sembians wouldn't encounter any local "harassment" beyond the occasional armed patrol to "see what they're up to" during construction (if they try to slay or run off the patrols, yes, there would then be a problem, because word would spread, and local adventurers would be quietly told it was okay to regard the newcomers as "brigands to be put down or run off").

If any newcomers (the Sembians or persons they sold various of the holds to) try to set up their own laws, rules, taxes, or armed patrols (beyond their own boundaries -- and note that determining those boundaries is apt to involve some friction), and defy the word out of Essemбра, yes, then there WOULD be trouble, and you'd see envoys from all over the Dales arriving with armed escorts (hired adventurers and/or local armsmen) to "explain" local governance to the newcomers.

All in all, this could be a great campaign focus. Buyers of the holds would of course include agents of Hillsfar, the Zhents, the Cult of the Dragon, various Sembian cabals and 'shady business' individuals wanting to dwell outside the easy reach of Sembian authorities, outlaws (including adventuring bands) bringing ill-gotten gains well away from Cormyr, Westgate, or wherever, and so on.

I'm chuckling just at the possibilities. Have fun!

Wooly Rupert, a glance at the DRAGON ANNUAL map of the domains claimed by my various Wyrms of the North will show you that quite a few of them "claim" Waterdeep, and one of my favourite wyrms watches over a particular Waterdhavian noble family 'through' mirrors, but owing to various plans for the Year of Rogue Dragons (what might happen to various dragons has been discussed, in confidence), I can say no more at this time.

About seismic activity in the Realms: SHHHH! Holy Mystra, man, don't you realize WotC editors read this forum?

By Her Sacred Silver Tears, don't give them any MORE ideas for RSEs! I've spent years building this world, and am getting more than tired of seeing bits of it torn down! :) Couldn't you bring up the pronounced lack of scenes of characters reading books, or playing games, instead? Tiddleywinks, even? :}

So saith Ed. And Bruce, your VERY handsome apology is lovingly accepted. (dimples, blows kiss, strikes languid pose) :}
THO

March 29, 2004: Your Hooded One, weighing in with a reply that probably won't please kuje31 all that much.

Ed can help with details of one of those three (which one must remain mysterious for now), but the other two are already being dealt with, in not-yet-revealed projects. Yet the bright side of this is, of course, that you now know TWO of those areas are going to get coverage soon. :}

Faraer, Ed says: "Right on! Superb post."

THO, signing off for now.

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March 29, 2004: Hail, everyone. The Hooded One returneth, with yet more from Ed:

Hi, Proc. Most communities in the Realms hold 'trade fairs' (annual events tied to local commerce, such as farmers driving their herds into town on one or two weekends every fall for 'bulk buyers' to see and bid on -- around which slowly 'grows' gatherings of food vendors, camp followers, and finally wagon-peddlers of all sorts, until the local authorities decide to make a few silver coins off everyone and stake out proper 'rental areas' for the erection of stalls.

Purely sporting events (except for religious ones, such as "champion frays" put on by large temples of Tempus, which are very close to the knightly jousting tournaments of yore) are much rarer. Most folk in Faerun just don't have that sort of leisure.

Some places (such as Hillsfar) have arenas where battles are staged (gladiatorial contests), and in regions like the Dales there are many small archery shoots (a la the sort of thing modern Robin Hood tales have the Sheriff of Nottingham sponsoring, in an effort to trap Robin). Such small, one-day events with modest prizes (sack of flour, sack of potatoes, twelve coppers and a good dagger, two new wagon-wheels) will be the norm.

Festivals (especially religious ones) and annual celebrations are far more common across Faerun, and many of these involve an element of misrule (apprentices clashing in the streets, demonstrations of weapon-skill, glorified and wide-ranging games of tag, and so on, like the Stag Maiden event covered in one of my early New Adventures of Volo DRAGON columns). In larger cities, it can be hard to find days in which someone isn't celebrating something, but these are rarely city-wide, and rarely involve sporting events beyond some sort of race (chariot races from Ben-Hur, anyone?).

Waterdeep has its own arena (not used all that often for public events these days, being given over more to City Guard and City Watch training sessions), but very few 'big annual events.' Everyone's too busy, the city is too crowded, and so on. There are horse races east of the city (that folk can watch from atop the cliff) in spring, and there are many, many small competitions (from oratory and minstrelry contests to oiled-body wrestling matches and "cat fights" involving two actresses dressed as high-class nobles, who tear off each other's clothing and hair in mock rages involving as many hilariously snooty insults as they can think of) held in the various clubs and private-rental 'upper tavern rooms' of the city.

A lot of work is forthcoming about Waterdeep, and I shouldn't say more for fears of 'getting in the way' of those projects. Let's just say you'll be seeing more Waterdhavian lore over the next two years, from divers pens.

So saith Ed.

Your Hooded One passes on Ed's promise to get to all of your questions, even if not in order or with some delay (Dargoth's holy books request, for instance, has not been forgotten). Until next, happy swordswinging and spellhurling to all!

THO

March 29, 2004: Well met again, all. Your Hooded Lady, passing on more from Ed:

Alexander, you're quite welcome. As I said, more to come...in the fullness of time.

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Dargoth, I have utterly no comment on your speculations as to the content of the Waterdeep book. :} No comment whatsoever. No, indeedy. :}

fourthmensch, I have a soft spot for coinage too. I'll start rounding up all my notes. In the meantime, if I were you, I'd adopt the post by George Krashos (thanks, Krash!) as gospel, official or not (see why he's one of my most valued conspirators in this dreamweaving of 'coloring in' the Realms?).

And I recall Faraer is interested in old coinage (something that a future WotC product will have to delay any posting of lore on here for some time, I'm afraid). So I'm adding coins to "holy oaths" in my "Deal With Soonest" file (it's a file in my mind, folks, right next to "Get Some Sanity To See What It's All About").

Right now, the novel must coime first, I'm afraid, but . . . Slow Eddie is On The Job. :}

So saith Ed.

Ummm, 'Slow Eddie,' eh? Lucky Jenny . . . ;}
THO

March 30, 2004: Why, Dargoth, you bet right. :}

The Hooded One here, fresh from passing on your e-query to Ed and getting a response RIGHT back:

It's in a box, carefully in someone's possession, and I'm NOT going to say whose, or where, or anything else, because it would screw up something VERY delightful that lies ahead in our futures. :}

So saith Ed. Interesting...VERY interesting...
THO

March 20, 2004: Hail, all. Your Hooded Lady once more, with a few swift answers (Ed will send proper ones via me later). Faraer, Ed confirms everything you said about the Endless Stair module, and adds that nothing of his is in the Castlemorn Ruins book yet, because (as far as he knows) it hasn't been written yet. :}

THO

March 30, 2004: Hi, thom. All of this is going to sound howlingly basic, but here we go:

1. No overall concept, but yes, I DO have specific things in mind when I design 'mini-dungeons.' First: WHY were they created? Even using magic, it's a LOT of work hewing through stone (or digging earth and then bracing it with stone against collapse), so who were the particular delvers/builders of this specific hole in the ground, and why did they go to all that trouble?

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(It's a safe bet that creating obstacle courses for adventurers to die in, seeded with treasure and handy monsters, is very, very seldom a 'real in the Realms' reason for a mini-dungeon to have started its existence, though dwarves and gnomes have been known to defend their subterranean strongholds with false or 'trap' entrances that lead only into dead-end slaying gauntlets, in regions where orcs and other menaces are numerous.)

2. It should be obvious from my preceding answer that the only elements that are always in my mini-dungeons are things that should logically be there. For instance: the two most popular reasons for a small subterranean complex of tunnels and chambers are: as a tomb, or as a storage cache. Either one can double as overnight shelter, which rises to become the most popular reason when the 'dungeon' is located on what is (or once was) a well-travelled route in dangerous terrain. So a tomb needs a burial chamber, something that identifies who's interred, and some measure of security (either simply a sealed or formerly-sealed door to that chamber, or more rarely, traps or misdirections). Any storage area has to be designed to securely store whatever's intended to go inside [if you want to shelter carts, the passages have to allow the carts to be easily moved in or out, right? if the stone is damp, the storage has to be elevated 'off the floor' and have some means of drainage] and you have to decide if the builders wanted to hide some or all of the contents (in side-niches, cavities in ceiling-support-pillars, etc.), and wanted to defeat monsters and hungry vermin (how secure are the doors, how sealed the complex?).

Anything underground that people are going to live in needs a place to store food, a place to sleep, a place for defecation and wastes disposal or storage, a means of air getting in, handy water either nearby outside or available within the underground complex (and if it is, howabout drainage?), and (if cooking's going to take place inside the 'mini-dungeon') a way for smoke to get out. Moreover, if the place was constructed by folks with brains, the possibility of being trapped inside by a collapse, foe, or fire will usually lead them to construct more than one entrance/exit (even if one of them is seldom used and inconvenient).

Moreover, if this 'mini-dungeon' has been abandoned since its construction (often the case in the Realms, given the reverses the dwarves have suffered and the tendency of gnomes to withdraw farther and farther from human habitation [notice how seldom they're mentioned in the 3e Realms?]), there should be some logic as to where monsters are, within them (the old "how come these monsters that would eat each other are waiting for us adventurers in adjacent rooms?" matter).

3. As a result, a lot of my mini-dungeons aren't that "exciting" in terms of challenging adventurers. Some are very small (see "Ironguard" in DUNGEON issue 8 [I THINK it's issue 8; Faraer?]), some are simply abandoned holes, and many don't have treasure (if there ever was any, someone else got there first). However, as a DM looking to entertain players for an evening, I always try to make my mini-dungeon interesting. Being as my players are ROLEplayers, a monster encounter is the least desirable way to do this (unless the monster has an intriguing mystery attached to it, or an ability to teleport or otherwise be VERY effective when fighting intruders on familiar terrain). Traps should always be logical, or they're just unrealistic nastiness ("Ha! I, the killer DM, just got you! Hahahahaha!"), so they, too, are used very sparingly.

However, the roleplaying nature of my campaign allows me to entertain players with scraps of rotting parchment with fragmentary notes on them, broken shards of weapons with distinctive runes on them, corpses of adventurers carrying the usual assortment of gear [MORE little parchment notes, spellbooks, weaponry, and little mysteries], so these realistic odds and ends are almost always present -- and can sometimes be added to, over months and years of play, in a process that fascinates players trying to puzzle out what their characters have found, and that leads to a conclusion I haven't always detailed (or determined at all) when I start dropping the little hints.

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My players were always pleased to find a little lair they could mark on their maps as a future storage cache or hideout for their own use -- and among other things, they temporarily stashed King Azoun IV, the runaway Alusair, various wounded Harpers, a trussed and magically mind-numbed Manshoun, and in the case of Torm, several angry fathers in such places. They also found a huge Zhent weapons-cache, and by magical means relocated it to their own 'mini-dungeons' elsewhere, forestalling a planned attack on Shadowdale.

So it boils down to two things: how did this place get there and what form will it realistically take as a result, and how can I jazz it up with later 'in-Realms' events to make it interesting for MY players?

For instance: some hack-and-slashers will be bored or irritated when they find a 'mini-dungeon' ankle-deep in pages torn out of old diaries and ledgers. After looking for spells written on these scraps for a few rounds, they may even torch it all (as two different pickup groups did, at GenCon 17). However, my 'home campaign' players had their characters examine all the paper, wondered aloud at why it was in such good condition after years of lying around damp underground chambers, did a few quick probing spells to make sure they weren't in immediate peril, and then gathered it all up to carry off for a more thorough examination. They didn't get it all (there was a secret room they hadn't located), forcing the wizard who'd long-ago desperately 'hidden' himself in various letters (A, E, G, etc. letters, I mean, not "letters to the king") on the pages to escape certain death at the hands of a vastly more powerful rival (who'd searched the place and torn up the books in a rage when not finding his intended victim) to try to communicate with them. They found the hidden room and its papers, and then had real-time months of fun trying to get the wizard back together again in a way they could control, as they quizzed him to try to make sure they weren't unleashing someone evil, insane, or just plain dangerous on the world (after all, how many more Larlochs does the Realms really need?).

I remain committed to 'mini-dungeons,' thom, because they can provide a good evening of play entertainment (and a secretly 'portable' one that a DM carries ready in his/er notes can be a great distraction if players are heading their characters in a determined manner to some place or confrontation you're not ready to run, yet). They can also be a great 'blow off steam' change-of-pace for players engaged in a long, difficult of adventure (City of the Spider Queen, anyone?): if folks are feeling silly, or need to slash and blast something after days of whispering and *****footing around delicate court intrigues, trot out a mini-dungeon that offers them a chance to unwind. (And no, Faraer, I have no plans to recycle Realms stuff into Castlemorn; much better to write new 'fit the new setting' material. I'll find some other way to get them out to fans, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen.)

So saith Ed.

As for me, thom, I can remember PLENTY of "mini-dungeons" the Knights explored, but even if you'd happily read dozens of "and then, of course, we opened the door and fought the fourteen floating mind-flayers" accounts, I wouldn't want to type them. :}

However, I'll give you one -- and being as Damian wants to hear about the Tomb of the Archmage, by far the most dangerous and power-loaded of them all, let's just QUICKLY summarize one of our visits there.

Picture a natural cavern in the headwaters of the Tesh, being used as a lair by various beasts (and overlooked by other caverns from which brigands with crossbows were quick to ambush all intruders from behind). There's a drop shaft at the back of this cavern with spikes at the bottom, and various passages opening out of its sides and then sloping down into the solid rock. One

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such passage leads to a spell-ward-guarded side lair containing a dark naga commanding several bone nagas to slowly tunnel a way to freedom, along routes that won't intersect with the Tomb proper.

Several others are dead ends or abandoned dwarf storage caches, one or two now home to monsters.

Yet another slopes down into the entry chamber of the Tomb, dominated by a grand but empty stone coffin on a catafalque (not a trap or false burial, but where the archmage's beloved sorceress wife was interred; her coffin was long ago plundered and emptied by tomb-robbers). A watchghost guardian (former lover and apprentice of the Archmage [long after the death of his wife], bound to him, and reveres him still) lurks in this chamber, keeping invisible and judging intruders by their appearances, deeds, and words. She unleashes other Tomb guardians (dread wielding swords, battle horrors [helmed horrors that can blink, unleash one spell (usually magic missile), and are immune to one sort of magic (usually fire or lightning)] wielding swords that can paralyze by touch, doomguards [3e "dread guards"], a captive drell, and so on) accordingly. Most of these perils are shut into several otherwise empty rooms, in a small complex of rooms and passages 'behind' the entry chamber, that's presided over by the watchghost. (One such room is where all dead intruders and their gear are dragged, and has become the lair of a shrapnyl raggamoffyn. A long-ago wizard intruder became a unique undead spirit [in 3e Ed says he'd use a ghost] and wanders the complex, avoiding the watchghost because their clashes don't harm each other but do cause each other intense pain -- we saw one, and Ed described lightning-like arcs of negative energy springing up between them as they both shrieked and cursed -- all in eerie whispers. A few darkmantles also roam the Tomb.)

Only one passage leads on from this area, to reach a false tomb [another grand but empty stone coffin on a catafalque, this one with a false bottom and stairs descending down into a chamber that's the lair of an imprisoned 'big brawler' monster of your choice: Ed had a creature there that in 3e terms would be a chaos beast of triple hit points, able to regenerate as long as it retained one of each sort of its heads -- and it kept sprouting chimera-like trios of heads], surrounded by floating, glowing books and splendidly-fashioned wands, scepters, swords, and other devices. Each of these items is an ALMOST-spent item (one or two charges or discharges left; the weapons deliver a single high-damage attack and collapse and crumble in a burst of magical radiance), because their magic has been slowly leached by the spells that levitate them, but one item, a strange 'handgrip'-shaped piece of metal with no obvious function or discharge, is actually a key of sorts, and the only way to reach the inner tomb: possession of it when one approaches a certain wall of the entry chamber causes the wall to 'grow' a gate [3e portal] to another chamber entirely surrounded by solid stone, where there's, yes, ANOTHER grand stone coffin on a catafalque, with a false bottom and stairs descending down into a chamber where the Archmage himself lies: not buried, but floating on his back in midair, withered to bones and resting atop a floating row of spellbooks. He's not undead, and the books are very real [and the REAL treasure of this place].

Ed placed a unique guardian in this last coffin, but tells me that today he'd replace it with a nimblewright (3e MM II) magically enabled to use IOUN stones (which accompany it), and motivated by orders to slay or damage intruders as much as possible without itself being destroyed (i.e. it can flee, hide, or lure intruders to another monster if faced with likely destruction).

We fought Zhents there several times (they knew about the Tomb before we did, and were trying to get into it), but on one of our visits, we Knights ran into heavy damage destroying other monsters, guardians, and magic items in the Tomb, and then fled when a Zhent force of beholders and priests of Bane spell-loaded to deal with us tried to trap us in the place. We had to

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fight our way out through them, and (ahem) decided we'd seen enough of the Tomb for a loooong time. ;}
THO

April 1, 2004: Hello, all. The words of Ed, to Richtin:

Oh, dear, this is going to sound flippant: I (ahem) made it up.

That's what they pay me for.

Seriously, I was assigned a project with that title, a specified length, told to create some new drow gods, magic items, and spells, and was specifically told to add the technology bits.

I began by gathering all the published rules and lore (check out the acknowledgements: they refer to DRAGON articles, earlier TSR products, and so on) into a 'picture' of the drow, identified the gaps I had to fill and what the pre-existing rules and lore "told" us about the drow and therefore what I could logically extend and extrapolate from that...and then went ahead and made it up. That's what I DO. ;}

So saith Ed.

And I believe him. ;}
THO

And a postscript: yes, that means Ed created Vhaeraun and Eilistraee, and developed Gary Gygax's un-named Elder Elemental God somewhat, too. The drow (and dark elves) are, of course, drawn from mythology. Ed briefly told the story of the development of the drow in D&D in his introduction to Bob's omnibus drow book (just reprinted in the hardcover of HOMELAND).
THO

April 3, 2004: 'Lo, everyone. Your Hooded Lady here once more, with a few quick replies from Ed (don't worry, he's working on the Tempus and rest of the Triad stuff, and oaths of the other deities, too):

Hi, Faraer. Thanks for the DUNGEON catch! At the moment, Fast Forward (mainly Jim Ward himself) has taken the Castlemorn ball and is running with it, expanding my overview lore notes with his own design (I handed over the bones, and he's adding organs and flesh, as it were). I don't think he's really got going on the Ruins book yet (beyond drafting a general overview of its planned contents), because -- enjoying having money enough to eat just like the rest of us -- he's seized a chance to do a novel for a major New York publisher. Please bear in mind, however, that this is my long-range view of the situation: knowing that Jim is one of the two or maybe three people in the world who are as creatively busy as I am, I try not to interrupt or pester the man too much. I very much want to see him make it big as a fantasy novelist as well as a gaming company president, so we have really good excuses for going out for drinks together at GenCon. ;}

Hi, Lashan. Of COURSE you should name districts and develop detail that makes your Tantras vivid and 'real' for you and your players. If I post anything (or WotC officially publishes anything) that contradicts what you've developed, so what? Just make note of how your campaign is

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different, because over time it can lead to different-from-canon consequences when events (in your campaign or in the published Realms) unfold. Feel free to use or ignore just what you want to, of what I pass along; there's no "One True Realms" any more, and hasn't been since 1986.

Yes, there are scores of major religious observances, festivals, and commemorations not covered in the Faiths and Avatars series, and literally hundreds of 'local variations' on those events, too. Far too many for me to go into here (I'm talking years of work to flesh out all the details, and of course many folks don't want such a 'religious flavour' in their games, and wouldn't use such lore at all.)

Malar tends to be worshipped in hunts only in rural areas, and not through city streets, except where there's a local tradition of 'a night of misrule' or 'a night when the old gods walk' and persons who go out often wind up as corpses lying on the cobbles in the morning. In most such situations, local worshippers of Malar take advantage of such traditions to stage their own hunts on the same nights -- and remember, a la THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME, the most dangerous quarry is a fit and formidable human, so quite often an opponent of local Malarites will be the hunted.

Otherwise, urban 'holy hunts' will be in sewers, large walled gardens of wealthy worshippers of Malar, or within the temples themselves (sometimes with participants blindfolded and in the dark, lightly armed and unarmored, with all doors spiked open, to give the monster a fighting chance in the small confines).

Hello, Herr Doktor. Most Dalesfolk hate and fear half-orcs, because they don't distinguish them from the orc mercenaries used so often by Zhentil Keep in Daggerdale and elsewhere, OR because local lore has taught them to hate and fear the "Beast-Men" (ogres) of Thar, and having never seen real ogres (and lived to tell the tale), your average Dale farmer will mistake an orc, half-orc, mongrelman, or half-golem for a "Beast-Man," and reach for the nearest weapon.

Hi, Bruce! I'll get back to you about the five as soon as I can, okay? About song: well, Elaine is a trained opera singer, and I spent years singing Gilbert & Sullivan and classical choral music (my father met his second wife while they were both singing in a professional choir, we all sang in a church choir, and the elder of my two younger sisters spent some years touring England singing in cathedrals every summer). So I've rewritten G & S patter songs and devised new lyrics to show tunes for actual performance for years. (I made a devastatingly dastardly Pirate King, I'll have you know. :}) However, right now we have to get the novel WRITTEN before we dare to indulge in filking about it. :} If I weaken, I'll let you know.

So saith Ed.

I can confirm that before his throat surgery, Ed could produce an almost Paul Robeson rich bass, although he was always a better mimic than performer. These days, aging has probably robbed him of a little of his lowest register and a lot of his wind (ha ha, spare us all the comments), but he can still thrill me to tears when he picks up the phone once a year and sings Happy Birthday to me. It's sorta like having your own private Thomas Hampson. :}
THO

April 3, 2004: Hail and well met again, all. Your Hooded Lady once more, with a reply from Ed (vinyl records, of course; I still have several hundred at home -- and Ed has THOUSANDS):

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Hi, thom. It gives me the greatest pleasure to help you corrupXXX er, seducXXX ahem, introduce new blood into love of the Realms. And I know by now from your posts that with you as DM, they'll be in good hands. So, without further ado:

1. Tethgard appears briefly in CROWN OF FIRE (Chapter 6), when Mirt guides Narm, Shandril, and Delg to its overgrown ruins. Before Cormyr existed as a realm, 'very long ago,' Lady Duskreene ruled a small area (now deep in the Hullack Forest) from her castle of Tethgard. Her watchghost still roams when 'awakened,' though not far from its crypt.

Today, Tethgard isn't much more than a few tumbled stones, crazily-leaning low walls running among the trees, and a leaf-choked pit (collapsed cellar entrance) or two, with the stone stumps of what were once round towers here, and the heaved and broken-by-trees flagstones of what were once floors over there . . . yet tiny traces (glades, stone-and-stump farm fences, traces of cart-roads, foundations of stables and cottages and outlying huts) of Duskreene's lands remain, overgrown by the forest. Yes, some of these cellars could well be 'mini-dungeons.'

2. What Volo means is that the Purple Dragons in this dangerous-due-to-monsters-and-brigands area of the realm, far from the niceties of Suzail, are like a lot of small-town, good-hearted (NOT corrupt) policemen in our modern real world: yes, they throw folks in cells overnight to cool off, and for all but the most serious crimes, rather than charge and hold miscreants and send for officials to come and try them, they're quite apt to scare them and beat them up (with bare fists), and then send them on their way, with growls of: "Don't come here and try such foolishness again!" (Volo with his questions and peering into everybody's business would be seen as a spy for outlaws, seeking easy targets, and certainly given this 'rough ride out of town' treatment.) I'd play these Purple Dragons as wily, salt-of-the-earth, cunning veterans who know the local terrain and hiding-places, know who in town is crooked and might fence stolen goods, and who won't easily be caught in ambushes or duped: there are no haughty, I-never-get-my-hands-dirty "high-nosed city brightcloaks" among them.

3. Ah, the big meaty question. :) Yesssssss. :)

First of all, hand your players mysteries, both big and small. Small: they find little cryptic notes. One of my favourite "treasures" for mini-dungeons were potions of healing, in stainless-steel, cork-stoppered and wax-sealed vials. Quite a few such vials had messages or maps wrapped and tied around them. Maps of where? Lists of passwords and directions to what cult or private club or secret cabal? Messages (of treason, or shady negotiations) to whom? Leave that for your players to figure out.

At the same time, whenever they CAN'T stop to pursue or question the guy, have someone the PCs don't recognize, someone nondescript, ALWAYS there when they go to a tavern (he goes upstairs, but if PCS follows, they can't find him even if they turn the place upside down searching -- hmmm, secret passages, I guess :)), or down a crowded street (he vanishes in the crowds), or along the docks (he's on a boat, pulling away). Obviously, he's watching them -- but why? Who is he? Let them speculate, and an answer that might just fit one of their speculations will occur to you -- and let you draw them into a cool adventure. At the same time, the mere speculation is making them think in character, and jolting them out of hack-and-slash.

When the PCs do fight monsters, have a few of them (straight out of the Monster Manual) look like OTHER monsters (also straight out of the Monster Manual); this forces them to "fight the unknown" rather than reading up on monsters and doing the ho-hum hacking of "things they know." And have monsters that can speak say something cryptic as they die (slain by PCs), such as: "Thurvan will hear of this!" or "Thurvan will . . ." or just, "Thurvaaaaan." Pretty soon, they'll be WILD to know who in tarnation Thurvan is. :)

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Force PCs to talk rather than just hack or bully, both by situations (talkative beggars, talkative innkeepers, talkative prostitutes -- particularly if any of these aid PCs by showing them a back way out, or telling them where they can get a wagon wheel fixed or buy a cage or net, inflict a lot of "interesting gossip chatter" (the NPC just has what we used to call "verbal diarrhea," rabbiting on about their sick sister and the cat not liking pink things and the state of the drains and their noisy neighbours who fight with flying daggers all night, daggers that fly because of the spells they cast . . . and so on, AND: Watch officers and Purple Dragons and other authority figures that PCs daren't flee from, ignore, be rude to, or attack, who ask the PCs questions: "So, let's see your charter -- why're you out HERE, anyway?" If the PCs answer in a friendly, talkative manner, have the authority figure start to 'open up' -- "Like knife-throwing, do you? So do I! My mother was a dead aim with a knife! Why, I remember once she . . .") and through items: the PCs find a sword (or a lantern, or a doorknob that's lost its door) in a dungeon that has only three magical properties: it can glow upon command, it can see with darkvision, and it can talk (AND talk, and TALK). It might not have much of an intellect, or coherently ordered memories that the PCs can plunder for useful information --but it does, right away, reveal that it knows SOME useful things, AND a lot of intriguing things ("King Azoun hid a coffer of rubies around here somewhere; I saw him do it! Never came back for it, neither! Where? Well, SOMEwhere near here."). So PCs have good reasons to talk to it, from time to time.

Again, you're training them to roleplay.

Encourage everyone to speak as their character (NOT necessarily funny voices, just...speak as their character, rather than as a modern person playing a game [player: I go up and tell the innkeeper not to mess with my friend. DM: Okay, so do that: let me hear you tell him). You as DM do this, too, saying the innkeeper's lines rather than telling them, "The innkeeper rents you a room for the night." Again, we're establishing the roleplaying habit.

It makes everything so much more vivid and meaningful and memorable. And never, never forget that your job is to entertain your players: lift them up when they're tired or depressed, amuse them with occasional slapstick humour, challenge them with fights that awe them and occasionally let them exult in victory.

So saith Ed.

I'll add just this: often Ed roleplayed three or four merchants sitting talking, where we Knights could overhear (sometimes when we'd sneaked in somewhere and had to hide, so were now a captive audience). He'd put on three or four voices, and have long, gossipy conversations about all sorts of things, and we'd frantically take notes and try not to miss anything. He ALSO made it clear through NPCs in Shadowdale that whenever caravans came to town, the locals rushed to the Old Skull to buy a few tankards for thirsty merchants, and in return get "all the news." So we knew we could join in and do the exact same thing. Ed had pre-prepared pages and pages of little snatches of gossip and "big news," all intermingled, and it really made the Realms seem real and alive, hearing all of it.

lordhobie and Wooly Rupert, Ed has your messages and will reply ASAP (probably tomorrow).

Love to all,
THO

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April 3, 2004: Merry met again, gentles all. Thy Hooded Lady approaching the fire once more, conveying Ed's latest missives:

Hi, Wooly Rupert. Four columns on Larlake is it for now, but there'll be a lot more on Silverymoon sometime in the future. It's up to you (and all DMs) what Larlake's true inner aims, competency, allegiances, and fate are. I'm using the Realmslore columns to pass out handy tools for Realms campaigns and paint in a few little gaps, here and there. Yet I second The Hooded One: if you have specific narrow-focus questions about Larlake, Alustriel, Silverymoon, or anything else, for that matter, I'll try to answer them here in this thread. The bigger questions ("Tell me all about this realm or that deity") no, because that infringes too much on what Wizards should have freedom to present.

I'm afraid I can't reveal more about Zarasper Nyritarr or his spells at this time (NDA/possible future WotC plans), but I can tell you why Larlake's able to resist: Zarasper's spells are faulty, and they both fascinate and infuriate Mystra, who not only preceived them through Alustriel (and saw the truth about Larlake, where her Chosen did not, or rather, preferred not to delve too deeply and so have some chance of retaining the love of this man rather than crushing him), but worked through Alustriel's silver fire, when the two of them were physically intimate, to alter Zarasper's spells enough to shatter his control forever.

She (the former Midnight) finds something abhorrent in using magic to covertly try to control other wielders of magic. Influence, yes, threaten or openly bargain with, fine, but controlling beings without even allowing them to be aware of the control is something she's discovered she DEFINITELY dislikes. Strongly.

Zarasper was at first baffled (how could Alustriel be protecting Larlake without being aware of Zarasper himself?), and then intrigued: is his failure due to Larlake's mere contact with Alustriel, or stronger bindings she's laying upon him, or is it something more?

And the inner, chilling question has arisen: Just how much attention does Mystra pay to her Chosen? Is Mystra actively and directly aware of the schemes and spells of Zarasper Nyritarr?

Zarasper is now trying to decide what to do. Which way he jumps is up to every DM to decide. In this Realmslore column, I merely present the tools and leave their uses and effectiveness to individual DMs.

Zarasper Nyritarr is an veteran Red Wizard and experienced 'lone manipulator,' unlikely to do anything rash... but for the first time in decades, personally afraid of Mystra. Decades ago, a colleague described him aptly as "that leathery, wily old lizard," and he's grown in patience and mastery of magic since then.

Lord Hobie, you'll find bits and pieces of dialogue from plays (and song lyrics too, for that matter) in the header quotations of many of my novels, and a description of the relevant guild in CITY OF RAVENS BLUFF.

Minstrels and bards have always memorized short, crucial scenes from 'the classics' (old plays; the scenes in question are the dramatic historical confrontations between legendary heroes and dragons, rulers and usurpers about to slay them, wise old men and young reckless fools, and so on) to perform in their travels alongside music and dramatic recitations of poems.

There have also always been carters and merchants who earn extra coin as they travel by doing mimicry of well-known figures (Vangerdahast, for instance, in the Dragonreach) or the equivalent of Punch & Judy shows, which in the Realms are always done by putting footwear over both

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hands, a shawl or other cloth over one's head to serve as a backdrop, and using the upturned boots as the heads of comic characters, and are known as "Oldboots" (or, when folk printing handbills in larger cities are being precious, "Talking Toes") shows.

As for traveling companies of players, I've always envisaged them in the Heartlands (Sword Coast right through to the Dragonreach, plus the Moonshaes, Amn and Tethyr, and Aglarond and the Vilhon) as pretty close to Elizabethan England (I'm sure you're familiar with the concepts, but for those Candlekeep scribes who aren't, the famous historical novel CUE FOR TREASON by Geoffrey Trease brings this to life vividly; the recent movie SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE does a good job, too, but sticks to London and avoids the traveling aspects -- though please note that in the Realms, there's a long tradition of actors performing in drag in both gender directions [usually for comedic purposes], but no prohibition on women playing female roles as there was in real-world England for a time; though except for travelling companies of strumpets who use their beauty in performances to entice customers for the night, beautiful women can be rare in companies travelling in the Realms purely for reasons of personal safety).

I should mention that in Faerun some actors travel constantly with goods caravans, and as a side-trade sell, make, and modify clothing to buyers at the various places they perform in (stop in your small village, present a stunningly beautiful gown on a lady character, let it be known after the show that similar garments can be bought, and wait for the local ladies [or smitten men!] to demand them).

Acting isn't a disreputable profession except in places where past travelling companies have practised thievery with heavy hands, and many temples have small morality plays that are NEVER seen outside their sacred precincts (and are supposed to be kept secret from non-believers). Due to the nature of the faiths in the Realms, there aren't any direct analogies to mystery plays (morality and 'important divine event re-enactment' plays yes, mystery no).

As for special forms, there are traditional chanting-chorus, everyone-employs-oversized-caricature-masks-on-sticks plays performed in Calimshan and Chessenta (different plays in both areas, just a common use of such masks), known in Calimshan as "malakram," and in Chessenta as "masqueladra" (from which Cormyr and other lands around the Sea of Fallen Stars get the term "masquerades" for their masked balls and revels).

In Neverwinter, many local plays are built around a central [literally sitting center stage for most of a performance, but walking on or off in unison to mark passages of time, such as a season or some years] trio of harpists (who harp, comment on the action of the play without being a part of it, and wear no costumes), and in the Sword Coast lands from about Waterdeep south to Amn, there are many "crafty country bumpkin" plays built around a gruff, limping old character called Old Duiwin ["Doo-WIN"] that are constantly updated with new jokes and snide political commentary. These traditions don't seem to have formal names; they're just "the good old plays" to locals (as opposed to strange new productions brought from afar). And many old, rich Sword Coast cities from the Tashalar north to Waterdeep continue to celebrate a tradition (in festivals and the revels of the wealthy) of tableaux [suddenly-revealed-to-stirring-music scenes of motionless "actors," usually scantily-clad females, often frozen in scenes that purport to depict important historical events]. These are usually known as 'marvel-masques,' but sometimes as "grandiques" or "fresstel."

Recently, in Sembia, a new tradition has gained popularity in the most exclusive clubs and in the private revels of the wealthiest: silent re-enactments of murders or hunts, the latter often done using bare-bodied actresses with their skins painted to mimic the appearance of the beasts being hunted (it's whispered that certain decadent patrons actually arrange to have real slayings done as part of these "bravadoes," but those in the clubs are never real -- and again, the painted

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actresses are employed in the silent plays performed in club settings to drum up prostitution business with those same painted actresses; some are even doppelgangers very well paid to appear as buxom human women only with webbed hands or feet, or tails, or illithid tentacles, and under strict contract to not harm patrons in any way [though of course they're under no such restrictions when it comes to non-patrons who happen to come within reach outside the club].

So saith Ed. I've passed your salt request on to him, Alan Hatcher (and yours, Bruce, and yours, too, Foxhelm), and we'll see how long it takes him to reply (busy busy on the novel, he tells me).

Ciao for now, all!
THO

April 3, 2004: "My sword is sheathed," as the Border Forest folk say by way of friendly greeting. The Hooded One here, with Ed's latest replies:

First, to Bakra of the Outlying Thread: You're welcome, and we don't know the fate of that apprentice (Elminster has not seen her again, and Khelben has said nothing about what happened to her). Real-world translation: I'll have to chat with Margaret about that. :)

Tyros, you're partially correct: Daggerdale does seem a very likely place to find half-orcs (most of the other Dales haven't been raided by orcs who dared tarry long enough to indulge in rape; they tossed torches at houses as they hurried past, did a little snatch-and-grab thieving . . . and were literally crossing blades with angry Dalefolk throughout all of this; so half-orc offspring, given the tendency of orcs to break the necks of human women they've enjoyed, or being forced to slay said women when said women attacked them with daggers the moment they turned away, and the ready access most Dale women have to herbs that can make a pregnant woman violently miscarry, are unlikely). The problem is that Daggerdale has been an open battleground for years, so your image of communities full of folk who helped deliver half-orcs, fed them, clothed them, and let their children play with them is just plain wrong. Zhent patrols crisscross Daggerdale taking slaves (many pregnant women wouldn't survive that cruelty, or their unborn babes wouldn't), swording and burning out folk (again, down go your pregnant women), and orc patrols often EAT humans (more losses). The few pregnant-by-orcs women who might escape all of this have that same access to herbal pyrgatives, and would certainly use it. Again, no (or VERY few) half-orcs. The Citadel of the Raven and Zhentilar encampments between it and Zhentil Keep are a more likely source of half-orcs, and such individuals would from childhood be forced to fetch and carry for the orc troops, march with them, procure food for them, and so on. The few hardened individuals who survived this process would BECOME Zhentilar troops -- or run away and probably be slain by inhabitants of whatever forest they tried to hide in (there's no other nearby cover).

Dargoth, there are scattered families of giants living here and there in the Thunder Peaks (especially in the southern end of that range), and a few in the Desertsouth and Dragonspire ranges (they've learned to hide from the Zhents, because those who don't are hunted down and slain or forced to join the Zhents and then used for the most dangerous work, like tearing open the gates of hostile fortress and cities), but very few giants living outside of rocky wilderland areas. Goblinkin (orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, et al) and bugbears and gnolls all dwell in the same sort of terrain, usually as wandering war-bands who travel between a cluster of cave-lairs (and can muster, as a gathered tribe, no more than sixty to seventy adults). The nomadic nature of these populations, plus our designers' desire to leave them as 'deployable' as possible for a DM (i.e. not to specify) has kept mentions of them sparse. In general, they may raid the Dales but

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aren't welcome in any of the Dales (and will be actively fought on sight), and Cormanthor is as dangerous to them as it is to lone, wandering human woodcutters.

Proc, Faraer's link to my earlier Realms-list answer covers your truenam question pretty well, I think. Yes, there was a specific spell, which was later deemed too powerful by in-house designers and removed from the next rules edition (and then, of course, as all cool ideas do, caught someone else's attention and began to reappear in print as suggestions and references and hints, sneaking back into the game . . . just as poisons and insanity and psionics all have :)).

Alan, the salt trade is very important in the Realms. This, like so many other details of trade and trade-goods, has been neglected in print because of the continuing (and probably correct) judgement of TSR and later WotC managers that an all-trade or trade-focus product would not sell as well as an adventure or so-called "crunch" or "splat" books. (And please let's not suggest it to them now! I mean, just how many merchant prestige classes does anyone want to see?)

Salt isn't quite as important in the Realms as it has been in our real world, for two reasons: there are other means of preservation (salt's primary importance was in preserving food so folk didn't starve every winter, not as a seasoning -- it was POPULAR as a seasoning, yes, because it augments flavour, but there are a large array of other spices and condiments one can use for taste-altering purposes, even more in the Realms than our real world), and because salt has never been as scarce in the Realms as it has been in large areas of our real-world. In other words, in Faerun you can always get some salt fairly cheaply, from a nearby source, so shipping sacks of it becomes less important.

So exactly where is all this natural-source salt? Well, in many salt marshes (ladle the water out on large, flat sunbaked rocks, or rocks over which you spread large expanses of black cloth) such as the Flooded Forest between the Moonsea and the Dragonreach, the Adder Swamp in Chessenta, the Spider Swamp, and Rethild (The Great Swamp); and as naturally washing-up-on-rocks deposits around certain shores (such as the Lake of Steam and around Azulduth the Lake of Salt), and in dryland form in places where there were once large bodies of water (there are huge salt plains in Anauroch and Raurin). There are also salt mines in Chult, Calimshan, under certain islands in the Korinn Archipelago and north of Mintarn, in the mountains girdling Amn, in the Orsraun Mountains, and so on and on and on. The point is, salt is plentiful; its expense comes primarily from shipping this heavy commodity, because (given the various aquatic and subterranean races present in the Realms), gleaning the salt isn't all that difficult. Many gnome families make a good living mining small salt deposits and trundling the results to the nearest human town or village market, so you won't find a "Salt Road" or salt caravans (though you will often find a salt wagon in a mixed goods-caravan).

So saith Ed.

That's all for now, folks; he promises more replies later.
THO

April 3, 2004: 'Lo again, all. The Hooded One here once more, bearing the wit, wisdom, and other words of Ed, to whit:

Hi, Bruce. Bardic colleges in the Realms have been addressed in this thread before, but your questions neatly avoid already-discussed topics, so let's have a go:

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1. Indoor, and often soundproofed by magic or by being underground and having long, "crazy dogleg" entry passages. The intent is not to enrage neighbours or embarrass performers, but to allow many bards to practise at once without disturbing anyone (except perhaps their tutor or someone they're performing with). So many colleges have teaching rooms, lounges, living quarters, meeting rooms, kitchen facilities and pantries, instrument storage rooms, and a lone performance hall with galleries aboveground, and a radiating network of performance chambers belowground.

2. Everything varies from college to college, and from tutor to tutor. In general, the lower order colleges concentrate on hearing pitch, timbre, and nuance, singing scales and being able to precisely duplicate an overheard note or tune with the voice, mimicry of other voices and bird and animal calls, and then in memorization of certain 'stock' tunes and perfecting the ability to perform them on a limited range of instruments (recorder, lute, harp) and transpose them into different keys. All students are taught to make and repair a particular sort of instrument.

Higher order colleges add instruments and greatly expand the memorized repertoire, adding translations into other tongues (so that a graduate who doesn't know language X at all can still perform a particular song in language X with perfect, non-accented pronunciation, understanding, and nuance), the histories of tunes and alternative lyrics (and why certain lands or towns or rulers frown on, or approve of, specific wordings), and so on. As students progress, they begin to be taught how to teach others well, and are instructed in how to make and repair an ever-expanding variety of instruments.

3. I've just covered the topics addressed in bardic colleges in the previous answer, and only the greenest students are taught in large groups, in organized classes; the whole point of bardic colleges is that there's a lot of one-on-one or one-on-two-or-three instruction, senior students are encouraged to 'fool around musically' with younger ones (so they can learn by exploration), and so on.

4. Yes, bardic colleges specialize in what they teach and what instruments they make, but this varies more with the individual instructors practising at a college at a given time, than it does by college policy. As a result, non-bards won't tend to rank, for example, a lute from one college as worth more or being finer than a lute from another college. They DO rank "this lute by Tholomon Candras, from the time when he was at . . ." over "that lute by Andrath Melonder, repaired by divers hands, from his early days at..."

5. Not much. Someone showing up at the door of a bardic college who was already making a living by performing might well already be known (by reputation, at least) to the masters of the college (both genders are usually called "masters," by the way: lord masters and lady masters). However, any recognition would not be revealed; all would-be students are auditioned by at least one visible and one invisible (hearing, but not seen) master; only in cases where they disagree on admission will other auditions be necessary. Colleges sell instruments and sheet music, and take at least half the gate at any public performances put on by college students (such occasions are rare). Colleges guarantee elaborate funerals and burials for patrons (of any race, species, faith, and profession, not just musicians) who endow them with sufficient funds, and undertake commissions (usually for rulers) to compose music, so student fees tend to be tied to the ability of a student to pay (high fees aren't used as a barrier, but cartloads of coins can't be used to bribe one's way in).

6. Again, colleges can be ranked against each other by reputation, but in the Realms I've never adhered to the 1st Edition 'bard character level corresponds to specific college entry and tutoring' rules. Student graduation is: when one is ready. One college is ranked over another purely by

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opinion, which will vary sharply from individual to individual. To outsiders, there's simply no way to truly measure which has the "best" training or instructors, or the most talented pupils.

7. In the original Realms, many human and half-elf females were of a class called "spellsingers," who could dance and sing in circles with other spellsingers (usually around a fire or other central focus) to combine and work magic too powerful for an individual spellsinger to cast. Spellsingers eventually found their ways into print in various forms, but as with elven "spellsong," the ability to spellcasting is an unborn talent rather than something one can acquire by instruction. Instruction serves to develop the talent, giving those possessing it control over it, and a greater scope and strength in its use.

Elven instruction inevitably builds in much more history, and nuances of emotion (mainly sadness and melancholy) are 'built into' how a note is shaped as it is sung, providing memory spurs to listeners, and actually 'tags' or footholds to elves who work magic that brings forth three-dimensional illusory images, so that a spellsong can be accompanied by a shifting 'movie' of animated images, one melting into the next.

Elves can reach higher notes than most humans without tone becoming thin or strangled or going sharp or flat, and can also hold notes longer, and their musical instruction is designed to develop these abilities. Certain elves can even produce a second 'ghost' voice echoing their primary vocalization, without any need for magic (so, for instance, an elf could sing, "'Twas in the early gloaming mist, that first I saw thy dancing fair," and as he sang the word "first," could faintly sing again "gloaming mist" simultaneously with "I saw thy"), and instruction develops this power, and the dronesong (whistle and hum simultaneously; many humans can do this, too, but proper instruction turns it into a finely-finished, controlled singing voice), AND the more-common-than-ghost-voice ability to split tone on a single held note, so as to create a chord with oneself (allowing a lone singer to, say, end a song with a rich, full-throated chord).

Elves typically understand more of the history of a tune, and its variants and various lyrics, than all but the most accomplished human bards.

Hi, Foxhelm. You pose an interesting query! Let us say an essentially neutral farmer (hardened, close to the land, a little selfish because he must be, but loyal to his neighbours also because he must be) from Shadowdale is brought to our world by Elminster (who then departs, leaving me to guide the fellow). Let us further say the fellow remains calm, and that El's magic allows us to communicate perfectly but works no influence on either of us. Let us also postulate infinite freedom for me: I can whisk us across borders and go anywhere I like, money no object, no unpleasantness from severe weather or from local authorities anywhere, fly us both without planes, and so on.

Well, first I'd show him MY farm, and slowly cross southern Ontario showing him all the different farms and terrain that gets farmed, and how (I know he'd want to see such things more than anything else). I'd be sure to show him Niagara Falls, then Great Lakes freighters, grain elevators and the like, a little of Muskoka cottage country, Queen Street in downtown Toronto just because it's a regular United Nations of different sorts of people all living close together but clinging to their cuisine and music, as well as sampling everyone else's. Then I'd sweep him across Canada just to show him how blamed BIG this continent is: the forests of the Canadian Shield, Flowerpot Island along the Bruce peninsula, the vast sweep of the prairies, the Rocky Mountains, and finally the Pacific Northwest rain forests. Tar sand mining along the way, just to show him how large-scale human scarring of the earth can be, and what honkingly large machines we're capable of building.

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We'd see some of the famous and lush gardens on Vancouver Island, dine in one of the small hippie restaurants on Denman or Hornby Island, and then zip up through Alaska and back east across the tundra and High Arctic, over the ice (watching icebergs break off and start to drift south) and Greenland, to come down through Scotland and England (wow him with castles and the canal system, and then awe him with the libraries at Oxford, and all the oddities and valuables at the V&A in London) and Mount St. Michael, into France (wine tastings and cheese making there, then dine in Tuscany, I think). The running of the bulls in Pamplona, just for fun, the tunnels in Gibraltar to show him a REAL fortress, then the Sahara, of course, with at least one real oasis for him to marvel over (the man's a farmer, remember) and then up the Nile (pyramids, Karnak and other temple ruins) into remote parts of Africa and some jungles. Drop in on the Bushmen to show him how they survive in much leaner terrain than he faces, see Lake Natron, and then over the Suez Canal to show him REAL crowding in New Delhi and Calcutta, on to the magnificent giant carved stone Buddhas and the Hindi temples and Anghor Wat, Laye Eyre and some of the other natural wonders of Australia, then on to South America: the Amazon and lilypads large enough to walk on, Angel Falls, the gigantic drawings on the Nazca plains and the mountainsides of Chile, then up into the USA.

There, my first stop would be the Canyon de Chelly (the Anasazi settlements), then the Grand Canyon, and then: the mudpots of Bumpass Hell in California, the carved faces on Mount Rushmore, New Mexico's Lechuguilla Caves, Crater Lake in Oregon, the excesses of Las Vegas, a night at the palatial Drake Hotel in Chicago (hey, if the original Playboy Mansion, in the Windy City, was still going, I'd have wanted him to see that just for the spectacle -- on a night when a good musician was performing), and then a quick hop to contrast rural Pennsylvania coal country with the streets of Savannah and then the concrete canyons of Manhattan. Then Big Cypress Swamp in the Everglades, and zip across the entire continent to the Hoh rain forest in Olympic State Park in Washington State.

Then active volcanic flows somewhere, back to Europe to see the Catacombs under Rome, and I'd give him the following things to take back with him: the best meat cleaver and the best axe I could find that were suited for his height and arms; handfuls of bloodstones and similar low-value gems to use as emergency currency, a good-sized pot of old gold coins (doesn't matter what the origins are, only that they're old enough to be gold and not just thinly gold-plated, several large coils of fine wire, some good locks and multiple keys for each, some old-design two-man crosscut saws (yes, they still make such things), a dozen or so really good knives, a large assortment of used eyeglasses so he could fashion eyewear for aging folk in the dale, a lot of those good wheels of cheese we saw being made in France, and (hey, I'm Canadian) some rolls of duct tape. No seeds! No livestock! NO firearms!!!!

That ought to set him up for years -- and I know that the moment he saw what I was assembling, that's exactly what he'd want to take back with him. :}

So saith Ed.

That trip would make a great novel, but I'm not even going to suggest it to him. He might throw something at me. :}

THO

April 4, 2005: 'Lo everyone, Your Hooded Lady returns with more from Ed:

Dargoth, the future of the Zhentarim has been discussed in detail before on this thread. My view is that there are too many variables to say anything definitive. If Hesperdan comes out of hiding to

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make a move against Fzoul, probably with beholder allies and perhaps with the aid of Manshoon, Fzoul will certainly be destroyed. There are many priests of Bane (particularly those formerly loyal to the High Imperceptor) also scheming to get rid of Fzoul, and of course he could drop dead of heartstop or a rotten tree banch falling on him tomorrow. With him gone, who knows what the Zhentarim would do (after the inevitable power struggle for control of the organization)? Your view of things could quite likely happen, but let's look at your four points:

1. Shade is itself a BIG variable, and the fate of the Zhent trade-routes depends on what they do more than anything else. If they move to block or control overland trade, we could be seeing a shift to a war for control of portals (which would probably draw in Thay and other magically-powerful groups). In turn, this leads us to another variable: what if the Chosen of Mystra, or Larloch, or anyone other magically-powerful individual sees domination of portals by one group as A Bad Thing, and gets involved?

2. The stability and power of the Church of Cyric are by no means certain; that's a matter for every DM to decide. My own take on this situation is that as Bane grows in power, Cyric inevitably loses, and that Bane is inherently stronger (less insane, for one thing) a personality, and thus will eventually win the "who's the big bad guy?" contest between them. The faith of Cyric is MUCH younger than the other large priesthoods of Faerun, and from the first has been dominated by opportunists from other churches seeking more personal power -- a recipe for schisms, struggles, and a weak church. So whatever happens to the gods themselves, the Church of Cyric is by no means a predictable or a consistent force for anything.

3. See the earlier posts on this list for all of the alternative trade routes. There's no such thing as "effectively cutting off" Zhentarim trade-traffic -- but events have already made such travel longer, more expensive, and exposed to new foes and predators (e.g. if it goes by ship and landfall in Sembia, Sembians try to take a hand; if Westgate is used as a port, certain individuals in Westgate ditto; if the Zhents try to take over Ilipur or Teziir (which to some degree they'd have to do, openly or covertly, to expand the dock, warehouse, and paddock facilities to what they'd need), they come to the official attention of Sembia, Westgate, and Cormyr, any or all of whom might respond -- and of course any waterborne route will please the pirates of the Inner Sea). We've seen Daggerdale laid waste by wandering Zhent war-bands, but we've not seen Fzoul in charge of an attempt to retake the dale yet. He might well use hordes of summoned monsters, or poisons introduced into drinking-sources, and other "slay 'em all" means -- and might well view obliterating the folk of Daggerdale as his cheapest, easiest solution. And as such struggles unfold, the hewing a road through the Border Forest (again, see the earlier posts) "Plan B" is proceeding...

4. Yes, Fzoul and Khelben made a pact. Would you trust either man to adhere to anything more than the strict LETTER of their agreement? Or Fzoul to break that enthusiastically if he thought he could do so through manipulated intermediaries in a way that Khelben couldn't actually PROVE he had anything to do with? Fzoul could easily force the breakup of the western Zhents into Cyricist and other factions that are all still under his influence (particularly if he has the support of beholders, and fosters beholder cults among the breakaway groups). And [insert echoing evil laughter here] what if something happens to Khelben?

You're quite correct, the eastern Zhents control raw material resources (gems and metals) that the Sword Coast markets want. And yes, there are plenty of alternate routes. What happens depends on just what events transpire in your own campaign. Myself, I view the Zhents like mildew: you can wipe them out again and again, and somehow they just keep creeping back...

So saith Ed.

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And I can add this echo to his words: my characters have fought the Zhents for over twenty-five years of real time, and certainly don't view them as the Keystone Kops some gamers tend to dismiss them as. More like Hydra (cut off one head, and three more spring up to take its place). Myself, I think Fzoul's living on borrowed time. I doubt Wizards will off him in print all that soon, but then again, how do we know the REAL Fzoul hasn't been mind-controlled for years, or even replaced by a shapeshifter long ago? The old one never exhibited half the wiles and guts the more recent one has shown us. Hmmm.

Thoughtfully signing off,
THO

April 4, 2004: Well met again, gentles. Thy Hooded Lady, bearing the words of Ed:

Ahhh, Lashan, you've spotted one of my little secrets. Yes, Brandon Battlemaster became a hero in Tantras after he led a few captains of his mercenary company -- WITHOUT pay or any sword-contract -- to the rescue of local priests of Torm, and paid with his life.

The priests were taking monies (temple offerings) and consecrated armor and weapons (which the priests of the temple had constructed, for other temples of the faith to sell in Sembia and the Vilhon, and thus raise more money for church activities [notably giving food, shelter, and healing to the families of guards who've died or been maimed in battle or fulfilling their duties]) to the docks in Tantras to load onto church-owned ships for a quick trip to the nearest Sembian ports (it was intended that the church cargo be carried overland as much as possible, because piracy was very bad at the time).

Not all of the supporters of Lashan died in the collapse of Lashan's dreams. Many of them fled across the Reach, to join agents of Lashan already resident in Tantras -- and they got wind of this valuable cargo. Some of them probably saw an attack on it purely in terms of personal gain: enough coin to let them travel far away from the dales and possible retribution, and start a new life elsewhere. Others, because the weapons and armor were their chief interests, obviously intended to replace Lashan with a new 'pretender' (perhaps even someone magically disguised to look like Lashan and pretending to BE the original Lashan), and try again to conquer the dales or some part of the region.

During the late night loading, an attack was made on the priests at the docks. Brandon Battlemaster and some of his warcaptains happened to be drinking in a dockside tavern, and they boiled forth half-drunk to defend the priests of Torm, fighting heroically against great odds and, although almost all of them died in the fray, ultimately winning victory for the faithful of Torm by buying the authorities time enough to muster enough armed force -- and making enough noise that the other dockside taverns emptied, and although confusion reigned, it became impossible for anyone to remove property from the priests on the docks without being seen.

For their pains, Brandon (now at least a CN hm Ftr9, though he may be as much as 2 levels above that; I can't find my current notes at the moment) and two of his senior warcaptains, Beltarkh the Bold (CN hm Ftr7 [a very large, strong man with minotaur blood in his lineage]) and Dathamra "Deadsword" Alyth (LN hf Rog2/Ftr4) were raised from the dead by the grateful Church of Torm, and a statue promptly erected in Brandon's honour. (Local rumor insists that priests constructed it so as to have a hideout chamber in its base, containing a weapons-cache.)

Brandon, Beltarkh, and Dathamra all seem to have been deeply shaken by the experience, and are now operating all over the coastal lands of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and (for now, at least)

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largely avoiding Tantras and the Dragonreach. Or perhaps they came to some sort of secret agreement with the Tantran priests of Torm that the wider world doesn't know about.

So saith Ed. Interesting. VERY interesting. Something Brandon said in passing to one of my characters makes a lot more sense, now...

Ed, your mind must be like a huge library of books all opening themselves and reading themselves aloud at once. Hmm: Lost and Wandering in Ed's mind -- now THAT would make a Hollywood movie I'd pay a LOT to go and see.

THO

April 7, 2004: Well met again, all. Peace be upon this fireside. I am, once more, Thy Hooded Lady, bringing the words of Ed:

Hi, Bakra. All courtly greetings to the Lord of the Outlying Thread. :}

As to glass: it's common in some parts of the Realms, and rare as gold and gems in others -- and in most places in the Realms, windows are leaded affairs of many small panes, not huge, rectangular unbroken panes. Moreover, most glass is "shifty" (full of bubbles and uneven thicknesses and whorls that distort reflections and vision through them). Shutters are the norm: full overlapping boards sealed with pitch in winter, and slats over which are tacked layers of gauze to keep out insects in the summer (if the dust gets bad, occupants wet down the gauze to impede it). The abodes of the poor will have shutters but lack glass at all, and some homes have frames around window-openings into which boards can be slid (and precious arrays of glass are taken out of storage and slide into place only on special occasions, such as royal visits, marriages, and the like).

In most parts of the Dales, drinking vessels are of carved wood, or soak-sealed leather, or ceramic, and a "glass glass" is regarded as an incredible luxury (why make a drinking-vessel out of something THAT breakable, when glass is so expensive etc. etc.?).

Mica is used in place of glass in some areas (where it can be easily found and mined), and certain dwarf and gnome clans know of ways to cut certain types of stone very thinly, to arrive at slate-like slabs that when set into window-frames admit light through (more or less as a glow), but aren't transparent.

For ceramics and copper cups in daily use (i.e. not "court" or "temple" pieces), homemade pieces will have a maker's mark on the base and a single badge-like design on the bowl or body, that identifies the owner ("That's MY cup -- see?"). Commercial pieces will either be custom-decorated with badges or runes or devices for specific buyers ordering such "finishes," and will otherwise have a few simple decorations pleasing to the eye, to encourage someone at a market to purchase the item.

A typical Dale ceramic mug will have a rough, unfinished flat base, that flares inwards slightly to either vertical or slightly-bowl-shaped sidewalls, and a 'smooth bowl' inside bottom. It will typically have a dark brown base and handle, a light [natural clay hue] drinking-lip around the top, and a band of deep blue glaze around the middle of the body decorated with repeating waves or stippling drawn with a fingertip, or even a series of fingertip impressions to outline a face or a sun [radiating rays] or flowerhead design.

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In addition to this finish, a ceramic mug will share adornments with copper vessels of these typical sorts: a bearded smiling face sculpted in relief on the body of the mug, across from the handle; the handle shaped like the head and scaled neck of a serpent or wyvern or dragon (sometimes with a suggestion of wing outlines across the body of the mug); an oval frame on one or both 'sides' of the body (if the handle is considered the keel or center line of the vessel, the bulge of the body 90 degrees to its left, and to its right, are the two sides) enclosing a scene. Such frames are often shaped to look like a snake biting its own tail, or a swordbelt with various elaborate buckles, and the scenes inside them are sometimes birds or the heads of animals (stags are popular), but are more often simplified scenes of heroism, such as a lone knight defending a bridge against many mounted foes, or a man wrestling off a hungry bear, or a local legend (wronged wife turning into dragon or swan; castle cracking and falling because its owner broke his word or lost a bet; and so on).

In the Dales, it's the custom to give a visitor in summer a mug of water to drink, and a bowl of water to bathe their feet in (they do the bathing and removal of footwear and the acceptance of either water, and it's not considered insulting to refuse).

In winter, a visitor will be given warm water or warmed oils for their feet, and a place by the fire or stove or other source of heat, if any, plus something warm to drink (again, refusing is not an insult).

A visitor who comes armed (with battle-weaponry, not simple belt-knives or tools, not matter how deadly these may be when properly wielded) is expected to promise "Peace upon this house" (which is a literal promise of: I won't draw weapon or use it while under this roof, nor set fire to the lodging itself), and to offer his sheathed sword to the lady of the house "for safekeeping" until departure. By tradition, the lady of the house (the senior mentally competent female in residence) puts the sheathed weapon in her bed so that no one can get to it in the dark hours of slumber and do bloodshed, but in actual practise the weapon may be hung from the rafters, laid on a mantel, or even hidden -- but if it is hidden, it must be yielded up speedily when the guest announces their intended departure, or the guest is entitled to do violence to get it!

So saith Ed.

From play in the Realms, I recall that in the cities of Amn, Tethyr, Calimshan, Sembia, and in Waterdeep, glass 'as we moderns know it' is common and there are even glass ornaments for sale. A 'tallglass,' by the way, is something like a slightly larger champagne flute -- or was when I bought a dozen to bring home to Shadowdale. None of them made it unbroken, but I did have the satisfaction of grinding one into a devil's face.

THO

April 8, 2004: Hello, everyone. I bring, as usual, the words of Ed:

Reefy, a 'loose end' character is any Realms NPC established in print who's made to seem especially colourful and interesting, and who has some project or scheme or destiny 'on the go,' or is presented to the reader with the impression that Things Are About To Happen regarding this being. There are scores of such characters in published Realms products.

Rather than spend pages listing them all, let me pick a single product at random and identify a few from its pages. (Random selection is easy in my basement study: you just stride in with all the lights out and grope around in the dark until you touch something. Then pull it a little way out from the surrounding items, go back to the lights, and turn around to see your choice.)

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In this manner, I 'chose' VOLO'S GUIDE TO CORMYR. (For our purposes, pay no attention to the stag-headed character on page 27: he's not a loose-end being, but rather Jim Lowder's creation, and appears in Jim's great-fun Realms novel THE RING OF WINTER. I'd like to see more of him!)

First, we find Tannuth Ormbyr on page 44. Why does he have this particular adventurer-hiring career, and who are his clients? What secrets about his current intrigues is he keeping from the Crown? It probably has something to do with treason, given his Marsemban background, but what?

Blentra Whaelbuckler on page 46 is NOT a loose-end character: she is what she is (like Popeye :) and is useful local colour, but not presented as 'on the verge of having something important happen.' Thurbrand, however (see page 66), IS another loose-end character, and presented as such.

Mitchifer of the World Serpent Inn (p 71) is another, though not of my creation.

Albhaera (p 109) isn't a loose-end character, no matter how 'deployable' and useful she might be to a DM or to PCs, because again, 'she is what she is,' unless a DM invents an intrigue or scheme or unfinished task for her. Nor is Hanno Minstrelsong (p 110) or the various merchants that appear on the pages that follow. Interesting and useful NPCs, yes, but not given that dash of spice that makes them loose ends that someone (a Realms author or game designer, or any DM) almost HAS to pick up and play with.

Eltagar (see pages 129 and 130), however, very much IS a loose-end character: he has schemes within schemes going -- enough to be a 'prime mover' NPC for a campaign all by himself, and as a result is intriguing indeed. (All of the local lords in the book -- such as Thiombur and Tessaril -- are interesting persons who can easily be campaign 'prime movers,' but aren't considered loose-ends because they're part of the government.)

Vilnar Orsborg (p 149) is another loose-end, and so is Tansard Famwell (page 209). Dunman Kiriag doesn't seem like a loose-end when first mentioned (page 151), but is revealed as such on page 219. So is Myschanta Halarra (page 221), because one can't help wondering just why Alustriel of the Chosen owes her so many favours!

Saszesk (p222-223), Tongreth (p223-224), and Valantha Shimmerstar (p224) are all loose-ends. So that's at least eleven in just one Realms product -- and lest you think I picked the richest loose-end character source I could find, why not check out Steven Schend's LANDS OF INTRIGUE boxed set, just to give one example.

Realms fiction authors have picked up many loose-end characters to play supporting roles in their books, over the years, but one of the secrets of 'keeping the Realms alive' has been to continually spotlight new ones.

So saith Ed. More replies coming (but slowly, because just now Ed only types them when he's too tired to write more coherent novel chapters).

Fair riding and bright swords, all!
THO

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April 8, 2004: Hello fellow Realms scribes, Thy Hooded Lady returneth once more, with another of Ed's replies, and these few words of my own about the Lowlantern Lutes: yes, I remember our various encounters with them all too well (there have been no less than six), and I fervently hope Ed doesn't want to have us run into them again. :}

Now, here's Ed:

Hi, Bruce. Thanks for the assists re. the Truenames and Psionics. I doubt the Lowlantern Lutes will 'fit' into the Knights trilogy, but they are a fun and interesting bunch whom I hope to use someday, somehow. Thus far, they've been subtle enough not to be caught fleecing any Sembian noble family -- but they have acquired a suspect reputation, and at least one wealthy merchant family (the Halanduskers of Yhaunn) have hired (thus far unsuccessfully, it seems) "slayknives" to forcibly end the careers of the Lutes. As for "Heehee," I agree. Heartily. :}

So saith Ed.

Onward into the Realms, gentles, and spare not thy prudence!
THO

April 8, 2004: Well met again, all. The Hooded One rides up once more, with one of Ed's to-multiple-folks replies. thom and Sarta, you're both very welcome!

Steven, what Ed has told me about you, and your superb work on the Realms (which reveals your deep love of it in nigh every paragraph) both make me want to greet you VERY affectionately if ever we meet [so I suppose I should innocently tell you I'm keeping quite healthy, and from that thought make the little carnal leap to thinking of Ed's cottage, and then mention that Ed tells me you wouldn't recognize the gaming cottage now, as its interior has been completely rebuilt since the two of you sprawled on the mouse-drilled sofas therein and talked of life, the universe, and everything for hours -- and the sofas are gone, too -- and didn't I adroitly digress over here into quite a different field than I started in :)]. So let's both think of field research as I hand everyone else the latest words of Ed:

Sarta, you're welcome. It's my pleasure to (almost :) make a living telling stories, and an honour to share the Realms with so many fellow enthusiasts, all over the world. Long may it continue for us all.

Hi, Dargoth. I think Bruce has covered your psionics question superbly. My take on things is that 'wild talents' (people able to do one or two minor spell-like things, like darkvision or handfire or feather fall or levitation) are about 1 in 1000 people in some places in the Realms (higher in some places, lower in a lot of others), but usually keep their powers VERY secret -- until family members or neighbours find out.

Shadowlord, Larlake makes ME itch to do more, too. I suppose I should shout and wave in Reefy's direction and say: "Hey! Here's another loose-end character, that I'm just bringing onstage -- see?" but I guess that's sorta obvious. Wait'll you see some of the other Realmslore columns Julia's still sitting on...

thom, you're welcome. Have fun with those fledgling players!

Lashan, you're welcome too. :) Enjoy, and please let me know how play unfolds.

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Maskanodel, Kuje31 has correctly answered your Tarrasque question. I stealthily included some Realmslore on this beast in my most recent Spin A Yarn tale, and the converse there betrays the fact that I'm SURE there's more than one of these beasts in the Realms. Many of the rumors you allude to are linked to the activities or deaths of various tarrasques. I'm being deliberately vague here because I don't want to mess up any plans Dungeon Masters might be unfolding in their own Realms campaigns that view the tarrasque differently, but yes, I'd say you can deploy one whenever you want to (and as soon as it's slain, establish another one somewhere else in Faerun).

Steven! I must call you for another long chat, the moment my @#\$!%#\$ taxes and this latest little novel thingie are done. Enough sleep? Of course not; I'm down to about four hours, most nights. My diet is DISGUSTINGLY healthy, and dominated by green tea and raw salmon (my younger brother is a top-drawer chef, and sister-in-law is vegetarian, so Jen cooked about a dozen gourmet veggie dishes when they visited a week ago, and I'm manfully wading through the leftovers [er, I don't think anyone on this list needs to tell her I used the phrase "wading through," okay? Let it remain a secret just between all of us, and thereby increase my life expectancy]). Thanks for your good wishes re. the novel -- and when do we see YOURS, hmm?

To everyone (especially George): I haven't forgotten the oaths of the Triad, and the Tempus offering is almost ready. There's just this novel to get out of the way first...

So saith Ed.

More soon, I promise.
THO

April 8, 2004: 'Lo, everyone. Your Hooded One again, with another Ed reply:

fourthmensch, the Sons of Hoar do have more to do with the UE sourcebook designers than me, but they and the Society of the Verdant Arrow are logical creations for any deep, colourful Realms campaign: such groups would naturally develop, given the situations described in those countries -- and of course are ideal for providing endless play possibilities (particularly as they'd be likely to hire adventurers as dupes or scapegoats).

I don't want to say too much here, because part of the value of any "new" regional sourcebook for the Realms is the wide new variety of possibilities it adds to play, and every "definite" word I post here can cut down on unfettered creative thinking, so let me say just this:

In my view, these groups would oppose each other (and yes, spies, knivework in the night, rival gangs, and rumor-mongering and information control would all be ways in which they'd do so, as well as the primary 'daily' ways in which they work against the Simbul's rule), and I think the various leaders (whom I afraid I won't say anything more about) would have to become fanatical to ever ally with Thay -- because they know they'd lose ALL local support if they did so.

Even Aglarondans who dislike the Simbul or all spell-wielding rulers hate and fear Thay far, far more -- and rightly view Thay as a powerful, grasping and far-too-close-for-comfort land ruled by, ahem, spell-wielding rulers who are known to practise slavery and therefore CAN'T be better than "the she-devil we know" [the Simbul].

If these anti-Simbul groups allied with the pirates, that too would have to be done very secretly, because much of Aglarond isn't too happy with the pirates, either. :}

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One goes about trying to overthrow the Simbul by spreading rumors of her evil and treacherous deeds (building on her wild temper and swift violence), to make the common folk hate and fear her. One also proceeds with a slow, careful, deft campaign of quietly slaying (or even better, corrupting) her supporters.

One does NOT successfully overthrow her by openly confronting her -- because not only does one have to contend with her power (aided by the Chosen and by Azuth and Mystra -- who want to keep the Red Wizards selling magic, not growing powerful enough that their practises of controlling spell knowledge rise again to the fore), one would also have to deal with other agents in Aglarond.

By "other agents" I mean the Harpers (who hate slavers even more than they dislike strong tyrants, and so are very much on the watch for any attempts to weaken Aglarond), and agents placed in Aglarond by almost every other realm around the coasts of the Sea of Fallen Stars -- because Aglarond is viewed as "the wall that keeps Thay from reaching out for us all." So these organizations can't expect sponsorship or trade help from other lands -- only from unscrupulous individuals (in say, Westgate, Sembia, and Marsember) who can see personal financial gain, perhaps through smuggling, in supporting these subversive organizations.

Some members of the groups want civil war (not caring about Thay, or fooling themselves into thinking they could diplomatically "deal with" Thay, somehow), but most want a swift coup -- or even better, the Simbul to just disappear someday and so leave Aglarond for them (they tend to sneeringly dismiss her apprentices, though I judge that to be a mistake, because almost any of her four strongest ones would be a capable foe for both subversive organizations).

I should also mention that certain observers believe the Simbul allows such groups to continue to exist because they focus and gather all resistance to her and resentment of her rule, ruthlessly eliminating splinter groups -- and that via magical disguises she has personally infiltrated these groups, and is greatly amused by their discussions and doings, and delights in planning her own downfall. (While of course steering her foes into debacles in which they are not only defeated, but lose reputation in the eyes of the common folk, making it even harder for them to gain support.)

So saith Ed.

Now this last idea I can attest to, fourthmensch, because a certain Tharchioness of Thay ordered the Simbul to be slain and proof brought to her (scalp, with silver hair). No less than five Red Wizards with poisoned knives came to Shadowdale to take her down (her dalliances with Elminster were by then becoming widely known).

One after another, she slept with them (in magical disguises, posing as various of Mother Tara's "girls") and burned out their minds as she did so, rooting out all the spells and magical knowledge she could, and sending them on their ways as rather simple men retaining no capacity for wielding magic.

These tactics were only revealed because the last Red Wizard was working with an assassin who bore weapons and a stone that was a dead-magic focus, and it caused the Simbul's disguise to melt away. The Red Wizard promptly fainted, the assassin fled precipitously out through an upstairs window and discovered the hard way that the wooden cover over the festhall's cesspool had become rather rotten -- and Mother Tara conveyed the dead-magic stone safely away into hiding (Elminster soon located it, and together with Azuth, Storm, and the Simbul, destroyed it).

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The Simbul used her spells to make the Red Wizard sleep VERY thoroughly, and to change his appearance to match hers, and sent him down to join the assassin in the cesspool, who reportedly "slew the Simbul" with fearful efficiency.

What happened to him when he reached Thay with the false scalp and silver hair is not recorded.

;}
THO

April 8, 2004: Well met again, all. The Hooded One, with another Ed reply. Metis and Dargoth, Ed has your questions, too, and will get to them soon, but he just couldn't resist replying right away to David Lázaro (with language carefully chosen not to steam parents, Alaundo, though the subject of course might):

Hi, David. Well, how much spice to include in your game should be up to your players. Discuss it with them first. My players have on occasion roleplayed some VERY erotic moments "in the flesh" (er, so to speak -- sorry, couldn't resist that one), but on other occasions didn't want to. [It of course helps to have a mixed-gender group of great maturity and a strong love of roleplaying and very close friendships; my group happens to include two stable-long term couples, and some er, adventuresome folks from generations before AIDS.] As DM, my job is keep them happy, so it's their call. The older in age your players are, the less possibility exists of unintentionally upsetting anyone (as long as everyone agrees on 'the ground rules' beforehand).

For instance, I'd never dream of deliberately making a homophobic person uncomfortable when I (a rather stout, pepper-and-salt-bearded man) roleplay a prostitute and go and sit in a male player's lap caressing his chin and face and breathily making propositions in a feminine voice -- but I don't have to worry about that, because I know my players and they know me. We have "warning words" (we simply say: "Steady!" or "Simmer!") for anyone to signal if they're becoming uncomfortable or think an observer (i.e. someone who's not a regular player) might be misinterpreting or becoming uncomfortable.

So your first step has to be discussing this with your players, even if it's going to rob a future erotic situation or scene of its surprise/shock value.

I don't want to leave anyone reading this with the impression that our play sessions are orgies. Far from it: sex comes up in play (ahem) less and less frequently as players age and a campaign acquires a deep history (and playing style) of its own. It's just that when it does, we're all comfortable with it -- in the same way, just to give an example, two "straight" actors of the same gender can climb into bed with each other and pretend to be carrying out a homosexual sex act when they're performing a scene for a play or movie. I suppose you could say we're all mature professionals about it.

Our player characters are not ourselves. What we do as characters doesn't directly reflect our personal views and actions -- in the same way I create characters in my novels who disagree with each other to the point of killing each other, so obviously they can't all be reflections of my own personal views (something a lot of critics, academics, and real-world clergy seem to be too simpleminded to understand, but that's another issue).

I think all of my players are used to my craziness, and can enjoy the entertainment without fearing I'm going to use the game as an excuse to jump them carnally -- but I can certainly see that other players unfamiliar with me might acquire that fear -- and I'd never want to make someone that uncomfortable. As they say: hey, it's just a game.

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On the other hand, I once played D&D at GenCon with a beautiful stranger who unconcernedly dropped her jeans and everything else to proudly show us all her latest tattoo. It was very nice, as I recall. :}

Yet more than the view, I admired her casual confidence, her being comfortable in her own skin. THAT'S what I remember, not the exposed flesh.

Which brings us to lingerie. First, utilitarian underwear for men and women: women with large breasts that get in the way, or when doing activities that are going to cause chafing or discomfort (crawling on rock while mining, rowing, etc.) often wear a tight cloth breast-binding or sling (the equivalent of a modern sports bra, although instead of stretchy fabric covering a lot of skin, the Realms version is more like a trough or shelf of tightly-stretched cloth sewn to cords (precisely because elastic fabric is largely unknown in the Realms). In colder climates, soft hide bras are worn most of the time.

For the lower half of the body, both men and women wear clouts: a very tight leather, cloth, or cord (listed here in descending order of perceived quality and durability) belt worn around the hips, and usually held tight by multiple hooks (like a modern bra) at the front. Then a long, diaper-like strip of rectangular cloth (usually cotton) is passed between the legs, up through the front of the belt to dangle down, and up through the back of the belt to dangle down. In other words, the "breechclout" of some native American tribes. In many cases, the dangling front and back ends are designed to be tied together, and the cloth may be folded in on itself for extra absorbency or padding (especially when the wearer expects to be riding a mount). Menstruating women usually place another layer or two of red-hued cloth inside the clout and change this as necessary, and yes, clouts can be purchased that are decorative and 'made to be seen.' Freshly-perfumed clouts are often sold in Waterdeep and other large cities.

Among simple backcountry folk in cold climates, women often wear leggings, leather skirts, long hide shirts (tunics), and fur cloaks -- and a woman wanting to signal her willingness for some hanky-panky either aggressively tells her chosen partner so, or hikes up her skirts briefly to reveal that she, ahem, seems to have forgotten to put on her clout! (Prostitutes trolling for strangers often expose their breasts and hold up a lantern to spotlight this fact -- and probably also to keep the bared skin a little warmer.)

Okay, on to the alluring stuff. The concept of wire for breast support and shaping is unknown in the Realms, but corsets (laced-up, tight boiled hide, not whalebone or any sort of stiffeners) and stomachers that cinch the waist tight are popular, and many of them have shaped panels for the hips and a top 'shelf' to thrust out and support the breasts. Low-cut peasant blouses and even lace trimmings (as one can see from examining the covers of Volo's Guides and much Realms interior artwork) are widely used. In hot climates, panties and translucent silk pantaloons, vests, and the like are often worn by women (Hollywood "harem" wear), also as established by some Realms artwork.

So black lace, black leather, and red (the other erotic hue) straps can be worn. Black lace dresses, garments that expose the crotch and nipples, and what we might call 'bondage gear' (such as tassel-adorned nipple clamps) are okay, on festhall dancers and in private, among couples. Prostitutes dress in whatever garb is allowed locally; in more conservative places, they are usually fully dressed, but in garments that show a strip of bare flesh all the way up the outside of the leg and torso (i.e. held together with a series of rings). This signals to would-be clients that this particular woman wants to be approached, rather than being someone who'll offer instant violence AND scream for the Watch if propositioned.

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Men trying to signal their interest in sex or courtship will often wear an artificial flower perched on one shoulder: a red rose for "I'm looking for courtship," a black rose for "I'm looking for sex," and a steel rose to signal homosexual interest (a device also used by lesbians). In 'my' Realms, there's no stigma attached to homosexual relationships, only to any sexual behaviour that involves exploiting children, and any sexual behaviour that involves force or coercion (please note: WILLINGLY undergoing pain or bondage doesn't count).

Fops or boisterous types (such as Mirt the Moneylender) might wear four or more such roses to signal that they're interested in multiple partners for the night, but except in the right sort of festhall, such displays can often cause mirth or ridicule.

Other than the rose, men seldom wear "lingerie" per se, but may shave, perfume themselves, or wear a single black legging (usually on the right leg) decorated with scenes of heroic prowess (usually depicted in red). Tiny bells on nipple-rings are sometimes worn by individuals of either gender to 'appear sexy,' and some priests are reportedly excited by sexual partners who tattoo symbols of their deity on the palms of their hands.

And a glance at the published Realms should make it obvious that erotic dancing is a big part of foreplay and sexual entertainment. Elaborately-decorated (with bells, etc.) garters (we're talking here not the modern straps between belt and silk stockings, but rather the slender belt worn around a single leg with ends a-dangle) are often worn by dancers, both professionals and housewives wanting to excite their husbands, and undone and thrown aside during the dance.

In warmer climes, both genders often signal their desire for sex by walking naked in moonlit gardens, or naked except for finely-made, 'show' high boots, headgear (often with face veils), and to-the-elbow gloves (an overcloak is usually worn to reach the gardens -- and if the gardens aren't private, kept on until a desired partner is met).

Foreplay among elves and half-elves (particularly strangers) often includes the wearing of full-face masks or hoods that leave bare only the ears -- and caressing, kissing, or licking of ears (plus throat, backs of knees, and palms of hands) for and by both partners leads to more ardent activities.

The Hooded One told me to stop here, because she was "getting quite warm," so I will. :}

Which leaves your Silverymoon questions.

Silverymoon is patrolled by groups of six or more (8 is the norm). These will be armed, physically agile adult persons of both genders, usually human or half-elven, and will consist of Warders (longtime local residents paid to go on watch-patrols) led by one or two Knights In Silver, and assisted by a lone Ardent Legion member. They act as police, pouncing on miscreants. Justice is served by magisters of the city, who are either longtime resident sages (just a few of these, and very elderly) or members of the Spellguard. Citizens of Silverymoon are entitled to have two justices hear their cases, and may choose the station of one of them (in other words, they can request Alustriel or Taern, but may end up with any senior courtier instead -- or they can request a High Guard member, or "someone not a member of the Spellguard"). The other magister is chosen, ultimately, by Taern, and will always be someone able to cast spells, because magic is often used in Silverymoon to help determine guilt. Whenever possible, a priest of the faith of an accused is asked to participate, and most accused, either citizens or visitors, demand that Alustriel try them personally (sometimes, even for visitors who lack the right to choose anyone, she will do so).

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The fine for breakage of wares would typically be their replacement value, plus [as much and only as much as this applies] up to half that amount again for lost sales due to having no stock and the time spent cleaning up and in court proceedings (the merchant suffering losses will have to testify, if not too injured to do so). This fine is paid to the merchant "under the eye of the court," not retained by the city.

I hope this is of help. So saith Ed.

And yes -- whoo -- reading that brought back so many memories that I am warm, indeed. So I'll just slip in an answer to Bruce: no, we haven't chipped in on Ed's cottage (several of us have cottages of our own), and I don't think I want to say more about the Lowlantern Lutes, because every time I relay one of your e-mails to Ed about them he starts to chuckle, and I'm afraid he already has quite enough evil ideas for our Knightly futures!
THO

April 9, 2004: Well met, all. Your Hooded Lady here again, to pass on Ed's latest reply:

Hi, Metis. I'm happy to oblige (and Silas, send me some replies and I'll have enough to proceed with suggestions for you, too).

Okay, here's my take on a starter Realms campaign. Given your preference for starting in the Unapproachable East and your probably character class mix, I'd concoct a story wherein your PCs are all folk from the Vilhon Reach backlands (the uplands west of Hlondeth), who came to Hlondeth seeking fame and fortune, but were drugged and taken by Thayan slavers there. Chained in the hold of a slave ship, they were battered by very rough seas, and eventually the ship ran aground on rocks just offshore of the Wizards' Reach, and wrecked. The few surviving crew were slaughtered by some of the slaves, and a wild battle for food and gear ensued among the 'freed' slaves that ended precipitously when a pair of wyverns swooped down out of the sky to feed (on fresh slave, of course).

The PCs were among the fortunate few who escaped ashore unharmed (most of the slaves were wounded and very weak, and all of them are now scattered).

They now find themselves in the Wizards' Reach, about midway between Laothkund and Delthuntle, in a landscape of tidal marshes, scrub-covered plains, and old, crumbling ruins (of overgrown, shattered stone towers and cottages). Monsters prowl (especially down out of the Yuirwood), and outlaws lurk in some of the ruins. Abandoned roads wander along these desolate shores, and many wrecked ships lie sunken in the sands. Tidal pools (and quicksand, and MORE monsters) are common in the lee of strings of rocky barrier islands (natural breakwaters a few hundred yards offshore), and the pirates of the Fallen Stars sometimes come here to dump spoiled cargoes, bury or abandon treasure too dangerous to keep (such as caged monsters, or magic items they believe are cursed or are being traced from afar by wizards or sorcerers).

This setting allows you to isolate the PCs from the wider politics of the Realms for as long as you want, and at the same time a passing ship or a handy portal discovered among the ruins can whisk them elsewhere (such as Telflamm, if you'd like to plunge them into urban intrigues) whenever desired.

Until that time, I'd begin by challenging them with three things: small mysteries, such as obviously recent written messages and cached supplies found in the cellars of ruined cottages that suggest ongoing smuggling or other covert activities in this area; any monsters you care to throw at them,

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whenever excitement starts to lag; and a stable of NPCs who (if the PCs don't slaughter everyone on sight -- and you should start teaching them not to, by having such deaths cost them, i.e. you just killed two priests, and now we need healing!) can become recurring supporting characters.

Some of these NPCs will be small groups of outlaws (rival adventuring bands, making a living as brigands and being hunted by Thayans and/or pirates they've stolen from in the past), a few will be priests or wizards seeking to dwell in this ungoverned region (priests wanting to establish their own holy community, and wizards wanting privacy), and some should be mysterious (the crazy, dirty, ragged old wandering peddler who seems to have an astonishing assortment of goods to sell, current news, and sly jokes -- who will simply vanish [teleport away] when threatened; and the beautiful woman walking alone in strange armour, who seems friendly [perhaps VERY friendly] but can defend herself with a sudden orbiting cloud of flying daggers without seeming to do anything to cause them to appear. It may take months or even years of play before the players discover why these "mysteries" are here, why they keep returning to take an interest in the PCs, and who (or what!) precisely they are.

The priests will, of course, be a handy refuge and healing service (perhaps raising from the dead, too) for the PCs -- but will in turn demand PC aid in performing tasks for them, like slaying this or that pesky monster that's been raiding their garden plots and gardeners.

The wizards will, of course, be conducting crazy experiments (and perhaps have some golems or automatons to surprise aggressive PCs with, as a result) and look upon PCs as perils to be driven off or slain -- or handy muscle to be hired (to "find and slaughter me a basilisk, and bring me this bit of its innards" or "there's a man called One-Eyed Rijakk, somewhere in Laothkund, who stole a stone from me that's about this size, that colour, and has THIS rune drawn on it; get it back from him, will ye? He need not survive your meeting with him" [Rijakk's almost certain to be a Shadowmaster, by the way, and if the PCs do anything to him, that'll bring them to the attention of the Shadowmaster guild in Laothkund]) and paid well -- half up front, and half when they complete the task.

There also seem to be a lot of small, wandering warbands in the vicinity, and most of them seem to be hunting for something. Just what, the PCs will have to find out -- whilst avoiding the occasional pirate or Thayan parties, and perhaps a Harper or two.

Moreover, the Simbul seems to want to stem any stealthy advance of Thayan influence through the Reach by allowing a restless Aglarondan (probably a suspected Son of Hoar whom she trusts not at all) to call himself "Lord of Summerspar" or some such title, and establish himself in an old keep nearby. He'll start sending out mounted patrols, whilst he schemes about how to get rich by making deals with some gnomes and dwarves who come to him with a proposition: it seems there are some VERY rich deposits of certain gems close to the surface here, but the dwarves and gnomes dare not tunnel to them from below because of the danger of tidal flooding and because of certain subterranean perils (intelligent monsters of your choice). They're hoping that this local Lord can build a little keep over top of them, and defend it, whilst they mine the gems from the surface -- and so share in the wealth. Now, the Lord has brought with him his "Lady," a female sorceress who seems far too young and far too unfriendly towards him to be the wife he claims her to be, and this young lady has a spitfire temper, some strong spells -- and is seemingly instantly aware of the PCs and spying on them magically from afar. Is she working for the Simbul? Or herself? Or someone else entirely? And is she trying to make the PCs her private strike force?

Nor does she seem to be the only one watching the PCs. Some sort of monster seems to be stalking them, wherever they go and however they camp or hide, never attacking but sometimes observing them from VERY close by -- and someone else evidently thinks the PCs are the agents

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he or she has been waiting for, and keeps leaving them cryptic written messages telling them the time of "The Moot" is fast approaching, and have they "brought what is needful"? Do they know "all the words" they "will need"?

Also, silent hauntings or apparitions seem to follow and react to just one of the PCs, who should be just as mystified as his or her companions as to who the images are, and what they want.

The encounters should regularly give the PCs a chance to hack things and blow off steam, and your challenges should force them to work together and develop friendships, debts to each other, loyalties, and regularly hand them both puzzles and hopes. They should be building NPC contacts constantly (whether they want to, or not :}), and you should make sure they have 'in game' chances to discuss what to do next and choose, rather than always reacting to things you hurl at them. Then, pay close attention to what they seem to want (both goals for their characters and style of play and encounters), and shift the campaign accordingly.

"Please, inspire me," you said, and I hope I've started to do that. Please let me know, okay?

Hmmm. Well, I'M interested, Metis! :}
THO

April 9, 2004: Hello again from Thy Hooded Lady, and hearken, all who desire to learn more of the rich tapestry that is the Realms, to the latest words of Ed:

Hi, Dargoth. Well, as for those Underdark cities, Eric Boyd's your man. I designed Menzoberranzan, several hundred miles of drow tunnels under Shadowdale, and the dwarf realms east of the Great Rift, and then decided I'd better turn back to the surface world (because so much of it was neglected, and because so many other folks were so busy detailing the dark deeps).

Now, as for the dwarves, the Ironstars and the Brightblades aren't linked beyond a few relatively recent ties of marriage (and, as you know, there aren't all that many Ironstar dwarves left). The dwarves were once so numerous in mountainous areas of the Realms that having two clans dwelling so close together wasn't that unusual at all (after all, there are humans in both places, and no one assumes one bunch are necessarily colonists from the other place). In the years of many foes and dwindling births, the dwarves were often forced to flee and to go into hiding, or go down into extinction stubbornly fighting to the last dwarf, and some strange juxtapositions have resulted (usually where dwarf-foes were weak or few or both, and hiding-places good). As a result, an observer today can assume nothing about any dwarf clan purely from the location of some of its members. Some day I hope to delve into matters dwarven in much greater detail -- and I know of at least one unpublished Realms novel (no, not by me, and no, I'll not say more about it) that's all about dwarves and only about dwarves. Now, if you want to look at truly "forgotten" races in the published Forgotten Realms, the gnomes are a good place to start!

Ah, Dargoth, you hit upon one of Ed's sore points: his inability to get the spotlight off what I call the Sexy Three: humans, elves, and drow. The hin clans got chopped out of The Five Shires, the gnome language Volo article dumped by DRAGON, the Shirestone halfling gambling game ditto . . . time and again, these details got tossed aside, further reinforcing the "Give us more drow! Give us more naked babes! Give us more noble elven naked babes! Because that's all gamers want!" mantra.

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Now, being a babe who has in my time gotten naked and done the "paint my skin black, give me pointed ears and a white wig, and I'll wow these jaded original Realms players, just watch me!" gig, I ENJOYED flogging my way through the gaming cottage snarling, "On your knees for Lolth, worthless males!" (And only two of them giggled. And I KNOW they liked it, too.)

However, I see Ed's point. It's hard to present a balanced world when you never get to show some bits of it.

On April 10, 2004 THO said: The Hooded One, with a swift reply for Gareth Yaztromo:

Unfortunately, Ed has no say in how novels are published or republished. If Shandril's Saga ever appears as an omnibus, it will be entirely at the behest of Wizards of the Coast. The Book Publishing folks are all friends with Ed and discuss most Realms books projects with him (in private, of course), but not always...and Ed has no "control" over what's published about the Realms.

If he did, you'd see a lot of novels that many, many Realms fans have been asking for, down the years, like: the return of Bane, a Manshooon solo novel, a series of novels starring Mirt the Moneylender, Elminster raising the infant Sisters, solo novels for most of the Chosen, a followup Cormyr novel, etc etc etc...

THO

April 10, 2004: Metis, perhaps in the future when Ed has more time we could do the private e-mail thing, okay? For now, Ed has these for-the-voyage suggestions:

Smuggled goods, fellow passengers who are spies for: 1. someone (the Harpers?) keeping a watch on what's going on, 2. the cargo itself (someone "safe-eyeing it" to wherever it's headed), 3. a fellow passenger who's an important personage from Telflamm, escaping Shadowmaster vengeance there with his/her 'life savings' carried along as gems, 4. another fellow passenger who's the Shadowmaster assassin (a doppelganger?) along to slay Number Three the moment the whereabouts of the gems are uncovered, 5. the "open Harper" agent (along to distract the attention of other passengers and crew from Number One) who's a garrulous old man with tons of colorful adventuring tales to share (some of which will point PCs at adventuring possibilities), and who carries on his body some small item that's a focus for a spectral harpist who can emerge to defend him/warn or awaken PCs/scare folks aboard as "a haunting" -- and, some carried cargo that seems to be a focus for various aquatic undead who swarm up the sides of the hull from time to time... exciting? I'd say this is a voyage no one should be able to forget, for a long time! (Which has the added advantage of making your players think of sailing away as a last resort, from now on: overland travel for us!!!!)

So saith Ed.

I'm glad I'm not aboard! :) What, Ed, no lady escorts?

THO

April 11, 2004: Well met, all. Thy Hooded Lady, bringing once more the words of Ed:

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Bruce, I try NEVER to have the Realms mirror real-world history all that closely, because of its harmful effects on roleplaying (as oft stated before), although others who've contributed to the published Realms haven't shared this philosophy.

The closest the Realms has come to 'courtly love' is Alustriel's rule in Silverymoon. My players even referred to her as 'the Queen of Courtly Love.'

So saith Ed.

Who is deep in visiting family right now.
THO

April 11, 2004: 'Lo, everyone. The Hooded One returns with more words from Ed:

zeathiel (Brian), you will indeed receive more lore about the Tower of Balance, but I'm afraid you may have to wait almost a year, and see it elsewhere than here (in other words, like everything else "new" about Silverymoon, future projects are involved). Sorry. In the meantime, if I were you, I'd make use of the excellent Project Silverymoon website suggested (and linked to) in this thread.

Let me provide just this tidbit: it's widely known in the city that the clergy of the Tower are involved in ongoing work on gigantic magics ("spellwebs") that are added to as the months and years pass, as worshippers' offerings and divine revelations are incorporated into the ever-growing spell-constructions. What ISN'T known across Silverymoon is just what these 'spellwebs' DO, or are intended to do. Many different powers are spoken of, but none are confirmed (clergy refuse to speak of them in detail, even to professed believers in Mystra).

So saith Ed.

Hmmm; now THAT'S a tidbit!
THO

April 12, 2004: Well met again, gentles. Thy Hooded Lady, riding in once more with the vocalized wisdom of Ed:

Yes, Bruce, a stunningly beautiful cover for Elminster's Daughter. I'm very pleased with it. I'm glad you liked the sample chapter -- but I should warn you and everyone who reads it not to open the complete book and expect to find more chapters set in Waterdeep therein.

The action shifts east, into another of my favourite Faerunian playgrounds. :}

Wooly Rupert, Velsaert is an interesting personage. I don't want to crash into forthcoming Realms projects of which I should say NOTHING more right now by providing too much detail about Velsaert, but let me say this much: most folk in the Realms know him only by his reputation and writings (in the last two decades, he seems to have become more reclusive than he once was), and rumors are arising that whisper Velsaert's apparent shyness might have something to do with changes to his body (some say talons, some say scales, some say nictating membranes over his eyes, some even speak of a tail) that might suggest a closer connection with things draconic than had been hitherto suspected. However, it's been said before (by the long-dead wit and playwright

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Aunselrus of Myratma) that "rumor hisses as menacingly as a harmless grass snake, but sinks its fangs in when least expected, not when heard from most loudly."

So saith Ed, who's just full of surprises these days.

Our next Realmsplay sessions bid fair to be interesting indeed.
THO

April 12, 2004: Hail and well met, assembled scribes. Ye Lady Hooded, of course. Herewith, Ed's long-promised list of some oaths of Tempus:

At last I've found time to craft and pull together from my lore-notes a partial listing of naughty words and phrases in current use among followers of the Wargod. As usual, per the original Realms agreement, these are canon or official until contradicted by in-print TSR (now Wizards of the Coast) products.

I'll start with a few homilies (temple sayings) that aren't considered obscene at all, but rather proverbs of the faith:

"A battle-death is a holy ending." [which is why devout worshippers of Tempus salute corpses, burials, and graves with murmurs of, "Holy ending!"]

"Laws are but words until blood is shed for them."

"Men fall, but Tempus rises!" [in older times, this saying was always rendered: "Men fall, but Tempus rides on!"]

"Nothing is truth that has not been tested in battle."

"Peace stands on a sharp sword."

"The sun rises out of blood and sets into blood, and all the time between belongs to the Lord of Battles."

Now, a few 'polite oaths,' that can be used in front of priests, or by one priest to another, without any rebuke or sin at all:

"Blood of the god!" [also uttered as: "Blood of Tempus!"]

"Hooves!" [a reference to the mounts Tempus rides or stands on, Deiros and Veiros, and therefore to the god at work]

"Steel!" [short for "Thirsty steel!" (this longer form is now very rarely heard), and expresses an eager desire to take part in battle]

"Sword and Stars!" [a saying derived from the belief that stars flash to mark the god's approval when a favored attack is made or a champion draws his or her sword for purposes of battle]

"Warhorn!" [short for "Warhorn forlorn!" (a line from a temple hymn about aid arriving too late to save the lives of heroes dying heroically in a 'last stand' because they upheld their duty rather than departing and so saving their lives), and expresses regret at a battle defeat or at poor tactics]

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that resulted in losses because allies or sword-comrades came too late, or went in the wrong direction, or chose opponents or terrain poorly]

"Zelzing!" [a word from an old, now-lost battle song of Tempus, that poetically described the sound of ringing swords in battle; this is now used triumphantly to mark a blow struck, or battle joined, or a foe struck down]

And now, the "hard swearing" indulged in by believers in Tempus who have lost their tempers and let lapse all guard over their tongues. As usual, I've provided modern real-world equivalents in parentheses. Almost all of these words derive from ancient temple cant of the Wargod, now forgotten except for these oaths and a few sacred phrases used in altar prayers.

"Arntarmar!" ("Jesus Christ!"; pronounced "Arn-TAR-mar!") [Arntarmar was a long-ago mortal war-hero who worked wondrous victories in the name of Tempus, and died willingly on a battlefield to allow wounded and children to escape while he singlehandedly held off a vastly more numerous foe in a narrow gorge]

"Caztul!" ("Fuck!"; profane shock or disgust] and pronounced "CAZZ-tuhl")

"Gekkor!" ("Shit!"; pronounced with a hard 'g': "GEL-kore!")

"Harcrimitor!" (akin to shouting: "DIE, motherfucker!" and pronounced: "Har-CRIM-ih-tor")

"Kelstyn!" ("Blast!"; pronounced: "KEL-stinn!")

"Malagard!" ("Well, damn!" [mild surprise or dismay])

"Ralimralar!" (a delighted: "Son of a BITCH!" and pronounced: "RAL-im-RAL-ar!")

"Sakros!" ("Holy crap!" [astonishment, not necessarily bad] and pronounced "SACK-roe-sss")

"Talandor!" ("Bloody hell!"; pronounced: "Tel-an-DOR!")

So saith Ed.

My delicate, ladylike ears are still burning (mostly with the effort of trying to pretend to be more of a lady and less of a wanton slut ;)), so I'll add just this lone example from Realmsplay:

While fighting to defend Shadowdale from one of the innumerable Zhent attacks, a few of we Knights ended up swinging swords alongside a wandering priest of Tempus, a grim and aging man who wore an eyepatch and chainmail adorned all over with welded-on swordtips taken from the weapons of foes he'd slain in battle (embracing him was a rather cutting affair, as I recall :)). When he struck at opponents, he often shouted, "By the bright blood of Thammaera!" or, "By the sweet limbs of Brelindra!" or, "By the proud beauty of Sannandra!"

When we asked him, after the fray, what these phrases meant, he told us he was dedicating this attack or that to lovers he'd had among the clergy of Tempus, who were either dead or now too disabled to fight in the field for the god themselves (Broken Blade), and so could no longer deliver such attacks themselves.

THO

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April 12, 2004: Hello again, gentles. This time, This Hooded Lady brings unto thine eyes Ed's Stonelands reply to Lord Bakra of the Outlying Thread:

Hi, Bakra. Ah, yes, Mr. Bubblejet. I find that my Mr. Printers all work much better when I threaten them, as necessary, with Mr. Hand. :}

Smokepowder: importing this into Cormyr requires a Crown license and a full explanation (to a senior War Wizard, such as Vangerdahast, Laspeera, or one of the six or so mages a single step down from them, plus Alaphondar or a Court clerk) of what the smokepowder is required FOR, where it will be stored, how and how soon it will be used, and so on.

In the case of someone officially trying to conquer the Stonelands, approval will be automatic so long as the Crown is satisfied the smokepowder will be well-guarded enough that it won't immediately fall into Zhent hands.

The interview process will be kept as secret as possible (to keep it from the ears of nobles who might be contemplating treason), and the license may come with any conditions you as DM might want to add (can't take it south of Waymoot, for example, or into Arabel for any reason), and costs 500 gp, which pays for the deployment of two War Wizards (and two Purple Dragon bodyguards/assistants) who become full-time spies watching over the smokepowder in the possession of your PCs.

The precise strength of this 'watch' over the smokepowder won't be shared with the PCs, but they will be warned that selling, giving away, or moving and hiding the smokepowder (particularly if they try to split it up and put small amounts in many places) will result in its confiscation.

What they won't be warned about is that if this confiscation occurs, it will be done by dozens of War Wizards with Purple Dragon bodyguards, all of them acting with alertness, weapon and spell readiness, and ruthlessness in keeping with full "at war" orders.

As for PCs creating their own: anyone trying to become Baron of the Stonelands is already under covert magical surveillance by War Wizards, and if they report the making of more than about a handkeg's volume of smokepowder, the PCs will VERY swiftly receive a visit from an unamused Court official (bolstered by all of the above persons) with a demand for purchase of a license and assumption of all the conditions described above.

Unless confiscating, the Crown takes none of the smokepowder. (However, any authorities who discover stored smokepowder whose ownership is uncertain or denied WILL call in War Wizards to remove or destroy it.)

Lantanna-made clockworks of great complexity are known (but on the mainland of Faerun, mainly as rumors). Many nobles have quite complex toys, clocks, and even water clocks. However, clockwork 'tin soldiers' are another matter, thanks to the severe weather and the tasks a garrison must perform. If the PCs want "dummy soldiers" who can march along the battlements, or move in very simple formations to block an entry arch, lower pikes, and fire (not aim) loaded crossbows, fine. If PCs want to rig a means of replacing the windlass each crossbow requires with a "mass-cranking" mechanism, also fine. If PCs want (very slow) motive power for simple wagons or handcarts (not steering), or a means of helping them load (cart-mounted cranes and winches), fine again. Everything else is going to be beyond the machining competence or maintenance time (all that oiling!) of a lone Lantanna expert. Mechanicals can't run on uneven ground/stairs, use the judgement of living warriors (aiming at a visible foe, for example), react with speed to enemy tactics, or anything of the sort. If the intent is to create 'metal-men' who ape the movements of a human controller (teletactoring), a lot (years!) of spell research will be necessary, and/or a lot of

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space (courtyards and large chambers, not confined passages or small rooms) will be needed for a cluster of rod-and-link driven mechanicals to surround the human operator, and move/act as a unit. As a DM, I'm growing an evil grin at the mere thought of PCs getting themselves into all those tin-soldier headaches...

Mechanicals that sprout from the faces of doors, now, and carry out repeated movements ("threshing blades," or "fire arrow after arrow in repeating high-medium-low, high-medium-low spray fire patterns down a passage"), YES, these are quite practical. And deadly. Now my grin is changing.

So saith Ed.

And having seen that grin in person, I'm shivering.
THO

April 13, 2004: 'Lo, all. Thy Hooded Lady, presenting once more the words of Ed:

Hi, fourthmensch. Certainly I can explain. Sune and Sharess (and therefore, in almost all cases, their churches, too) wouldn't care about the married or unmarried state of persons indulging in lustful practises. Wherefore performing such short-term marriages wouldn't be clerical policy for them (except perhaps to indulge wanton faithful desiring the thrill of turning a marriage ceremony into debauchery).

However, the clergy of Siamorphe, representing a deity catering to the nobility, are concerned both with being popular/useful to nobles, AND safeguarding the rights, privileges, and powers of nobles. Bastard children, loss of virginity, and so-called "immoral" behaviour are matters far more important to noble families than to the general populace.

So legitimate but very-short-term marriages allow nobles to ah, enjoy other nobles (or commoners) whilst at the same time protecting the rights, status, and wealth of the participants and their families.

For example, a commoner female (or her family) can't easily later demand monies or other compensation from a noble male, in return for her lost maidenhead, when she willingly (the clergy will attest to this, for they test for it, with witnesses and spells) participated in a known-to-be-dusk-until-dawn marriage.

In like manner, a noble female can experience the joys of lusty male partners without said partners gaining any claim to becoming part of her family (so she can, er, taste dung sweepers instead of restricting herself to any chinless foolheaded fops who happen to be noble).

And so on. A father can promise his daughter in marriage to anyone who can slay the Dread Beast Barthos or recover the Lost Sacred Silver Apple without blindly binding his family to an evil, grasping lout or sacrificing her future and lifelong happiness -- because she can be shrouded in disease-averting, ironguard, and healing spells for a night and just put up with things for the one night. Elder nobles who don't want to share their fortunes or sacrifice their freedom can indulge in brief flings without sacrificing respectability (remember, in most places in the Realms no one deity is paramount [Lantan, with Gond, would be one of the exceptions], so the moral code of no one deity can dominate; whereas in our real world North America Christianity dominates and decides what's "respectable" or not, in the Realms all of the gods have rightful standing, so as ridiculous/insincere/overly convenient as a church-legitimized one-night stand might seem to us,

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it's not viewed that way by the majority of Faerunians...individuals who cleave to this god or that may sneer or deride or be scandalized, but would have a much harder time than many of our real-world fanatics do in gathering popular support for their personal views).

I must preface my answer to your second question with a gentle suggestion (please understand I'm not trying to be critical here) that your question to me, as phrased, betrays a North American Christian-dominated viewpoint. You speak of people "in serious relationships sowing some serious oats" as "lax mores."

Though I agree that in general the Realms does follow rather romanticized courtly love-plus-feminine-equality values (or at least, that's what I designed it to have), neither I nor the nigh-immortal [not everyone, notice, just the Chosen and other live-for-many-centuries folks, and nobles and royalty who consider themselves 'above' laws and social rules, or to be the people who set such laws and rules] fictional Realms characters I've created view "sleeping with" people as being incompatible with having deep, committed relationships with someone else. So they don't see it as "lax" at all (and by the way, neither did a LOT of real-world American people of a certain generation, during the 1960s/Woodstock generation -- making love to Person A was seen as having nothing at all to do with being life-bonded to Person B).

Yes, The Simbul and Elminster DO love each other. Deeply. Yet neither of them would define faithfulness to the other as having anything at all to do with sex. So, yes, "swinging" between committed or married couples isn't seen as Bad by a lot of Faerunians, in many places and situations (though among most citizens across the Realms, it would be).

[It's fashionable among some noble classes and a LOT of "wannabe noble" rich, rising merchants, and frowned upon in places with small, stable populations where warfare or monster predations haven't forced folk into desperate survival measures (telescoping survivors down into a single extended family of multiple husbands and wives, for example).]

I make no apology for this mental separation between love and lust. Outliving lover after lover, family after family, (many of) your own children, realm after realm, and so on will do that to you. You grab physical love when you can, and search for long-term partners with a desperate hunger.

Or at least, that's how I've chosen to define the effects of lonely longevity on persons trying (and usually failing) to remain sane. If I was publishing the "uncensored" Realms, in fiction, most of my liches would be desperate to have physical relations with adventurers, not kill them. Think about it.

I'm well aware that many gamers, reviewers, academics, and persons with only a casual understanding of fantasy roleplaying games have labeled me as some sort of pervert or (at best) immoral "dirty old man" for holding such views (strange, that 'old' bit, considering I was examining these issues and settling on this particular viewpoint when I was about fourteen), and of course the shortage of centuries-old real-world people to examine makes the point moot, but I'd like more folks to consider that situation and come up with alternative desires and drives that might dominate such long-lived characters (pure power is one, striving for immortality at the cost of humanity through undeath is another the game rules present to us).

Interesting, yes? The Realms has many such 'deep waters' places, awaiting those who question deeply enough.

So saith Ed.

Whew.

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THO

April 14, 2004: Well met, everyone. The Hooded One here again, with Ed's replies:

Hello. A lot of collective replies this time:

First, to TheHermit: yes, I've been basically a D&D/fantasy roleplayer down the years, but I've also played in Cthulhu campaigns, Shadowrun, Top Secret, Metamorphosis Alpha, Gamma World, various steampunk settings, Featherstone-style "map-moving and playing the parts of generals, with tabletop miniature battles whenever armies meet" campaigns in both real-world historical settings and fictitious rapier-and-blunderbuss European kingdoms -- and of course scores of TSR-related playtests, and even more boardgame "campaigns."

SiriusBlack, the cover can be viewed at:

<http://images.epilogue.net/users/vengince/ELminsterD.JPG>

and is part of a "gallery" on display there. What you can glean from that is as much as I know about the artist. :}

The book provides a "passing look at" Alusair and the overarching politics of Cormyr, "checking in" as it were, rather than being a full-blown Cormyr book (as Dargoth was hinting/hoping). As for relieving stress [bats eyelashes in feminine manner] why, whatever do you mean? [More serious answer: you'll see at least one interesting scene showing something of how Alusair has grown and changed thanks to the demands of the job, but not so much of her traditional stress-relief techniques. :] Oh, wait, there IS one scene at a hunting-lodge . . .

[But wait, there's more! Keep reading what directly follows, SiriusBlack :}]

Dargoth, as aforementioned (and as kuje31 conjectured), ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER is the fifth Elminster book, but designed to be a quick cross-check with unfolding events in Cormyr. I think Peter Archer and Phil Athans might rightfully go berserk if I mess up their series lists and charts any more than I have already. :}

But yes, if I was running Wizards, the book would officially be both. Draws more of an audience, pleases fans of Cormyr who must be wondering by now when they'll get fiction set in their kingdom that doesn't half-destroy the place, and so on.

I can say that you'll get to see something of Vangerdahast's retirement, an update on a character last seen in one of the flashbacks in ELMINSTER IN HELL, something draconic (being as Richard Lee Byers is bringing us some great dragon-wild books, right now!), a little more about the Lady Lord of Arabel, a wild chase scene involving not-so-secret agent Rhauligan, Alusair and Caladnei and Filfaeril (!) in battle, and two engagingly bumbling villains I hope we can all meet again.

ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER is straightforward chronological storytelling (though we do, of course, jump from one setting and character to another), is crafted to be a bit of a romp, is a catch-up-with-some-neglected-characters book, and also introduces some new characters for Realms writers, DMs, and game designers to play with. And all this for the price of dinner for one at a decent restaurant. :}

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As for your article suggestion on morality of the different faiths, yes it could make for a very useful overview, with two caveats:

-- any survey of religious beliefs must necessarily be a 'snapshot' of a moving target: church policies are always subtly changing, and sometimes (post-Time of Troubles is a very good example) dramatically altering

-- this entire field of discourse has been rejected by DRAGON editors and TSR editors more times down the years than I can count, no matter how politely and obliquely I promised to word things (and of course, the more vague and euphemistic the prose, the less useful the end result can be), so I don't think it'll ever happen. I once discussed the idea very briefly with Lorraine Williams, head of TSR at the time (doing "adult" material, in the same way that Disney can put movies on screens via Touchstone Pictures that didn't reflect on the "wholesome animation for kids" Disney was then, pre-Pixar, known for), and she was very much afraid that 'the public would find out' and it would reflect poorly on TSR. There were later plans for an adult line, but it was cancelled. (Please understand here that "adult" doesn't only mean 'more sex or at least more skin and sizzle' . . . it meant the brutal gunslinging, drug use, other vices, and so on covered by d20 Modern right now.)

So saith Ed.

Who is busybusybusy in various Waterdhavian locations rights now.
THO

April 16, 2004: Fair greeting, scribes! Thy Hooded Lady riding in once more, with the latest from Ed:

Lashan, I'm still at work on your last few Tantras requests, and I will get to the oaths of Tyr, etc. in due time (meaning: when my taxes are in [April 30 deadline up here in Canada] and the first draft of Waterdeep is done).

Wooly Rupert, glad you're a Glarasteer Rhauligan fan. I've lots more to delve into, if I get the chance, regarding the man who's my favourite turret top salesman, too. For one thing, I've GOT to do a trade fair scene wherein discerning nobles and glitterpockets (merchants burning to spend their coins) inspect the exhibits of various salesmen of turret tops, drawbridges, scented-flush garderobes, roll-apart circular beds with secret treasure compartments, animated statues, and similar luxuries. Somewhere, somewhen . . .

Bruce, Sememmon and Ashemi are characters I should say no more about, just now, other than to agree that we've neglected them in print, yes. (My, I'm such a subtle hinter . . . :)

Dargoth, now be NICE. :) Phil Athans plotted Tilverton's downfall, not Troy. Troy did kill off The Lords Who Sleep, a lot of Obarskyrs, and a lot more nobles and Purple Dragons, but I got called in to help him do it, so my hands are bloodstained too. At least we avoided a long-ago internal TSR plan to smash Cormyr because it was considered way too happy and King Arthur-ish a place, and there should be no such tranquil refuges in the Realms. I'm still chuckling over that one, and recall that as I handed in STORMLIGHT, I asked the Books people to hand a copy of the MS to the designer (no, I'm NOT going to reveal who it was) who described the Forest Kingdom as a "tranquil refuge," and force him to read it. Tranquil my left buttock.

As for the article: perhaps the chance is better now. We'll see. :)

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I hope you'll enjoy ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. As I said, it's romp time again. The usual critics will no doubt have the usual cavils about my writing, but hey, relax and enjoy the FUN. I often think the problem with reactions to many Realms novels is akin to folks watching a James Bond flick and saying, "Tsk, tsk: there wasn't much slow, subtle character interaction or development."

I think a Leather Bound Wonderproduct would be just DANDY for 2006: could you please suggest to the presidents of Wizards of the Coast AND Hasbro, right away? :}

Rather than update the FRCS, I'd like to collect everything we couldn't fit into the FRCS, including web columns (e.g. my Realmslore pieces) and the various web enhancements, all suitably updated to 3.5, and add a nice deep layer of yummy icing in the form of some new Volo Guide material. However, I'm not holding my breath that we'll see any such thing. I WILL say that I'd love to be a part of anything we do to mark the longevity of the Realms, though for me it started in 1967, and for TSR it first appeared in 1979 in DRAGON, so a 25th anniversary is something of a 'moveable feast.'

SiriusBlack, if real-world issues like time and money and agents and publishing schedules didn't combine to hamper things, I'd be perfectly happy if Wizards of the Coast paid me a living wage for the rest of my life to just go on churning out Realms novels, about one every six months, for the rest of my life (and of course I hope that life is a long one, not a few months of emptying my brains onto pages and then expiring :}). I'd like every Realms fan to be eagerly awaiting the next book, because then I could spend all my mental time 'in the Realms,' checking in on this or that character. Even after all these years, there's SO much I haven't been able to even mention about the Realms yet. (And NPCs are starting to have kids and I'm another generation behind! Aaaaargh!)

Lady Kazandra, well met! An honour! I believe Elminster experimented with smoking in his youth, but took it up in earnest when consorting with dwarves and halflings in Myth Drannor. I'm not sure exactly when he gained the Eversmoking Pipe. It was some centuries later (after the events recounted in THE TEMPTATION OF ELMINSTER, I believe), but I'll have to look into this in depth. Perhaps in a short story. :}

Krafus, I've no idea what a full muster of humanoids would be in the Sword Coast North at any given time, even if such a thing were possible. Millions, certainly. The whole point of orc hordes is that they CAN'T sustain themselves: orcs are fecund, overpopulation leads to overcrowding in the northern mountain caverns and starvation, and charismatic leaders arise to lead a pillaging and foraging army south to GET food.

What happened to Sundabar? Several hordes stopped by, plus severe winters and disease, plus some of the strife recounted in various Realms novels and game products -- all of these caused deaths and migrations to "friendlier" Silverymoon and warmer, more southerly locations.

So saith Ed.

Who'll have more to say very soon.
THO

April 16, 2004: Well met again, all. Thy Hooded Lady, with Ed's latest:

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Karth, I enjoy the early, seminal short-story Heinlein (The Roads Must Roll, Misfit, etc.), the juvenile-novels Heinlein (Red Planet, Farmer In The Sky, Tunnel In The Sky, etc.), the all-too-often forgotten fantasy Heinlein (Glory Road), the brilliant Heinlein (Orphans of the Stars), and the later, self-indulgent Heinlein (Friday, The Number of the Beast, The Cat Who Walks Through Walls, To Sail Beyond The Sunset). I must say that the Long family books are among my least favourites, because I'm completely disinterested in interpersonal power games played along American military discipline lines or gender lines, but I enjoy examining RAH's various 'takes' on altered people, characters with increased longevity, and so on. (BTW, following on the heels of the publication of Heinlein's "lost" first novel, Spider Robinson will be completing an unfinished early Heinlein from notes and an outline).

Although it's considered fashionable in many quarters to sneer at Heinlein, these days, I consider his early short stories and some of his early novels to be enduring classics of the field, and almost every one of them increased the horizons of what sf was at the time. His juveniles (YA or teen novels, they'd be termed today) were vitally important in 'hooking' an entire generation of readers into sf, many of whom became important sf writers. His later books (particularly those before his brain surgery) became increasingly long and rambling, but all of them have both fun moments and intriguing examinations of social ideas (whereas the early short stories more often examined scientific cutting-edge ideas).

Heinlein likes to show us his near-immortals in family situations, so he can compare and contrast his characters, and we can watch them bouncing off each other. By the time he was writing books about Lazarus Long and the rest, he had more or less complete freedom in what he wrote about (only light editorial hands were going to touch his work).

I've never yet really had that freedom of style, length, and topic -- and in my Realms fiction, I haven't had the opportunity to examine the Seven Sisters as a 'family,' or really go into much depth about their attitudes -- beyond here-and-right-now problems and their current romances. I've managed to sneak in a lot of Elminster's philosophy, in the form of little quotations and bon mots down the years, but SILVERFALL and a few moments in this year's Spin A Yarn tale (Only a Woman . . .) are about the extent of Sister-to-Sister interaction.

I'd love to delve into this more, but on the other hand, the more I "paint in" about the Chosen, the harder it is for other writers to use them (and believe me, some writers ARE hard at work right now on some uses of those characters. So I guess the best way to sum it all up is that: I don't personally agree with some of the attitudes expressed by Heinlein's "Methuselahs," I'm not sure we readers can be sure all of them were always telling the truth at every moment in his fiction -- and I haven't yet had the chance to properly lay out the attitudes and actions of my various near-immortals enough for us to compare them properly.

Here we come to an important difference between RAH and Ed Greenwood [yes, besides a vast difference in literary quality :}): RAH is writing finished fiction, that (in his mind as he's writing it) is never going to have to serve as an unfolding, flexible roleplaying game setting. (Yes, I know there was a Crossroads solitaire game book based on Glory Road, but let's leave that aside.) I have to keep in mind that for the Realms to stay 'alive,' I have to keep some mysteries clinging to the major characters, and allow them to change, grow, and us to continue having revelations about them as the years (and game products, and play sessions in your campaigns) pass. So I tend to want to reveal more slowly, to keep things interesting (in the same way that the old art of burlesque striptease can be far more compelling than a person quickly and unglamorously shucking off their clothes, even if in the end you see more).

I can say that a lot of RAH's characters seem to value their personal freedoms above everything else (including love, stable relationships, etc.), whereas I usually see "true love" as transcending

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all else, and folks not only dying for a loved one, but devoting their lives to the happiness of someone else over their own (one of the best definitions of love I know). RAH was all too apt to construct situations in which Character X can most love Character Y by 'opening the eyes' of beloved Y to see and do things Character X's way, because it's right. I've never been so confident of what "right" is.

So saith Ed.

BTW, thanks to Number of the Beast, my nickname was Gay Deceiver for a time (and no, Heinlein wasn't using "Gay" in the modern sexual-preference sense). Sorry, fellow gals.
THO

April 16, 2004: 'Lo, everyone. The Hooded One once more, with more of Ed's words to inquiring scribes:

simontrinity, I'd love to say a lot about Dove and Florin's relationship, but that's another topic that saying too much about may well hamper/damage a future Realms project. So let me just tiptoe through some abbreviated answers, okay?

Florin had rescued Dove twice before receiving his orders from Mielikki, so they did know each other, and were well on the road to becoming very friendly. (Florin knew she was a Harper agent, and had willingly undergone degradation and Zhent captivity to learn things -- and respected her for it.) Yet at the time Florin was reluctant to marry anyone. Obviously, Dove accepted because Mystra ordered her to (suggesting an as-yet-unrevealed destiny for their offspring, and a mysterious agreement between the two goddesses).

I can say that Mielikki's avatar personally made love to Florin while giving him his orders, and this rapturous experience augmented his knowledge and changed him forever, turning him from reluctant to marry, to eager to become Dove's partner.

I think Dove saw Florin as a handsome, desirable, noble-of-character man she'd love to become intimate with and to befriend (knowing she'd see him get killed or grow old and die, leaving her lonely again) before Mystra spoke with her -- and then saw him as someone marked (changed) by the gods as she is, and so a fitting mate.

The two of them have teleport rings that allow them to "jump" to or from Evermeet whenever desired, and they (and their child) have the 'liberty' of that realm: they are free to visit and depart as they see fit [a status VERY few humans enjoy]. Dove spent much time on Evermeet giving birth and raising their infant child, but rarely visits there now (her duties as a Chosen keep her very busy).

They have a happy marriage, and love each other deeply, but are neither given to public displays of affection nor are inseparable: both spend long periods of time apart, 'doing their own thing.' Both are Harpers, and both enjoy some sort of limited mental link (like back and forth sending spells, but becoming a true telepathic link only on occasions of great pain or emotion) while on the same plane.

So saith Ed.

I believe he'll have more to say soon. For my part, from Realmsplay experiences in the 'home' Realms campaign, I can add this much: Dove and Florin 'think alike' enough to work as a

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seamless team in battle and in certain playacting negotiations (e.g. with Zhents, Cormyrean officials, Waterdeep City Watchmen, and so on), and take delight in entertaining each other with mimicry of others (in private only; they'd never dream of doing so in front of witnesses who weren't fellow Harpers, Chosen, or Knights of Myth Drannor -- and NO, I'm NOT saying Florin is himself a Chosen of Mystra, okay?).

THO

April 16, 2004: 'Lo, all. Thy Hooded Lady again, bringing more words of Ed:

Hi, Josh. I think Faraer has done his usual superb job of guiding you about writing. If I were you, I'd not mention your epilepsy in any initial contact or covering letter, though your agent should know about it right up front, and you shouldn't hesitate to tell any editor who's working on your prose about it (particularly if they take you to task for not fixing something correctly that they've asked you to).

However, like it or not, unless you happen to be stunningly famous or infamous, you will be judged by editors on the quality of the writing you put before them. Almost all of them won't care if you have epilepsy, ingrown toenails, or webbed feet: they just go by the writing. Their job is to procure or develop the best writing they can, within their time and budget constraints.

It IS possible to educate yourself, purely by reading writers who do have impeccable grammar and spelling, to "spot" bad writing or glitches even if you don't know exactly what's wrong, and have never had formal grammatical training (quick, everyone, what's a gerund? how exactly does one split an infinitive? and why do teachers teach people not to start sentences with 'and'? :}). Granted, many of these writers are English and of earlier generations (and that will land you in spelling trouble with American editors). Even if you never get formal grammar training, a thorough grounding in classic writers (Kipling, Wodehouse, Dunsany, Churchill) will give you a 'feel' for style, pacing, and elegant phrasing. Obviously most of their writings aren't in anything approaching a current style, but examples of current writers you can admire, or learn what NOT to do from, abound in any library, if nowhere else handy.

I can tell you that many individuals from an entire generation (and heading into a second generation) of teachers, journalists, and, yes, professional editors in North America seemingly managed to get through school without ever learning proper grammar--and we can all read the results, every day. That's not to say there aren't outstanding individuals as editors, in both "guiding the story" sense and in line copyediting (fixing the spelling, grammar, tenses, and writers using the wrong words). I've run into both--including one copyeditor (who shall remain forever nameless) whose marginal notes in my manuscript were full of misspellings and "there/their/they're" mistakes, who didn't know that "presently" DOESN'T mean "at present," and who accused me of inventing the following words (to pick just a few out of a long, long list that presumably weren't in her Cat In The Hat Dictionary): anklet, archaic, battlements, destrier, ere, evoke, glean, helm, merlons, paralyzation, pectoral, portcullis . . . well, that's enough. The Hooded One is a part-time book editor, and can say more if she desires to.

So saith Ed.

I can spout horror stories for pages, Josh, but between Faraer and Ed, they've covered things thoroughly. Tell your story simply, vividly, and quickly. Save the flowery stuff for after you can tell a good tale. How do you know if you're telling a good tale?

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Turn on a tape recorder, and tell a story to a friend over the phone, about something that happened in real life. Or pretend you're at camp, telling a campfire ghost story. Try telling it several times.

Then listen to the tape. Did you describe settings and characters vividly enough to get someone else to imagine them vividly, do you think?

If you're not sure, get a friend to tape a brief story about a party or some incident at school that in part involves some people or rooms or places you're NOT familiar with. Listen to the tape. Did your friend describe things well enough that you can picture them-but avoided bogging down in details and description?

Try writing THAT simply. You can "dress up the skeleton" later. Get the story done, beginning to end. Then it'll be easy to add little baubles, here and there, like putting ornaments on a Christmas tree. Trust me.

THO

April 16, 2004: Peace to all! Beneath this hood I pretend to be a lady (from time to time), and in this guise step forth once more to present the words of Ed:

Hi, thom. Re. the oaths and the mysteries: hey, you're quite welcome! Great to hear I've been a part of corruptXXX er, helping new roleplayers! :}

Yes, there are some useful Realms drugs not yet really detailed. I'm not going to do 3.5e hard stat rules for anything here. That's more properly the province of Wizards of the Coast writers, working in the pages, physical and web, of WotC products.

I'll just briefly list a few known drugs. Most of these are secret-recipe mixtures of herbal distillations, plant saps, and animal secretions. They have no real-world inspirations or counterparts.

Alindluth ("AL-inn-dluth"): (ingested) Deadens all pain (prevents shock, nausea effects) for a few minutes. No known side-effects, but if used too soon after first exposure (or in too large a dose; dosages vary by body volume and weight), induces short-duration coma.

Chaunsel ("SHAWN-sell"): (bare skin contact) makes affected area VERY sensitive for short durations (up to about twenty minutes maximum). Often used by thieves or others working in darkness, on fingertips, to make them able to feel tiny details, seams, etc. Also used in festhalls or by wealthy lovers to increase sensations of pleasure-and by torturers to increase feelings of pain. Too much sensation usually causes fainting; revival plus repeated sensory overload (through pain or pleasure, not by chaunsel overdose) will bring on a coma lasting hours. Overdose causes days of numbness in affected area.

Tansabra ("TAN-sab-rah"): (injected, must reach bloodstream) Causes complete 'system shutdown' in mammals (humans, demi-humans, humanoids): breathing is suspended, body temperature 'holds,' need for oxygen ceases, bleeding stops, any internal bleeding and tearing ceases unless fresh wounds are induced, acids and toxins suspend operations, consciousness ceases. In effect, the body is placed in stasis. Usually used on persons near death, because they are rendered helpless, and remain that way for 4d6 days, emerging from that state suddenly and without warning. Certain little-known arcane and divine spells can force release from "tansabra sleep," and there are rumors that certain rare gem powders and/or herbs can "shock" someone

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out of tansabra sleep, but otherwise, an affected being emerges from the effects of tansabra at a random time.

Creatures in tansabra sleep don't heal naturally, and magical healing doesn't affect them-but of course they can be conveyed to magical healing while in thrall to the tansabra, and healed the moment they 'awaken.'

Repeated exposures to tansabra kill individuals, but how much exposure is lethal varies randomly from being to being (volume of tansabra doesn't matter; it's number of distinct times the body undergoes its effects). Tansabra is a mixture of particular creature venoms.

Vornduir ("Vorn-DOO-er"): (inhaled powder) This drug varies widely in effects. To many people, it does nothing at all. Others get mild rashes and itches. For a few, it 'switches' pain and pleasure for an hour or two (so a gentle caress brings excruciating burning/ripping pain, and a slap or flogging or heavy punch or cutting wound can induce orgasm), and for others, it makes them feel warm (even if wet and/or naked and/or out of doors in freezing temperatures) and happy and alert (for two days or more, sleep isn't needed and dexterity and judgement don't suffer due to weariness). Vornduir prevents shock and immobility due to exposure, but not frostbite or lowered body temperature (so a vornduir user won't get hypothermic, but could freeze solid). Vornduir is a mixture of herbs and animal essences, and also acts as a "complete and instant" antidote to certain poisons-for some individuals only!

So saith Ed.

And you're quite welcome, thom. Secret languages at school; THAT brings back memories. Three female friends and I used to get quite "hot" openly saying to each other that we were going to make love to our boyfriends at this or that time, in front of teachers-because our own 'secret language' was subtle enough that the words we used had legitimate everyday meanings, too. The teachers could tell that more was being said than the words normally suggest, but never asked. The thrill, for us (we were very young, okay?) was that we'd made a pact that we'd truthfully and fully answer any teacher who did ask.

Oh, I'm so BAD.

As for your question about breaking up drug cartels: not specifically. Ed's Zhents and certain Waterdhavian gangs smuggled drugs and (to avoid taxes) perfumes and wines, and we certainly beat up on them often enough-but we were more interested in stopping their slave-trading, murders, blackmail, extortion, kidnapping, and intended regicide activities. :}

THO

On April 24, 2004 THO said: Hello, all. Ed's still tied up (well, not literally...yet) with the novel, though I understand his taxes (must do wife's too, because in Canada the greedXXX all-wise government connects all household incomes) are just finished.

However, I have been copying ALL comments here and forwarding them to his ever-bulging e-mail inbox, and feel moved to quickly provide a few of the easier answers.

To Faraer: beautifully apt quotation you posted (Ed's sentiments as well as mine). He will get to your timely Knights queries, and I can add this: talis was originally a Dragonlance game. Ed has invented at least six card and board games for the Realms (e.g. Shirestone for the halflings), and

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handed them to DRAGON and the TSR designers, but they've never been published. Perhaps someday.

The single and double quotations I can speak to, as a Canadian-born and -trained editor. This is actually inherited from Britain, of the 'old Scottish Presbyterian' editing school: single quotes are used in two instances: to denote a quotation within a quotation (the 'field' quotation already being denoted with double quotation marks), and as I've just used it here: to mark a cliché or invented term or colloquial naming. For instance, if I know that yonder cow is properly called a Shorthorn, by breed, but is being temporarily labelled as part of a subset such as 'breeders' or 'first ship' or something of the sort, that colloquial term is marked with single quotes.

A dying usage, but (in academic writings in particular) a sometimes necessary, often useful one. Ed was, after all, the first writer to ever submit an article to DRAGON (the gates piece, in TD #37) that had footnotes.

On April 24, 2004 THO said: Thy Hooded Lady once more, with a few quick answers during The Silence of Ed:

Rick, yes, I'm familiar with that painting, and I know Ed (who knows Larry, of course, and collects a lot of his work) has a print of it. Probably scant consolation during tax calculations, however...

Gareth, Ed has never applied to WotC for work (THEY offered HIM a consulting contract, I believe), but I know the industry is flooded right now with freelancers who used to be on staff at TSR, WotC, WizKids, and other firms that have 'imploded' (shed a lot of staff in a short time), so it will probably be hard to make an impact. The traditional 'way in' (which worked for Ed, back in 1979) is to get published in DRAGON and impress people. As for starting your own sub-line or division of Wizards: no, won't happen. Not unless you rise to become Hasbro brass or at least a WotC vice-president first.

April 28, 2004: Hello, all. Ed apologizes for his continuing silence: he's still up to eyebrows and then some in getting the Waterdeep novel "done" and in preparing for his signing tour (Elminster's Daughter: out very soon now, and his next Aglirta book from TOR, The Silent House, in mid-June).

He did, however, want me to pass on two things: chariots are known but uncommon in the Realms because they work best on dry, hard, flat roads, and mire very easily in mud. So within a Calishite or Old Empires or more southerly city, yes, but elsewhere: not so often seen. Outside cities, most folks either walk, ride, or want to haul more weight than a chariot can, and so end up with some sort of cart or wagon.

Regarding kuje31 and the request to host Ed's ramblings: he feels it would be best to share Realmslore as widely as possible, so by all means share it. He intends to continue posting here, through me, and doesn't want anyone to be upset, legally or otherwise. In his words, "By all means hand it to the WizO's . . . or ask them to link to it, if you prefer. I just want Realms fans to have continued access to Realmslore, however we can do that."

Fare thee well for now,
THO

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April 28, 2004: Hello, everyone. This is by way of being Ed's reply to kuje31 re. germs, diseases, and hygiene:

Most civilized people in the Realms know that disease transferral works "sorta like this for shaking fever, like that for blacktongue," and so on. They disagree on treatments (aside from rest, care, bathing and purgatives, careful feeding of observed specifics), except for remembering what worked for them and their friends. The reasons for these disagreements are the various churches, most of whom are doing their level best to keep influence and control (and a continuing flow of coins for healings) by spreading misinformation (at the lower ranks, usually unwittingly) as to exactly how this or that disease is best treated--and these (as with real-world doctors) turn into heated professional disagreements. "Bad hygiene" for the Realms means wash hair every four days or so and before special occasions, bathe "smelly areas" every night if possible, scented oil plus sand-scrub when bathing impossible...not reeking, filthy bodies, okay?

Thus saith Ed.

Your Hooded Lady must go now...

On April 29, 2004 THO said: Ah, yes...I was Elminster's Stunt Double.

Gareth, Ed has been asked at least twice to write scripts for a Realms movie (on spec, in his free time). Being as he has to hack out "free time" with a pickaxe, no script has happened yet. Me, I just want to see HIM play Elminster on the silver screen...as long as I get to be Storm (giggles, thrusts out hip, bats eyelashes and probably something else). Of course, if they insist on restricting us non-pros to tiny supporting roles, I suppose I could be a passing priestess of Loviatar.

I'll try to get Ed's latest tour schedule update, but I can confirm that this coming weekend, the first Saturday and Sunday in May, he'll be a special guest at the Great Canadian Baycon (a gaming convention held at the Hamilton Convention Centre in Hamilton, Ontario). The con has an admission charge, there's a website you should be able to find with a simple Google search, and Ed will be appearing 11-3 on Sat and 11-2 on Sunday (insider tip: Ed has to drive over a 150 miles through TERRIBLE commuter traffic to reach this place, so he may be a LITTLE late, each day).

THO

On April 30, 2004 THO said: Malaug, Ed toured Melbourne in 1994 (on a 5-week jaunt arranged and hosted by the legendary "Uncle" Wes Nicholson), and loved it. He's not sure when he'll next have time and money enough to visit again.

He can, however, start to answer some of your questions through me. First, Bakra's answer to you re. Tiamat is right on.

Second, Elminster raised SOME of the Seven Sisters, not all of them, and their full identities and roster was kept secret from him by Mystra for some centuries. He also lost touch with a lot of them later (again, Mystra's doing: she NEEDED them to be independent, not "Uncle Elminster's little gals"), and in some cases didn't know who they were in his first contacts with their 'new'

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selves. Ed has plans to someday write more fiction about their rearing, if he can arrange it with the good folks in Book Publishing at Wizards (and the same goes for the two male Harpers of the Wizards Three, B and I :}).

Ciao for now, scribes!
THO

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