

So saith Ed

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

Part 11

Jul - Sep 2006

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July 1, 2006: Hello again, all.

Great questions, Miri-Jala! I'll hurl them in Ed's direction right away...

Halaster Blackcloak recently posted: "I had two questions for Ed. First, where did the inspiration for Halaster Blackcloak and Undermountain come from? Ruins of Undermountain is my all time favorite game accessory/adventure and I was curious as to where it all originated. On a side note, I came across an old episode of Night Gallery (the Rod Serling tv show from the 70's) titled "Messiah on Mott Street", and it features an actor who would be perfect to play Halaster in a movie. Here is a not-so-great screen cap with Halaster's image from RoU mixed in:

<http://users4.ev1.net/~dormammu/halaster-movie-color2.jpg>

I thought he'd make a great Halaster.

Second question, where did the inspiration for Szass Tam come from? Again, I found a movie that features a character that's stunningly similar in appearance:

<http://users4.ev1.net/~dormammu/szass-tam3.jpg>

Thanks Ed, for all the help and for giving us the Realms!"

Ed replies:

Undermountain was inspired (circa 1967) by reading Tolkien, and thinking, "What a cool environment - - but what if it were RIGHT UNDERNEATH a crowded, bustling all-races crossroads trading city?" So I set about thinking about how the city-dwellers would "use" such spaces, if they knew about them (and of course, how the under-dwellers would "use" the city and its populace). When D&D came along, a little later (1974, but general release and my first taste of it: 1975), lots of Tolkien-inspired dungeons were part of it (see the original booklets for why), and the gamers of that day had magic shops, resupply areas, and the like down in their "endless dungeons." I thought most of those touches were jarringly unrealistic, more "modern-world-obstacle-course/game-show" than anything that could possibly be consistent with the fantasy settings, so I did some hard thinking about how various races (and prowling monsters) would dwell in a large subterranean labyrinth (where does food come from? where do they poop? if they travel about in such a dangerous environment, where and WHY?).

Now, if the city above had been around for centuries, and city-dwellers were going down exploring (via the Yawning Portal, etc.) from time to time, surely all the traps would already have been sprung, monsters slain, and dangerous challenges blasted away by the fireballs and suchlike of long-ago mages. No? Well, then, someone or something would have to be creeping around "resetting" and restocking and renewing them. A lot of those traps were magical, so that someone should be a powerful mage (also handy in capturing, compelling, and transporting dangerous monsters). Okay, so WHY would someone so powerful do this - - instead of forcing world peace upon the Realms, or making everything blue, or (ahem) conquering the city above long ago?

Well, he must be mad, of course. :}

Hence, Halaster: he's unpredictable - - there's no telling WHAT he may do. So he won't automatically regard adventurers who kill his monsters, take the treasures (and again, he must be

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mad if he hasn't glommed onto all that magic and riches for himself, right?), and smash all his best traps as his foes. Sometimes he will, for short periods, but not for long or consistently (otherwise, it would be Halaster versus adventurers, equals no more adventurers). I then turned to thinking about WHY Halaster is the way he is, why he's so tied to Undermountain, and so on (Halaster was around in my stories in 1967, but it wasn't until 1976 or so that I started delving into these matters). In the published Realms, Steven Schend picked up on Halaster's life, sanity, nature, and powers, and developed him a lot farther.

So that's the "short version" of how I came up with Undermountain and Halaster.

The RUINS OF UNDERMOUNTAIN accessory has my (edited for brevity and game rules content) original keys to the area around the shaft down from the Yawning Portal, mated to an old Empire of the Petal Throne home-campaign map that the late Dave Sutherland (then of TSR's mapping department) had lying around, so as to save time on redrawing my many, many levels of faded pencil maps and cramped, tiny, wandering-all-over-the-pages keys to Undermountain's many, many levels and sub-levels. So you've only seen a tiny, tiny bit of my original Undermountain - - but the Realms and D&D have both "grown away" from conditions back then, so if you see more of it, you'll almost certainly be looking at newly-generated material (perhaps loosely based on my fading-into-the-past original).

So saith Ed.

To avoid running into the post-length-limit, I've chopped his Szass Tam answer, and will post it on the morrow.

love to all,
THO

July 2, 2006: Hi again, scribes. As promised, here's Ed's reply to Halaster Blackcloak's question: "... where did the inspiration for Szass Tam come from? Again, I found a movie that features a character that's stunningly similar in appearance..."

Ed replies:

Szass Tam first "really" fell into my forebrain in a story I wrote in 1977, though his name and the idea he was a mighty powerful mage dwelling somewhere in the east, who had something to do with undead, were floating around in my Realms writings a decade earlier.

In that tale, I made him undead himself, and the most "interested in the lands of the west" of the zulkirs (or "zulkiirs") who ruled Thay. Thay was my Orient, or as close as the Realms was going to get to it: NOT Oriental human subraces, but rather a warm-climate, dusty-part-desert old and decadent slave empire ruled by people who had mastered powerful magic, shaved their heads (think: Moondragon of Marvel Comics fame), and were cruel by western standards. There was a power struggle of sorts between royalty and nobility on one hand, and these magic-strong zulkirs on the other, with tharchions (and tharchionesses) being regional governors that in the old days were "patronage appointments" given to nobles by reigning royalty, and that were increasingly being seized by zulkirs and filled by themselves or their (militarily capable, ruthless) appointees. Szass Tam was a bit of a restless maverick among the zulkirs, so to stay on top against BOTH his fellow zulkirs and the royalty, he'd have to be super-powerful, and a man who'd been anticipating attacks and treacheries for centuries and preparing for them: he always had a Plan B

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and C, and X, Y, and Z, all of which he could shift like puzzle pieces to respond to any threat and deflect or shatter it (usually deflect it so as to harm a rival).

Like Larloch, ideally he would never feature directly in play - - because he would watch adventurers and others, and respond through layers of intermediaries so his own involvement would usually never be proven or traced (it could be rumored or suspected, but no more than that).

I'm afraid my dial-up rural Net connections are far too crude to view the URLs you've provided (I haven't even tried; animations? video clips? Hahahaha; not on THIS computer!!), but I'll see if I can sneak a peak at them at a public library high-speed terminal. Thanks!

So saith Ed.

Who'd love to see a Realms movie if (and only if) it were done right, but doesn't ever expect to (long story).

love to all,
THO

On July 2, 2006 THO said: And according to Ed, Ffolk is pronounced (I'm exaggerating here):

"FfffOAK."

(In other words, slightly lengthen a single "F" sound, and then come down emphatically on the "olk" - - which should end up sounding like "oak" or "oke").

Ed wrote up a mini-bio of Gondegal years back, as part of a "list of recently vanished Realms NPCs who could be whisked off to Ravenloft," but I believe it's still NDA. Gondegal is mentioned in many, many places in Realmslore, including CORMYR: A NOVEL by Ed and Jeff Grubb.

love,
THO

On July 2, 2006 THO said: This is a question that has been put to Ed in many, many GenCon seminars as well as internal TSR design docs (from Jeff Grubb's time as Realms honcho, before the hiring of Steven Schend, Rich Baker, et al).

The accepted "official" answer back then was (in my paraphrasing):

Silver fire is the most puissant, because it's more intense than Spellfire: it snatches and channels energy directly. Spellfire drinks energy from the Weave, and hence is slightly limited in bandwidth (recall Shandril's pain in using it: the physical limitations of her body are also limitations on spellfire throughput). Dragonfire is intensely fierce, and may for large wyrms be much larger in volume, but it's far less precise and is an entire order of magnitude less "hot" than either of the other two.

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El Magnifico Uno in his posting seems to exhibit a belief that "which fire wins" depends on the fictional needs of the moment, or the prejudices of the author. The former is quite true (Jeff Grubb once explained it as "we just don't know what will happen in most battlefield combinations and collisions of magic"), but the latter is only true if authors ignored the design dictates.

Then again, my reading of some of the later novels suggests that the writers didn't receive any design dictates. Sigh.

love,
THO

July 3, 2006: Hello again, all. Ed now tackles some related queries from April and June from VonRaventheDaring (and yes, by all means sample away, dear, and feel free to use your teeth as well as your hands and tongue): "Do you have any views/opinions of the new psionic classes from the CP. Also what do you think about the Jhaamdath empire, and the addons that Ed Bonny the other ed (lol okay thats lame) has made for them. I know that you have stated before that tsr kept you from publishing psionic related stuff due to dark sun being their focus place for that, but since wizards has changed that do you plan on adding or resubmitting any psionic related things for the realms? *trying not to drool at the thought* Also just have to note that the hooded one rocks, and i would like to do some breast sampling but thats a different type of question."

and: "i read where the different types of gems all react to magic different, and i was curious if there was any gems that responded to psionic powers more so than others in the realms? and if it wouldn't be to much of a bother could you list them for me, thank you. Also i was wondering when you created the lore gems for the elves, were they inspired by psionics at all as they seem to have a psionic theme to me at least."

Ed replies:

To deal with your last questions first (hey, I'm a designer :)), VOLO'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MAGICAL will show you that witherite confers psionic immunity, and the gem-like magic item (the inspiration of Eric Boyd, and recently discussed in this thread here at Candlekeep) known as the weirdstone (also in VOLO'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MAGICAL and the later PLAYER'S GUIDE TO FAERUN) also deals with psionics. There are other, as-yet-undiscovered (though various alchemists, sages, and wizards are privately and independently experimenting) gemstone properties pertaining to psionics; stay tuned to all official Realmslore channels for future revelations.

As for adding or resubmitting psionic-related material for the Realms: I have LOTS of plans, but no time in which to deal with a three-hundredth of them, and I'm better suited (particularly while Wizards designers are continually revamping psionics :) to fleshing out the world (e.g. the cities articles in DRAGON, the Realmslore and Border Kingdom web columns, my lore answers here, and [NDA], [NDA], and [NDA]) so the maximum number of Realms DMs, players, and readers can enjoy more depth and colour in "their own" Realms.

As I've posted before, I tend to personally use psionics at the "personal wild talent" level more than anything else. At first glance, the psionic racial classes from the CP are just fine, the prestige classes (ebon saint in particular) seem quite usable, and I haven't thought enough about the synad to venture a useful opinion. I'm speaking now as a game designer trying to evaluate the

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game balance, possible abuses, and implications of the classes as published - - whether or not, and to what extent, they appear in your Realms campaign is up to you, because (just like having lots of powerful spellcasters, or wagonloads of powerful magic items) psionics does have the potential to quickly dominate a campaign. There's nothing wrong with that, IF that's the campaign you and your players are happy with; everyone must make their own decisions on what balances and flavours they prefer in their play.

As for Jhaamdath: so far, so good - - but again, I've been too busy with many other Realms projects to fully consider the implications of the various fleshings-out of Jhaamdath on the "wider picture" of the Realms. I must take the time to sit down and do that, soon - - but looking at the multiple trainwreck that is my schedule for the next three years, I'm brainblasted (er, sorry) if I can tell you when.

So saith Ed.

Who is fighting his way through many, many projects at the moment, to keep on bringing you the vivid Realms we all know and love.

love to all!
THO

July 4, 2006: Hello, all. Ed herewith answers scribe Lauzoril, who asked: "Did Lord Chess have any kind of power in Zhentil Keep, political or otherwise, or was he just a puppet figurehead for the Zhentarim? Could there be any chance that you and Jeff Grubb someday write a novel together again? Thank you kindly."

Ed speaks:

You're very welcome. Hmmm: let's do last first, as usual. :}

I'd love to write another novel with Jeff, a very good friend who I haven't seen enough of since Wizards relocated to Seattle. We've recently worked on several projects edited or engineered by Brian Thomsen, though not directly together (WE THREE DRAGONS, a fantasy book of dragon Christmas stories that was published in paperback by TOR last Christmas, wherein we both had short stories, as did Jim Ward, formerly TSR's Creative Manager; and the forthcoming FURTHER TALES OF BEOWULF/CHAMPION OF MIDDLE-EARTH, from Carroll & Graf, wherein we both have stories alongside Lynn Abbey [of Thieves' World fame; Lynn and I once collaborated on the Mornmist fantasy series], Wolfgang Baur [former TSR designer and editor of DRAGON, who is now writing d20 fantasy adventures "to order," as mentioned here at Candlekeep by Steven Schend in his Become A Patron! thread], and Brian Thomsen, alongside a modern translation of "the original" Beowulf writing that's come down through the centuries to us), but the chances of us doing a novel together right now, with the differing directions our professional lives are trending, aren't large. That said: I'd jump at the chance, if it were directly offered.

Lord Chess was a youthful noble, a "bored, idle younger son," who WOULD have attained real power in Zhentil Keep upon the death of his father or the pleasure of his family and fellow lords if the Zhentarim hadn't seized control (see my short story "So High A Price" in REALMS OF INFAMY or THE BEST OF THE REALMS II: THE STORIES OF ED GREENWOOD). However, as a vital conspirator in Manshoon's seizure of power, he rose swiftly to real power as an indolent,

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decadent figurehead instead. He worked as a figurehead because of his noble status and therefore "rightful" power in the eyes of the public, but he was a lazy, corrupt, and ultimately disloyal to the Zhentarim individual, who discovered his true loyalties were to his city first and the Zhents second... and so he paid the price.

So saith Ed.

Who has written an astonishing number of short stories, several of them critically acclaimed, that many Realms fans don't know about. Faraer, have you listed them, by chance?

love to all,
THO

July 5, 2006: Hello again, all. Herewith, Ed tackles Athenon's query: "Is it an oversight that Wizards has not scheduled an "Elminster Speaks" seminar at GenCon the last couple years, or do they for some reason not like channeling of the Old Sage? Thanks for hours of entertainment reading this forum."

Ed replies:

Will, you're quite welcome; glad you've enjoyed my meanderings and mutterings. As for Elminster Speaks: Wizards submits its events for GenCon around March or so, but I've only just started to discover what I'm slated for, and internal WotC sources tell me "nothing's really been settled yet" re. GenCon, so I'm not sure if Elminster will ride again or not this year at GenCon Indy.

The thinking a few years back was that as the Realms moved into 3rd edition, the role of Elminster (as his long, long life entered its twilight years) would be de-emphasized (hence, no more stand-up comedian who was improvising as he went, and therefore could say ANYTHING, much to the chagrin and shortened lifespan of his Wizards staff "straight person," be it Jeff Grubb, or Steven Schend, or whomever). From my point of view, the costume is hot to wear and a hassle at customs (that staff's obviously a weapon of mass destruction, you dangerous foreign bearded terrorist!), so... we'll see. You can always ask me to channel Elminster at other seminars. [broad evil grin]

So saith Ed.

Oh, I can just FEEL that grin.

love to all,
THO

On July 5, 2006 THO said: Hi, all.

The physical setting of Castlemourn is geographically isolated: a long coastal band of countries hemmed in on three sides by mountain ranges. On the fourth side, those ranges arc out into the sea to form a string of islands that shelter a bay. Treacherous shoals, currents, and mists imperil

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sailing "along the coast" off the map (and the only feature known to be "out there" in one direction is a fell city of wizards

So this could be placed on any temperate-clime seacoast, and MIGHT (if a DM wished to do so) be put "on the other side of the globe" that holds Faerûn, in one of the seven continents Ed placed there (WotC published far different ones in the FR Atlas without Ed's approval). It also works as a self-contained, standalone setting.

And Brian, Ed has worked out a detailed recent history for everything (as for ancient times... well, you'll just have to read the setting). As Faraer mentioned, this has been a long time seeing print; its root material is years old, now.

For legal reasons, Castlemourn and the Realms will always be presented as completely separate settings. As anyone who's talked with Ed knows, Ed has always linked multiple worlds with gates (D&D 3e "portals"), and there's no reason any DM can't do the same thing. Castlemourn is really about handing gamers fourteen or so fairly detailed new lands to have their characters explore.

I'm sure if you pose questions to Ed in his thread, he'll be happy to say more.

love,
THO

Gosh, no. Monte has written a city (BEAUTIFULLY done), and is selling it as an "all in one" box, for over \$100 USD.

Margaret Weis Productions is releasing a Players Guide "taste of the world" launch for under \$10 USD, I believe, followed by a "typical d20" hardcover for (I'm guessing here) 40 or 50 dollars or less, plus some (planned) smaller and cheaper future products.

Or so I've gathered...

love,
THO

July 6, 2006: Hello again, all. Thanks for the Canada Day wishes Foxhelm (and Wooly, too! I personally think we Canadians observe Canada Day, the former Dominion Day, to celebrate our annual deliverance from the black flies to [just] the mosquitoes), and thanks for so swiftly and obligingly providing the Ed short story listing, Faraer. I can add "The Mad Monj of Onteth" from THE DRAGONS' RETURN (2005) and "Wrathclaw's Wyrmtide, Or The Secret of Treasure-Unlooked-For" from WE THREE DRAGONS (2005) to that list, off the top of my head, and of course there are at least two tales in not-yet-published anthologies Ed has previously mentioned in this thread...

But, on to Realmslore! This time, Ed makes reply to Valus Gwaren, in this matter: "I was hoping I might get some information on the size/layout of a typical Sea Ward noble's villa in Waterdeep. I have a character who is a Waterdhavian noble, and is just returning to the city for the first time since I created him. I would like to design his family's holding, but I don't really know where to start. What style architecture is typical of these sorts of places? What kind of staff would there be to run the place? and so on."

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RodOdom helpfully posted: "If the electronic FR atlas is accurate, villas are on roughly rectangular lots of anywhere from 7,500 to 15,000 sq. ft., containing three or more individual structures."

Ed makes reply:

RodOdom is quite correct. The typical Waterdhavian "villa" (so-named because noble owners have other homes, in warmer climes south of Waterdeep, in which they spend winter months) is a walled compound, typically with a landscaped garden inside (though the nature of the gardens vary widely with owners' tastes, from sunny floral gardens with formal layouts and statuary to "wild"-looking forest glades with shaded bowers and meandering paths), in which are situated a main residence (sometimes called a "mansion" or "manor"), a stables, and a guest house. (Servants dwell in the uppermost floors of the mansion and above the stables.)

At least, that's the "minimum" number of structures for a villa. Larger villas will have separate servants' quarters, perhaps a gladehouse (equivalent of an orangery, greenhouse, or summerhouse: a heated, near-tropical building where exotic warm-clime or jungle plants are grown, usually because the noble owner loves tropical fruits), and one or more guest houses, some usually given over to dowager mothers or aunts, or even mistresses (or "houseboys," the Waterdhavian noblewoman's term for what we might call gigolos) rather than true "guests."

The main residence is almost always tall and impressive, with turrets and balconies. Inside, it will ALWAYS have a grand entry hall (usually with sweeping stairs rising to an upper floor), a large and splendid feasting hall, and one or more meeting rooms decorated to impress (these may be called "parlors" or "studies" or almost anything; if the noble is martial in nature, like the Roaringhorns, or a mercantile power and proud of it, one might be an "office"). Lower levels are given over to kitchens, pantries, storage cellars, and hobbies or eccentricities (pet cages or studios or private swimming pools or dress-up rooms and pleasure dens), and upper levels to dwelling-suites for family members, each generally consisting of a reception room opening into a bedchamber, robing room, garderobe (jakes), and lounge (private office or dining-room).

Aside from turrets, spires, balconies, large windows (to display the wealth of the owner; large sheets of glass are EXPENSIVE in the Realms) and luxurious furnishings (again, to display wealth: tapestries and carpets are almost always present, but sculpture [especially life-sized statuary] and paintings [huge wall-panels in particular] are popular but very much a matter of personal taste [some nobles love 'em, some don't]), and a prevalence for building in stone, and massively (usually with marble flooring), the architecture of Waterdhavian villas can be almost anything. Some have doors of single sheets of copper fastened to wood, most have doors ten feet tall or more and with ornate handles, and most have greatglories (candle-and-crystal chandeliers), all scream "I have coin to hurl away recklessly, and see? I have!" and many have fountains of water-spouting dolphins or mermaids or fanciful monsters, both indoors and out.

Any large house requires a large staff; POWER OF FAERUN p22 and 24 outlines one typical "grand household" organization, but in brief, any Waterdhavian noble will have hostlers (sometimes called "grooms," and always run by a horsemaster or stablemaster; the former term implies skills as a horse trainer and doctor); gardeners (administered by a head gardener or groundskeeper); a kitchen staff of scullery maids, pantry jacks, and cooks (administered by a head cook, who reports to a chatelaine or steward); house guards (commanded by a captain, who reports to a seneschal); and "the household," the household or domestic staff, of chambermaids, pages, dressers (personal maids and jacks, what in more modern times are called "butlers") and doorjacks, who report to the chatelaine, who in turn reports to the steward. Sometimes the seneschal and the steward are the same person, sometimes there's no steward and the chatelaine reports to the noble lord directly, and sometimes the reverse is true (no

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chatelaine and the steward runs things). Any or all of these "commanding ranks" may have assistants (understewards, chatelaines-of-stairs, and so on), and there may or may not also be a house wizard, a chamberlain (accountant and lawyer), and an equerry (personal assistant to the noble lord) above all of them. Every noble dwelling in the house will also have personal servants; males generally have two (a dresser and a "sword" [butler/clerk/secretary/errand-runner]) or three (a page is added, to run errands and deliver messages), and females generally have three or four (add more maids to see to a far more elaborate wardrobe). Feel free to augment, and if things seem rather crowded, you've got it right: they are! A noble who entertains a lot may have seven cooks, three times that many scullery maids, and twenty or so pantry jacks in livery to serve at a feast or revel; one who's nuts about horses or gardening will have similarly large stable and grounds staffs.

So saith Ed.

Covered in depth and full, m'lord.

love to all,
THO

On July 6, 2006 THO said: Can't fault your logic, Sammael, but as one who knows both Ed's original and the published Realms, I'm afraid the reverse is true: the published Realms is a lot less diverse and colourful than Ed's original.

Yes, there have been many, many cooks in the kitchen over the years - - but they've been hired to cook dishes chosen for them. Time and again the published Realms has visited the same locales, but not "filled in" areas right next to them.

So we've never had proper coverage of Everlund (or Silverymoon, for that matter!), the Dragon Coast, and so on and on and on. Nor ever had Ed's desired "merchant shipping cargoes" game, that would enable sailing the Sword Coast FOR A REASON play, complete with currents, uncharted isles, and those other continents.

We've never properly seen Sossal, or Semphar and the surrounding lands. We haven't even had in-depth coverage of Chessenta or the Wizards Reach. And then there's Sembia...

If we'd had all Ed, all the time, the published Realms would have come out far more slowly, yes. But if Ed had been the head chef, we'd certainly have had "full map coverage" (and NOT had the map get twisted and pruned between 2nd and 3rd editions to take away far too many gaps that hadn't yet been addressed.

Believe me, Ed has notes on everything. The published Realms (and especially game edition rules changes) has made that lore increasingly out-of-date, but Ed did paint (and hand to TSR, back in 1986) a tapestry far more diverse and creative than what's been published.

Remember, TSR and now WotC have been gaming companies interested above all in "what will sell." Someone always has to decide what to publish and what not to publish. And they'll always choose something "familiar" if it sold well last time, over some place new. Hence Waterdeep over and over, the Dales ditto, and so on.

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Again: your logic is impeccable. However, in this case it just ain't true.

love,
THO

July 7, 2006: Hello, all. Divers replies this time.

First, to Swordsage, Zeboaster of Ordulin, and Hoondatha: Ed looks forward to meeting any scribes who make the trek to U-Con at Ann Arbor. In the matter of who visited him, NDAs and modesty prevent (unless the visitor cares to spill the beans), but I will say some scribes are good guessers.

Secondly, to LoneHeroDragon: Feel free to ask Ed anything you'd like to ask publicly right here. However, he's not the person to contact if you're seriously interested in doing a Realms novel. That "best contact person" would probably be Phil Athans, Managing Editor of the Publishing Group at Wizards of the Coast, and he'd probably tell you to submit a sample and then a proposal to one of the Realms short story anthologies. That's the "front door" (see REALMS OF THE DRAGONS II for folks who followed that route). Save your novel idea, work on it, but don't expect Wizards to take an unsolicited Realms novel "cold" from an unfamiliar writer. That's not the way they work. (But hey, Rich, you can get this same reply from Phil Athans directly.)

Thirdly, Ed swings into action at last to reply to Kaladorm's recent comment: "This leads me to wonder then, as we know gods get their power simply by a person intoning their name (although obviously more so from their faithful), whether the gods power came from a sincere intoning of their name or not. Every time one of the other knights reprimanded Torm, would Torm the God become slightly more powerful. Bet that one would mess with his mind (aha Torm by misbehaving we rebuke you and so make the god of duty a bit stronger, get over that one) Random musings :)"

Ed speaks:

No, gods derive no power from insincere intonements of their name, or mere discussion, or even proclamations. It's devout prayer (and oaths or curses made by individuals at moments of great emotion, such as fear or rapture) that empowers them. So someone cursing Torm the mortal would have no effect at all on Torm the deity. Someone cursing Torm the deity for influencing Torm the mortal WOULD affect the deity's power. Nor does merely hearing their name spoken (whether or not it's "really them" or just a mortal namesake) drive gods crazy; there's a ceaseless thunderbabble of such namings coming to them, and all gods go crazy right away or learn to "tune it out," listening in to specific mortals or locations or events only when they want to. By the way: rapture includes moments during lovemaking, both deliberately (on the part of clergy) and spontaneous (everyone else). :}

So saith Ed.

Who must have spent a happy weekend. Ahem.

love to all,
THO

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July 8, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes. Herewith, Ed makes reply to Rinonalyrna Fathomlin, about this: "All right, my question for today may sound really silly, but I have honestly been wondering about it for the past few days. The trivial things in life are part of what makes up... life. If my question has been answered before, I apologize

Do Faerunian women commonly shave their legs, underarms, and *ahem* other parts of their bodies? If so, what types of razors, creams, and other materials do they use? From what I understand, the common safety razors used today were invented only about 100-150 years ago--I can't imagine having to use a regular straight razor. I have also wondered sometimes how Faerunian women deal with their menstrual cycles..."

Ed speaks:

Nothing trivial at all about such matters! If the game makes note of what weapons or loot creatures carry, descriptions of their bodies (especially as corpses or captives being searched) are of vital importance. In the same way, if a Realms fiction writer is describing someone disrobing or getting dressed, or for that matter what's on view in a harem, festhall, or club where scantily-clad folk are dancing or otherwise on display, this becomes Need To Know information. This importance is only enhanced when we consider time-to-time adventuring necessities of hiding small items in various body cavities (ahem; I'm sure you understand).

So here we go...

[[scribes reading this be warned: specific biological anatomy words and details follow]]

First, the body hair. In a world with many races dwelling and working (or at least trading) together, there's a great tolerance for variety. So no one "looks down on" someone for being different (i.e. having heavy body hair or not). However, there are practical reasons for being hairless in warm climates (and for wrestlers and those who make coin by means of sex, too), and in the warmer countries of the Realms almost all adult folk do remove their body (not head) hair (by plucking--the mild pain of this technique is often used in prayer, in monastic communities; by shaving with sharp CURVED [crescentiform, sharp edge on inside of curve, but with a short, marked arc of sharpened outside edge at the end for doing armpits] blades; and--most popularly, by far--by the application of herbal depilatory ointments, of which there are many, widely known everywhere in the Realms). This is less common in cold areas such as the North, and men everywhere often leave chest and head hair alone, and merely trim other hair short (or shave just their cheeks, and trim moustache, sideburn, and beard hair). The majority of men DON'T shave their heads, unless they have head rashes or wounds that need treatment, and men and women aren't vain about hair that goes gray or white (they may dye hair for all sorts of effects or reasons, but pretending to not age isn't one of them).

As humans biologically have hair to catch and intensify natural body scent, and strong-smelling human odours aren't considered pleasant in most of the Realms, the great majority of humans do "wash their hairy areas" daily or even more often, and use scented oils when they can't wash properly, or before engaging in activities they know will be sweaty and during or after which they want to impress or be welcoming to others.

Many who do remove armpit and genital-area hair may leave small shaped areas of hair for adornment (e.g. a lightning bolt zigzagging down to a clitoris), and for adornment, when going

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nude or wearing garments that leave strategic areas bare, body paint (and dyes like henna), or even more permanent tattoos (usually blue or green) are sometimes used to "replace" genital hair.

It should be remembered that warriors and wrestlers also have practical reasons for minimizing hair, and anyone who's ridden a lot will know that hair literally "wears off" stress areas like the inner thighs. Nor does hair always grow back on scar tissue.

Second: menstrual cycles and their treatment. Social and practical. Social: Selune, Chauntea, and many other deities keep "closeness to natural cycles" strong in the minds of all Faerûnians; there's no religious or societal stigma about menstruation. Women aren't regarded as "unclean" at any time, menses are no bar to sexual activity, and any embarrassment is purely of the "Oh, now I've stained a nice [or borrowed] garment" variety. Menstruation is never called "the curse" or anything of the sort in the Realms; in Faerûn, it's "lifeblood" or "moonblood" or even "Selune's kiss" or "under the moon" (as in: "I'm under the moon just now, so pack extra redcloths").

Time for the practical. Please see my reply on page 21 of my 2004 replies, here at Candlekeep, for information about undergarments (specifically clouts and redcloths).

Blood-stained "redcloths" will be washed or at least rinsed out daily, often in scented water. To avoid being tracked by beasts following scent, wilderland-travelling women often discard (by burying them) redcloths as they go; if they can find dew or any sort of water in which to wash the cloths (including stagnant swampwater), they'll do so, often dousing the cloth with perfume beforehand to minimize any odours the water causes. The most popular "travelling wash" for redcloths (practiced, for example, by women stopping at a rustic inn) is cheap wine followed by rinsing with rainbarrel water. Please bear in mind that there's no embarrassment or stigma attached to this, even for young females experiencing their first menses; no one will be trying to do this "on the sly," and inns high and low will anticipate this need and have facilities for it (that's why there are ewers of water sitting in washbasins in most inn rooms, AND spare washbasins underneath beds, alongside the chamberpots). Most inns and taverns do a busy daily trade in buying new redcloths and disposing of old ones (they become scrubbing rags).

One last note: shaving your naughty bits with a straight razor isn't easy, but having someone else (who's skilled, in good light and with room to work, and not in a hurry) is just fine, if you aren't embarrassed and don't flinch). Just ask THO.

So saith Ed.

Who (as you can probably tell by now) lacks a lot of the hang-ups and prejudices of most of the males of his generation. I remember him cheerfully buying feminine products for both co-workers and family members, but thinking it ridiculous when they asked him to go make the purchase but were embarrassed to tell him their "sizes."

And yes, Ed's right about the straight razor, but the key word is "skilled." (Ed is more of a "gingerly-proceeding amateur" than "skilled" in any use of a straight razor, but I once encountered a grandfatherly army barber who tended to a row of female personnel with a gruff, "Spread 'em, ladies, and no telling jokes while I've got the razor out; laughs are bleeders.")

Amazing, what we get around to discussing in this forum...

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love to all,
THO

July 9, 2006: Hi again, all.

This time, Ed responds to scribe Miri - Jala's post: "Hi Ed and Lady Tho, Hope you and loved ones are having a great summer so far. I was browsing the Candlekeep website yesterday and found the Feb 2004 Interview at Mortality Radio and I thought it was great! I've been reading lots of posts by forum members and the ones in the "So saith Ed" archives. I can see from the insatiable appetite members have for more detail on just about evverrything that they love the realms. To hear someone vocally empassioned about it, though, is so much better than just reading the posts! I learned quite a few things I hadn't known before and thanks for doing the interview. I liked your Elminster vocalizations...cool. Do you have any mp3's you'd be willing to share where you're 'playing' some of the characters you've created? Or even some short avi files? For people who've never had the opportunity to get involved in or even see what a "home Realms campaign" is like, it would be a sweet treat indeed! If not...that's okay. I still get a kick out of reading all these posts.

I might as well put in another question for myself since I'm here... Were all the Seven Sisters born with the Silver Fire already in them? At the end of The Temptation of Elminster, Mystra sends El to watch three Chosen ones, Dove (4 yrs old), Storm, and Laeral. Since Mystra says they are already Chosen, does that mean they already have the Silver Fire? If so, when were they first able to call it forth? Was it painful or scary for them? Where they able to control it right from the start, or did they have to practice to make it do what they wanted? (If this is already covered somewhere, please let me know and I'll look there.) Thanks again Ed and Lady Tho"

Miri - Jala, you're very welcome. Gosh, was that radio interview really that long ago?

I'm afraid I don't have any such sound files available, in any format (though ever since the switch from typewriters, I've always used Macs capable of generating them, to write everything for the Realms on: I've honestly just been too busy writing to ever learn to use them), though that's a very good idea, and I'll pass it along to Wizards - - who would have to approve any such Realms-related release of them (yes, even if free and informal). I have participated in a promotional DVD for Tracy and Laura's BRONZE CANTICLES, and there are aging cassette tapes of some moments of Realmsplay with the "original cast" of players and yours truly nattering away, silly Monty Python and Goon Show homage moments and all... but nothing I could lay hands on for public distribution. Sorry.

Yes, the Seven Sisters were all born with the Silver Fire already in them. However, as infants, they didn't know that they did, or really what Silver Fire was, or HOW to "call it forth" from themselves.

That knowledge only came later, allowed by Mystra only after Elminster's tutoring (or in the case of some of the Seven, some alterative hard life experience) had taught them some ethics, morals, and ways of the world. Some of this learning (with the Sisters involved being "teenaged handfuls") is shown in my short story "Dark Talons Forbear Thee," which appeared in THE BEST OF THE REALMS BOOK II: THE STORIES OF ED GREENWOOD, a WotC mass market paperback published in July 2005 (ISBN 0-7869-3760-2 or, in the new "long" ISBNs: 978-0-7869-3760-8). The right answer to "when were they first able to call it forth?" is different (in terms of age) for each of them, because it's either "When Mystra deemed it needful to their immediate

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survival" or "When Mystra thought they were ready for it." If the former, it burst out, quite possibly painful and scary. If the latter, Mystra "paved the way" with dream-visions (moral lessons, demonstrations of its use, and the inner feeling of how to call it up and what it feels like to unleash it) beforehand.

And like anything else of great power, precision and control of its effects needs practice. Picture a loaded submachine gun in the hands of a grandmother who's never handled a firearm before. She "knows what to do" (pull the trigger) by watching media or reading, but may end up spraying a lot of things with bullets before she gets anywhere near hitting anything she's intending to shoot (being a little scared, unfamiliar with "pull" or recoil, and so on). And that's just the destructive "searing flame" of silver fire. Using it to mend broken things, heal, purge taints, power things (as seen in my tale "Tears So White" in the still-in-print anthology REALMS OF THE ELVES), or duplicate spells; these are all much more delicate tasks that must be learned and practiced.

Some day I'd like to write some fiction scenes that delve into this a bit more, but thus far there seems to have been far too much interest or emphasis placed on the 'peerless destruction' side of silver fire for gamers and game designers to really pay much attention to what else it can do.

So saith Ed.

The creator who will never have enough time to fully explore his creation.

love to all,
THO

On July 9, 2006 THO said: Richard has superbly put the writers' point of view in this, so let me (as an editor) add some of the publishers' views:

Publishers are in business to make a profit. For every book, they must decide press run, format (including length), and price. (With an eye to profit margin.)

Move the price point up, especially if the book seems "small" to a casual buyer, and the sales go down. Shift it too high, and sales will be to a select few. Make it too low, and some buyers will suspect the product is no good. Make the format too different from what the chain bookstores want (in terms of shelf space), and they'll refuse to carry it, chop their orders down, or you'll suffer when buyers decide. And let's face it, a bookstore can put six copies of something slim on the rack in the same space that will only hold three thick "doorstop" mass market paperbacks.

In some cases (examples: Tor Books, with the current series Charles Stross is writing and with Paul Park's first novel), publishers cut books in half regardless of authors' wishes, to get the price point they deem right.

Wizards is no different. If they put out a book that's too expensive for its size (example: the current Dragons: Worlds Aflame) the orders and sales will be low. That's a different problem from printing too many copies of something that the public just doesn't seem to want. That's one of the reasons most WotC books have a "standard" wordcount, inside a given series or line. So the 1000-pagers will tend to appear only as omnibus collections of already-successful books.

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Now, if * I * was running Wizards (and how many times have you heard THAT phrase?), I'd release omnibus volumes with new covers, authors' notes, and a new short story involving (some of) the same characters and locales, or as an expanded epilogue, or the like: always including "goodies" to boost sales.

However, as Ed Greenwood always says, it's probably a very good thing I'm not running Wizards.

love to all,
THO

July 10, 2006: Hi again, all. Ulitharid recently posted: "As the game has progressed, new systems have been added without what would appear to be too much fuss in regards to implementing them into standard realmsore (at least imo, though yours might be quite different). However, and this might be a redundant/already asked question, but what about Incarnum and Truespeak in relation to traditional "magics" i.e psionics/magic.

At least to me, they seem to be unique enough mechanically and fluffwise to bypass the current implementation of magic systems in the realms (i.e tapping into the weave/shadow weave) in that truespeak are the primal words of creation, such that a weave of some sorts is completely unnecessary, and one's potential mastery of the multiverse through truespeak is limited only by the potential of the individual in question, as opposed to divine interventia via portfolios.

i also feel the same way about incarnum, in that, while power-from-the-soul is itself not a new idea, the concept behind incarnum and harnessing the essence of souls seems so out of the box, as to be a sin to chain it to the standard boundries of typical magic/deific patronage.

so, i guess to move onto a more specific question rather than detailing my thoughts... how would you handle implementing incarnum/truespeak into the realms(if at all), and what would be the corresponding lore that you'd put behind the "new" systems?"

Ed replies:

You're entirely correct: magic (as in: harnessing natural forces to bring about specific and immediate effects) doesn't need the Weave or (specific) deities. There are indeed "many other roads" to tapping these powers; incarnum and truespeak can be used alongside (in addition to) the more familiar and popular spell systems. Kuje correctly pointed out true names have been part of the Realms since its beginnings (before the D&D game), and therefore it follows that truespeak (using the same concept of "words of power" that also, thanks to the Vancian magic system the D&D game spell system is based on, is there from the first in D&D) must work in the Realms.

That doesn't mean that DMs must use it, or must agree with all of (and only) the rules presented in the recent Tome of Magic: like everything else in D&D, everyone is constantly tinkering with rules and approaches.

However, as of right now, the arcane and divine spell systems predominate in Faerûn: a typical travelling character will encounter relatively many clergy and wizards, fewer sorcerers and psionically-gifted beings - - and users of other systems of magic (such as incarnum and truespeak, or table magic for that matter) will be far rarer.

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I love using mavericks, as my players will tell you, because the moment "the unknown" pops up, roleplaying must increase.

So saith Ed, Auld Sage Extraordinaire.

(Well, 't isn't the worst thing he's been called.)

love to all,
THO

July 11, 2006: Hello again, everybody. Ed recently replied here to a query about a peninsular name, saying in part: "It's true that in the latest (3rd edition) projection maps of Faerûn the region wherein the Vast and Impiltur are located LOOKS somewhat like a peninsula..." and RevJest responded: "I wonder how the Northmen feel about the island of Gunderlun disappearing from the face of Faerun."

Ed now responds in turn:

Very down in the depths, I'd say...

Ahem. Seriously, I'd say the isle in question (about which I provided some lore on page 20 of the 2005 vintage of this thread here at Candlekeep) is just "off the map" (to the west) because of its projection, or perhaps just omitted by cartographers oversimplifying, rather than truly vanishing in any physical sense. Er, I hope. I would NOT want to have to design, in a balanced 3.5e sense, the spell that could "vanish" such a large landmass without anyone noticing (or not causing tidal waves, current alterations, and the like).

So saith Ed, sounding somewhat like Slartibarfast.

love to all,
THO

July 12, 2006: Hi again. This time Ed tackles Dargoth's query: "What's the relationship like between Auril, Thrym, Kostchtchie (Demon Lord of Frost Giants) and Zzutam (The wanabe Elemental god from Prince of Lies) in the FR? Does Kostchtchie exist in the Forgotten realms? Or does Thrym take his place in the Realms? (ie the same way Ghaunadaur has taken Jubliex place in the realms)?"

Ed replies:

Worship of all the deities you mention takes place in the Realms, because creatures from many planes and worlds have found their way to Toril by various means. However, veneration of Kostchtchie in Faerûn strengthens Thrym, master of frost giants (unless a Faerûnian mortal has the power to summon Kostchtchie, a Demon Lord, and does so, but in doing so has the carelessness or ignorance to bring Kostchtchie to the Realms uncontrolled - - whereupon

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Kostchtchie would gain power from worship, but also attract the attention and enmity of Thrym and other Faerûnian giant deities, who would move to harm, hamper, and banish him).

So between Thrym and Kostchtchie: hatred; they are rivals. (But very little contact.)

As for the relationships between Auril and Thrym: they have very little to do with each other, as Auril concerns herself foremost with frost, cold, snow, and winter, and their effects on humans (and to a lesser extent other races), and Thrym concerns himself with frost giants. They largely ignore each other; Auril doesn't mess with frost giants and Thrym pays attention only to frost giants.

As for the relationship of either of them with Zzutam: none (at least, no more than any deity pays heed to ambitious mortals). PRINCE OF LIES uses unreliable narrators, remember, and therefore not everything stated or implied in its pages is true.

Frost giants in the Realms, like humans, are both intelligent and spiritual: everyone "believes" in the gods, remember, having to take nothing on faith except the "true nature" of specific deities, and therefore whom they should worship. Frost giants can worship any deity they hear of, but are likely to worship only relevant deities (a drow divinity of fire, for example, would be largely meaningless to them) - - and in the Realms, Thrym is by far the most relevant. Ergo...

So saith Ed.

Underscoring once again that the Realms is polytheistic, not monotheistic; most intelligent Faerûnian beings don't worship just one god, and outside of professional clergy and zealots, only a minority of them even have "patron deities" (primary gods they worship before or above all others).

love to all,
THO

July 14, 2006: Hello, all. Gray Richardson recently asked: "Hi Ed, I was wondering if you could tell me about taxes in Suzail. Is there a sales tax on the kinds of items that adventurers might want to buy? Things like food, ale, lodging, both basic goods and the more expensive kind: special inks, spellbooks, finely crafted armor and magic items. What about on services like stabling and hiring a messenger or guide? How are such taxes collected? What are the rates? And do they vary based on the type of good or service?

What if an adventurer were to sell his own items, would he owe the crown a portion? How would he go about paying that? And what might be the penalty if he failed to give the crown its due?

Also, what about property taxes? Are there taxes on the sale of land? Any periodic taxes on owning land? How often might they be collected? Quarterly? Annually? Monthly? Are you required to go and pay your taxes or does a tax collector come round and collect?

Thanks in advance for your kind answers!

What other surprising taxes, tariffs or fees might an adventurer in Suzail stumble across?"

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Ed replies:

I've already written a two-part Realmslore web column for Wizards about specific taxes in Suzail, and therefore can't repeat here what I wrote for it, but in general there are no sales taxes on either goods or services. The usual exceptions are magic (items and scrolls, not castings), and when purchasing ships or land (upon which the levy is five to ten percent of the purchase price, if Crown officials deem that price "market fair").

Vendors usually don't pay taxes on selling items, but do pay a tax in the form of a rental for stall space at a trade fair (just like renting an exhibit hall booth at GenCon), even if they're just selling without actually setting up a stall.

There are also annual "head taxes" paid only by land or building owners or the heads of households, that Crown tax collectors "come around" to collect.

To this can be added also gate-entry fees for wagons or coaches, and riding beasts (so a mounted man pays, even if he gets off and leads his horse), but not lone travelers afoot. Ships are charged berthing fees. Crown employees, conveyances, and vessels are all exempt.

(There are few surprises for an adventurer in Suzail, because the Crown of Cormyr doesn't have to be greedy for funds; it has the Crystal Grot and many sources of fee-based income.)

I'm afraid the amounts for most of these are part of my column, so you'll have to wait for it.

Taxes vary widely in the Realms, but generally, in the Heartlands, in all communities depending (or profiting mainly) upon mercantile trade, taxes are light. In "unorganized" areas, such as wilderlands, and nominally ruled but unpatrolled lands, where the only settlements are individual steadings, hermitages, and monasteries, taxes are either non-existent or take the form of "provide food and shelter to the ruler or his representatives when they happen by, and request it." Forceful rulers may extend this to "protect our stuff and give us mounts or fresh draft animals and mounts," too, whereas fairer ones will pay for the beasts they take.

So saith Ed, who just once wants to lounge naked on a bed of shiny new gold coins (or so he tells me).

love to all,
THO

On July 14, 2006 THO said: Hello again, all.

The Crystal Grot is covered in VOLO'S GUIDE TO CORMYR, and regarding the taxes, Ed does mean new lore (web columns you haven't seen yet).

love to all,
THO

P.S. I'd say I'm most like Storm, of the Seven. Not much of a surprise there, eh?

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P.P.S. Wooly, here I am, lounging. (I'll describe myself in more detail privately, soon. Promise.)
Ed's the buried-in-coins bearded lump yonder, but don't worry: he'll just watch us quietly. I hope.

July 15, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time Ed tackles a very interesting query from Chyron:
"The official roll of years stops in 1600. Much has been written in terms of the past, including some jaunts involving time-travel. But I wonder how Mr. Greenwood sees time and 'the future' in the Realms.

Do the realms have a future? Is the progression of things (time - technology) slower? Is Faerun ever likely to move beyond 1600? In a Faerun 2001 DR does he forsee world of orcs in suits, skyscrapers, taxis, technology and magic (the closest gaming equivalent I can think of is Shadowrun) or is the world moving at a much slower pace and never meant to achieve such a period in his mind?

Ed replies:

Chyron, the Realms DO have a future. NDAs prevent me from saying anything about what I'm working on beyond what Wizards of the Coast has publicly revealed, but suffice it to say that many people are always planning ahead for the Realms, thinking of what will happen both "in-game" and in terms of FR products, and the Realms is "moving ahead" technologically.

This "progress" may seem achingly slow to some, but it should always be remembered that the Realms is NOT an analogy or copy of Earth; what we may see as medieval in some ways, and Renaissance in others, when looking at Faerûn, is inevitably seeing things from our point of view: the Realms may develop in very different ways than the real world did. Also, society may be moving and changing very rapidly right now in the real world, and communications make this readily apparent to most - - but for much of human history, the changes didn't SEEM to be moving ahead all that fast, most of the time, to people living in the middle of them.

I can say that the published Realms has in the past, and will in the future (including the very near future) include mentions of various "inventions" that do change life in the Realms, in ways large and small. The Realms IS constantly changing, and not moving to a Great Big End in my mind (various big changes, yes; an endpoint: no).

Wooly Rupert posted a very good and entirely correct response to you; there are indeed more years on the Roll than have been published yet (though who knows when we'll get to them?). I can reveal that as recently as last week I was chuckling with another Realms creator over the Roll of Years, and once again planning an event (not a big one; not everything Shakes the Realms) to match a year name.

Obviously, (for reasons of prudence, professionalism, and legal commitments, to say nothing of not wanting to ruin the ongoing, ever-unfolding party for us all) I can't say much more.

So I'll just stress once again: the presence of magic that works in the Realms, and gods who have personalities and desires and the power to advance them, may tug the "march of technology" in the Realms into very different paths than it took in our real world. We'll all just have to see.

So saith Ed.

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Who's obviously choosing his words very carefully. And once again underscoring the point that although to work as entertainment for us all the Realms have to evoke our dreams or fantasies of some real-world places and times, the Realms are NOT a coherent echo or copy of our real-world, and may "work" and turn out very differently. As always: stay tuned.

Ed penned this before seeing your query, Winterfox, so although this might seem a reply of sorts, he'll no doubt write a specific response to you. The specific passage of 1st Ed FR text that was "quoted at you," that you passed on, was written by Jeff Grubb, as I recall.

love to all,
THO

On July 15, 2006 THO said: No, it's the severed head (unless too large to be practical, whereupon it's usually a fang/tusk, the tongue, or an eye), brought wrapped or in a chest, and displayed before the community officials or elders, in such a way (town square, or official "presentation," or in the tavern of an evening where everyone's gathered) that the public also gets to see.

(I'm basing this on years of Realmsplay with Ed Greenwood as the DM.)

love to all,
THO

On July 15, 2006 THO said: Well, El Magnifico, the Knights have been nothing BUT supporting "side-characters" in print, thus far, so I doubt there are ANY "huge fans" of them.

However, I quite agree with you about not preferring the "saving the world again" tales. Unfortunately, when the editor settles on involving Larloch, the Srinsee, and getting Elminster and the Knights out of Shadowdale for the duration of The Last Mythal trilogy, Ed's sorta stuck with telling a "high-level" tale. Just as, when he's writing the annual Spin A Yarn stories, he's stuck with all the wild, risqué, and outlandish story elements the GenCon seminar audience saddles him with (and that's how they get THEIR fun).

Ed has written and spoken many, many times about preferring to write low-level, character-driven rather than uber-plot-driven Realms tales, if HE were "controlling the Realms." However, too many editors and designers know he can write the other sort rather well, so they keep asking him to do it. If he refuses, they just get someone else to write that sort of tale, so he says yes.

Check out some of his Castlemourn short stories, when they start to appear, for tales that peer over the shoulders of relatively low-powered characters, caught in the middle of action they'd prefer to be far away from.

love,
THO

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July 16, 2006: Hi, all.

This time, Ed reaches back to November of 2005, to answer Sourcemaster2's questions:

"1) Is there any common organization for the fey of Faerun? Do they have a leader? How do the different races interact? How do druids rank within fey society? How about half-breeds? Any random fey details would be useful.

2) Are magical items created by priests any different than those of arcane origins? Specifically, if an item blessed by a benign clergy falls into the hands of an evil priest or person, will the deity care, or even take steps to get it back? I don't necessarily mean artifacts or major devices; would, for example, a Selunite-forged sword falling into a Malarite's hands cause consequences?

3) This question may have been answered already, but does incarnum have a place in the Realms? If so, how does it relate to magic in general? Is it like psionics, in that it doesn't require divine intervention/approval to use, or does Mystra or another deity control it?"

Ed replies:

1. No, the fey have no common organization or single dominant leader. They have many would-be leaders, of course, but as most fey seem to have a strong individualistic streak, they don't have all that many would-be followers to make those wannabe leaders dominant. :}

If you're familiar with THE LORD OF THE RINGS, think of the fey as Tom Bombadil: NOT the all-powerful side of him, but the close-to-nature, chosen-to-be-apart-from-the-politics-and-struggles-of-others side. The fey tend to resist rankings and even commonly-accepted standards; to most, everyone is judged and dealt with on a personal basis. To some, blood descent and purity is very important, and they might treat half-breeds haughtily or with hostility. To most, bloodlines don't matter, personalities do. A strange fey is judged by their personal behavior, not their heritage.

Obviously I'm speaking in generalizations here. When brought down to specifics, asking about the fey is like asking about the real-world human race - - that is, there are hundreds of correct and contradictory answers to all of your questions about them.

2. Most aren't, but they can be. It depends on the details of their creation (did the clergy intend this item to be used only by those of their faith or alignment? does their deity agree with that intent? did their deity tell or show them how to give the item those properties? do church records available to the creating clergy tell how to make the item behave so?). The majority of temple-made items DON'T react any differently when in the hands of non-believers, but specific uses of them may attract the attention of a deity or servitor beings. In general, divine etiquette seems to be that gods inspire mortals to be their agents in recovering items or punishing or thwarting those who (in their eyes) "misuse" them, rather than stepping in themselves, though Realms fiction has shown us many exceptions to this "rule."

Again, I'm speaking generally. There are obviously powerful, important "holy" items that clergies and deities will value more highly; these items may even have sentience of their own, and work against bearers of the "wrong" faith, race, alignment, or intent.

3. Incarnum has a place in the Realms if you want it to, as I said in a previous answer. It co-exists with the Weave ("normal" spellcasting, as set forth in the PLAYER'S HANDBOOK and DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE), alongside it, without Mystra or any other deity controlling it. So,

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no, it doesn't require divine intervention or approval to use or have - - unless you as a DM want things to be different in your Realms. It should be much rarer than "usual" arcane and divine spellcasting; if it were prevalent, it would have been put into the "root" sourcebooks.

So saith Ed.

Who adroitly avoided some NDAs in those replies (Sourcemeister2, if they seem a trifle stilted, that's why). Oh, and Sage: sorry, no. No ASCII art. You'll just have to dream...

love to all,
THO

July 17, 2006: Hello again, all. Jamallo Kreen recently posted: "Please correct me if I'm wrong, Ed, but my understanding is that one can -- without violating the time stream -- even go back in time to Netheril, study with an archwizard for a year and then come back with cool new tricks to show off at one's New Year's Eve party. Is it not so, or does Mystra purge one's memory of spells learned in the past? One can imagine what hilarity would ensue if such a time travelling magical apprentice returned to 1374 and then happened to bump into Tabra, whom he knew from their student days in jolly old Netheril. Apropos of which hilarity, has Tabra cast lolaum's longevity more than once, or was her casting of it centuries ago the only casting of it which she has done?"

Ed replies:

Unfortunately for would-be avid scholars, "the new" Mystra and Azuth, having observed and discussed some previous mortal doings and experiences (and the consequences of same) have now both agreed to neatly fix matters so that arcane spellcasters moving into the past "leave their lore behind them." In other words, mortal spellcasters arrive back in the past knowing NOTHING about magic, not even recalling their aptitude for it (they still have that aptitude, but unless circumstances point it out to them, they have "forgotten" that they have it - - along with all memorized spells, of course!).

So they COULD study, back in the past, but it would be as green novices - - and for each year spent "back in the past" studying, their chances of returning sane decrease. In effect, the various deities of magic allow someone who jaunts back into the past for a specific bit of information (a word of activation/command word, a specific conversation between mages, the whereabouts of a hidden magic item, and the like) to be able to "bring it back," but NOT to profitably study in the past to improve performance in the present.

And yes, Tabra HAS cast lolaum's longevity more than once. She's cast it twice, but the second casting is NDA.

So saith Ed.

Who was not all that pleased with chronomancy, as I recall...

love to all,
THO

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July 18, 2006: Hello again, fellow scribes. Dagnirion recently posted: "Hey, Great Ed! Howareya? Don't remember if I ever asked, or not...either way, it doesn't matter too much. Anyway, could you share with us some of the common Elven food dishes of Evermeet and Evereska? Thanks!"

Ed replies:

Certainly. Elves have created and refined a huge variety of incredibly complicated "special feast dishes" (some involving cantrips that allow dry ingredients to be "breezed" [a human observer would probably describe this as 'swirl-mixed'] in midair), so I'll confine myself here just to a modest selection of plain 'everyday' fare. Please note that the drinking of wines is common with most meals, both dry wines with the main fare and sweet dessert wines to finish - - and that (to elves; humans and halflings may find them potent indeed) most wines aren't nearly as readily intoxicating as most human wines are, to humans.

Quaffs/Slakes (non-alcoholic):

Sprucebark quaff (cleanses palate/freshens breath before meals and after)

Mintwater

various berry-juice drinks (unfermented)

Vegetables (eaten raw, sometimes diced and fried with herbs and other vegetables):

Cress

Leek (also chives, hotwhips [spring onions], searshoots [wild Faerûnian vine onions]: these last are a staple of elven cuisine, and if left to dry until fall, can grow as hot as garlic, but never give elves "garlic breath")

Parsley

Coushoots (the green, growing "new" shoots of certain forest vines, such as Chokevine and Thaelthorn)

Greenspear (asparagus, a staple with many elves, both raw and steamed with herbs)

various ferns, from fiddleheads to stewed broadleaves

Brownbuds (brown Faerûnian wild forest radishes)

Fruits:

Many sorts of berries

Rhubarb

Roseapple (a mild-flavored apple-like fruit that grows at the thorny junctures of a particular sort of forest vine, the "rosethorn," that grows abundantly in the Heartlands)

Soups (usually served cold):

Leek

Turtle

Blalatha (certain mushrooms, diced and then boiled)

Darblalatha (certain mushrooms, diced, then fried with leeks, and then the mixed result is boiled)

Haendur (simmered glow worms, seasoned with particular sharp-tasting leaves)

Blackbark (literally, the stewed bark of four or five different sorts of forest bushes; tastes and looks a little like a thick beef stew)

Snake (four sorts, beheaded and then boiled until skins separate from flesh; skins, like heads, are discarded)

Meat and Fish Dishes (some elves eat flesh, some do not):

Seared Rabbit

Thaenwing (spiced-and-diced grouse, partridge, quail, and woodguth [wild turkey]; most elves are revolted at the thought of eating owls, whom they deem "intelligent souls," and believe dining on

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raptors brings misfortune on oneself and one's kin)
Silvereyes (fish stew, of silverflash and other small forest stream fish)
Sornstag (roasted hotspice [equivalent of curried] venison)
Surkyl (beaver: belly-slashed to insert leek and herbs, then rolled in clay and fire-baked, to remove hide and quills with hardened mud shell) Hooroun (moose, always marinated with particular herbs to counteract the natural seasonal tastes of spruce in winter and spring [when moose have been eating evergreen tips] and swamp in summer and fall [when moose have been grazing on swamp vegetation])
Lulleth (muskrat and equivalents [from shrews and voles to "branchcats," which are a tree-climbing Faerûnian cross between a mink and a raccoon], usually simmered into a thick stew; most elves dislike boar, but when they do eat it, treat it in this same way)
Groundsnake (beheaded and roasted on skewers over a fire)

Trail Food:

various nuts and dried berries
mintnut cheese

Taece (fire-dried tiny forest-stream fish, that look a little like brown, finger-length sardines, contain a lot of fat, and are "crunched" [eaten whole, bones and all])

Marruth (sometimes disparagingly called "root pies" by dwarves and humans): pastries into which cooked spiced and herbed mashes of vegetables have been baked, and then let cool, and then rolled into rallow leaves (heavy, oily, waterproof broadleaves) to keep them from rotting, and carried for eating cold when on the move

Desserts:

Mint jelly

tarts made of various berries, sweetened with a mash of berry juices

I could go on at length, but I'm afraid I haven't the time just now to set down a lot of detailed recipes, so I hope this helps. Elven cuisine is more sophisticated than human, though it uses almost no non-forest ingredients, so if you have to improvise, look at some of the dishes whipped up on, say, IRON CHEF and think of "forest-friendly equivalent ways" of making some of them.

So saith Ed.

Who must be tearingly busy right now, to resist giving you recipes!

love,
THO

July 19, 2006: Hi again, all. Scribe Chyron asked: "Do bards serve as the top critics as well as creators? For example who in the realms would be among the most notable Drama, Music, and Food critics (The ones nobles and common folk alike might bend an ear to)? Would these be other Bards due to their wide variety of knowledge or is the domain of 'criticism' left to others (sages, or scholars, etc)?"

Is the 'best'* food imbued with magic? Are the Julia Childs, Jamie Olivers of the realms required to be dabblers (i.e. Bards or other casters) to be considered among the top artisans of feasting fare? Is this something that is only reserved for/accessible to the nobles?

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(*Best being subjective I know...but I wonder if nobles might see 'enchanted' food as being above standard or even rare edible fare as the enchantment might make it more pricey and exclusive).

My thanks and good eating to you both :)

Ed replies:

Many bards, priests, and sages do act as critics, but in rural areas of the Realms, most folk pay attention to the opinions of particular local "elders," and in cities, various "high society" types set themselves up as esthetes and are either jeered out of acting thus, or heeded. So there are "notable" critics only in the local sense, and endless war between various noble "aging aunts and uncles" who speak out, in cities; the trend-setters among the younger generations (who of course often disagree sharply with the "mossbrained" opinions and tastes of the "graybeards") in those same cities; and travelers such as Volo (and, yes, bards and minstrels, but more often eloquent and successful merchants, who publish and sell chapbooks of their travel accounts and opinions, spreading "their judgments" of matters culinary and cultural.

So, no, bards don't serve as top critics (except to "captive audiences" of students in academies they may be tutoring at).

And no, the best food is NOT imbued with magic, because of centuries of fear and abhorrence of magical tinkering with food (poisoning foes, transforming foes, or just tricking foes into eating dung, vomit, and glass shards, and other disgusting or harmful substances that were temporarily transformed into something more appetizing). Just about every society shunned magical meal preparations (except for specific and sharply limited tasks such as peeling and ingredient mixing), and so the prevailing attitude across the Realms now is admiration of cooking done without magic (though no one is going to cavil at someone who uses a spell to get drenched wood burning as a cooking-fire in a rainstorm, or thaws out frozen food in a blizzard).

However, your suspicion is correct: some nobles DO see "enchanted" food as being exclusive, rare, and special because it's forbidden or frowned on, and pay wizards (and especially sorcerers who can work magic without a lot of obvious casting preparations) handsomely to prepare food magically at private feasts and revels. Of course, nobles who love such fare claim it has taste that "more mundane" food can never achieve.

So saith Ed.

Who has certainly described some wild revels in Realmsplay, down the years, and (in censored, toned-down form) in more than a few short stories and novels set in the Realms, too.

love to all,
THO

On July 19, 2006 THO said: Which is as good a cue as any to remind younger scribes of what Wizards Books Department (oop, sorry, they're calling it the "Publishing Group" these days) let slip at a long-ago GenCon: the top-secret, long-delayed Realms short story collection project they've been "privately" assembling:

EDTIME STORIES.

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(No, I'm NOT making this up. Many drinks have been hoisted in dimly-lit nooks, late of GenCon nights, as Ed and various WotC editors contemplated this project. Peter Archer thought of it, and the title, I believe.)

love to all,
THO

July 20, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes of Realmslore. This time, Ed tackles RodOdom's post: "Dear Ed and Lady Tho, Here's another question about names. The ruler of Halruaa is known by the title "Netyarch". The great druid of the Great Dale has the title "Nentyarch". Is there a link between the two names?"

Ed replies:

Yes, there's (only) an etymological, historical link.

The title "Tarnentyarch" was an archaic word for "leader, speaker of decrees" as Netheril rose to greatness, and through usage the word (corrupted to "Nentyarch") became a Netherese title, roughly equivalent to "sheriff" or "district supervisor." In other words, a Nentyarch was an official who kept order, settled disputes, and disseminated information over a specific (and fairly small; so there were many nentyarchs, and the rank wasn't exalted) geographical area.

Many folk fled in various directions during Netheril's fall, and the title (corrupted again, into "Netyarch") was obviously adopted by the ruler of Halruaa (perhaps the largest and most successful diaspora 'colony'). In uncorrupted form, it obviously also found its way to the Great Dale.

So saith Ed.

Tireless painter-in of all the little uncoloured details of Realmslore.

love to all,
THO

July 21, 2006: Our pleasure, RodOdom!

And hello again, all.

This time Ed tackles atlas689's quintet of questions: "1. Are there any future plans for any books on Netheril such in the format that of the novels of Cormyr or Evermeet were written from either you or any other author?"

2. Not much is known of Barauble of Cormyr before he was seen in the elven forests of Cormyr. I know that he is from Netheril, but what of his life in Netheril is known to us?

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3. Elaith Craulnober has obviously massed a huge fortune in Waterdeep, Mirt seems also to be extremely well off also but who has the greater and the more valuable keepings?

4. In City of Splendors the novel Madeiron Sunderstone is mentioned as Piergeiron's body gaurd, what is known of him other than the few worded description given to him in the novel.

5. In the novel Farthest Reach when the whereabouts are questioned about Elminster and the Knights of Myth Drannor, it is said that they are on a mission along with the Simbul to do something with the Shrinshree, is this the possible storyline of the upcoming book Swords of Eveningstar? Tempus thanks you!

-Atlas"

Ed replies:

A solid roster of queries, atlas689, and kindly scribes have ably leaped into action to deal with them already. So I'll bat cleanup, as follows:

1. I don't know, but I doubt it. (I don't decide what novels are being written about the Realms, and am not privy to the plot details of many books being worked on by writers whose names don't happen to be Ed Greenwood.) However, I have a pretty good idea of how many titles are scheduled and who's hard at work on what, and there don't seem (to me) to be too many slots unaccounted-for - - which leads me to suspect that there aren't plans in, say, the next three years to deal with Netheril. You are familiar with the out-of-print Arcane Age mass market paperback trilogy that dealt with Netheril, yes?

2. Not all that much. The large, grim-looking shield I'm raising and hiding behind is an old, battered, yet still-valid NDA. Isn't its silence heavy, and somehow menacing? But let me hint: he was assigned (ordered into) to the role he ended up in. I leave you to speculate by whom.

3. Skeptic has directed you to the relevant reply (page 16 of this year's thread), but to be more specific: Mirt is a LOT wealthier than Elaith, but Elaith doesn't realize it and probably wouldn't believe it, because the bulk of Mirt's business as a landlord is well hidden beneath several layers of apparent building owners and sub-owners (whereas his moneylending business is conducted very openly). Mirt also sponsors many small businesses in a completely confidential manner, and does "banking" for several guilds in a highly profitable sideline that's even more secret. Elaith has the larger profit-per-transaction and is making more gross profits in recent years (because more of his business is criminal, hence high-margin), but Mirt has a huge head start as a landlord and in money-laundering business investments for Elaith to overcome. In terms of influence, Elaith can command more fear - - but Mirt is a Lord of Waterdeep AND much better-known and more liked. So Elaith's lifespan will make him the eventual winner (if he stays alive and stays interested in Waterdeep), but for now Mirt wins any shrewd wealth comparison of the two in a walkover. Not that either of them is particularly interested in any direct competition (both see the other as a convenient "cover excuse" for a lot of things, and Mirt's formerly deep apprehension that Elaith is out to wreck or covertly rule Waterdeep has faded; he now correctly sees the elf as caring about Waterdeep's future).

4. Arkhaedun has mentioned Piergeiron's first appearance (in FR1); there was some amplification in both VOLO'S GUIDE TO WATERDEEP and the 2nd Edition CITY OF SPLENDORS boxed set (complete with an illustration of him: he's the taller guy in the illustration on page 70 of the Campaign Guide booklet). He's a pretty straightforward guy, with few secrets. Trust me. :)

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5. Skeptic and Arkhaedun both took care of this one. "Tears So White" in REALMS OF THE ELVES deals with the whereabouts of the Knights during the events of the Last Mythal trilogy. SWORDS OF EVENINGSTAR is set in the past, specifically during the year the adventuring group that later became famous as the Knights of Myth Drannor was formed, winning their charter and beginning their adventuring careers.

So saith Ed, the original and still-bubbling font of Realmslore.

love to all,
THO

July 21, 2006: I asked Ed about this, and he told me someone at TSR 'relabelled' what was in the original (written by Jeff Grubb, I believe, not Ed), replacing an invented Realms word with a real-world phrase.

Here's what those letters were:

GRAVVENDREN: written documents entitling and legally empowering the bearer to collect a debt in future, either monetary or in terms of service (aid in doing a task, or furnishing space or materials to the bearer for carrying out the task).

(That's a double v, not a "w" in the word, BTW.)

In this case, various thieving guilds had needed help (in hiding and smuggling contraband goods or funds or sought-by-the-authorities guild members or persons kidnapped by the guild for ransom) in the past, and had received said aid from another organization (usually another thieves' guild, but often a legit guild that wanted to win the good regard of the thieving guild), and had written an I-O-U in recognition ("gravvendar" is the singular). And those at Darkhold had been assembling and stockpiling them, so as to be able to carry out concerted operations with a lot of help in the future.

A gravvendar has a "cash out" value in lieu of aid. In other words, if the guild or organization (trading costers use them, too) refuses or is unable to help you in terms of performance, they owe you a specified amount of cash.

The "legally empowered" bit means the organization members will work with you and not swindle or harm you, even though you don't know their passwords, have membership in them, and so on. To use the recent phrase "if I told you that, I'd have to kill you," consider a gravvendar as a certificate of immunity.

love,
THO

July 22, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes. Ed felt he'd been neglecting Woolly Rupert, and so has tackled Woolly's query: "A discussion in another thread has mentioned something from one of the Elminster's Ecologies books: the existence of dinosaurs in the Stonelands. To some of us, this seems to be an odd place to drop dinosaurs... And, now that I think about it, I'm not recalling any

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other references to dinosaurs being there. So, in your Realms, are there dinosaurs in the Stonelands? And either way, is there anything you could add about their official presence there?"

Ed replies:

The Sage is quite right to remind us of my Candle04Page38 reply: there once were many dinosaurs in the Realms, but the dragons flourished by dining on almost all of them, leaving only handfuls behind (usually in jungles or other "good cover from flying wyrms" terrain).

The Stonelands are just such terrain, with their knife-edged ridges, deep ravines, caverns and overhangs, and exposed horns and faces of stone. So, yes, there are a few dinosaurs lurking deep in the Stonelands. Almost all are ostrich-sized or smaller velociraptors (bird-like, darting and hopping predators, of the sort featured so prominently in JURASSIC PARK: see fleshraker and swindlesplitter under "Dinosaur" in the MM3), though there are a few deinonychus (MM). They hibernate in deep, "warmrock" rifts (near earth nodes and volcanic flows) and hunt in cover, never leaving the Stonelands or racing along heights of land (for fear of being devoured by dragons; the Zhent foulwings, dark horrors, and other aerial steeds remind the dim-witted dinosaurs of the "death from above" that they now instinctively fear).

So saith Ed, who will recall Torm trying to interest Jhessail in a skewer of dinosaur steaks that she said VERY rude things about. Even Rathan, with the aid of much wine, downed them only with difficulty, finding them "tough, and with a curious dead-mushrooms taste."

love to all,
THO

July 23, 2006: Hello again, all.

Blueblade, Ed tells me he wasn't planning on reading from SWORDS, but rather from "a few old favorites." He warns that this is part of the province-wide Summer Reading Club (which Ed helped design, one year, back when he was working for NYPL), and that the audience may be rather young; he'll tailor the reading to his listeners.

This time Ed tackles two queries from Blackwill: "Greeting madame THO and sir Ed, I am a member of a community (ALFA) dedicated to recreating your realms within Neverwinter Nights (2) and sometimes we have strange and funny questions which add flavor to the world we've created. Here goes. Is there any whale catching within the realms? Are there specific types of whale?"

What is your personal favorite region in the realms, and why?"

Ed replies:

Yes, indeed, there's whaling in the Realms (in the western and southern seas that bound Faerûn, almost never in the Sea of Fallen Stars). These days, it's practiced by Chultans, by pirates in the Nelanther when food is slim or they need to waterproof their hulls, by a handful of Korinna Ffolk and Tashalan seacaptains, and especially by the Northmen.

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(I'm distinguishing here between seeking whales at sea to slay them, and fighting off sea creatures that attack ships; many warm shallow waters are plagued by tentacled things that snatch sailors off decks at night, and even drag down or tear apart smaller vessels.)

Here are the main species of whales hunted by whalers:

o The Araun

This huge species is the largest of known Faerûnian whales (many are more than two hundred feet long), and in shape resembles a gigantic cucumber or Zeppelin. It usually drifts slowly through the sea, mouth open wide, scooping up plankton and small fish alike-but it can charge at astonishing speeds to ram and sink ships, if aroused, or [males only] to 'head-butt' other araun to establish dominance over a bay or a specific female during spring mating times. Araun females can carry fertilized eggs and fetal whales within themselves for years, giving birth only when conditions are ideal (clean waters, abundant food, lack of bad weather or predators, warm spring or summer conditions). Araun have jet black skin, underlaid by a thick white layer of edible blubber, with huge amounts of quite pleasant, "roast beef"-like meat underneath, that keeps well if kept submerged in salt water or sealed away from air in a barrel that's been smeared with blubber (araun blubber has a smell like fresh cut grass, and rapidly forms a "skin" like varnish when exposed to air, so it's doesn't stay sticky to the touch, but water softens this skin on contact; the blubber can be used for frying, boiled down into a cooking oil or fragrant lamp oil if combined with the right herbs (both for smell and taste, and to alter it so it won't congeal back into blubber). Araun organs are also edible, the liver and heart being incredibly rich and a prized ingredient in some recipes for beneficial potions; a dead araun can feed a village for months.

o The Daerasluke

This fast, agile, whale likes to play (leaping clear of the water, chasing each other around ships, islands, and undersea obstacles) in pairs or small groups. Daerasluke are slender, 50 to 70 feet long when full-grown, have large front fins and heads like very large flat arrowheads, and are sandy-hued. Under their hides is a thin layer of spongy yellow skin that leaks a yellow oil that can be burned as lamp oil just "as is" (so stabbing a beached or dead daerasluke causes an outflow of oil that barrels and lamps can be filled from). Under this is white, fibrous, "whitefish"-like flesh that's very oily, but edible; it can be squeezed to "drive out" the oil and the less-oily flesh then eaten (it "fries itself" when cooked), or it can be cooked down or boiled down to separate out a lot more oil if the flesh isn't wanted for eating. Daerasluke are plentiful, and females usually give birth to six or seven frisky young at once; they may produce two such families in a season if conditions are favourable.

I've cut Ed's reply in half here to avoid hitting the post size limits, and will post the rest here tomorrow.

love,
THO

Hello again, scribes. Herewith, the second half of Ed's replies to Blackwill, beginning with another two species of whales:

o The Karrask

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This is an armored-headed, fearsome-looking monster of many seafarers' tales, the whale that "likes to fight," ramming ships, shearing off oars, and even leaping out of the water to land on and swamp small boats. Karrask have large, glistening black-and-gold "false eyes," but actually see out of many tiny orbs studded here and there in the fissures between their armor plates. A karrask has a head like a giant horseshoe crab (except that where a crab has an unbroken plate as its "shoe" snout, a karrask has the same shape made up of many overlapping plates), and an adult is usually around 80 feet long, with some old warriors reaching 120 feet or more. Karrasks are loners, meeting in shoals and deserted islets far out to sea to mate, with only the males "cruising the coasts" (where they'll eat anything organic, including sailors fallen overboard). Karrask yield almost no oil, but have thick white muscles under their skins (feet thick) that's said to resemble but surpass the finest white pork in flavour. A single slain karrask can feed a village very well for almost a month, or make a merchant's fortune if the meat (white flesh that hangs together very well, and is often cut into blocks about the size of a handkeg, by men wielding double-handled saws and holding the meat in "coffers" made of boards while they work on it) is brought fresh to a port market.

o The Browntail

The most common sort of whale, found in large pods swimming slowly around harbours and along coasts, "grazing" on weed (and the algae that bloom on sewage). Small (most adults are between 30 and 40 feet long), placid, and bony, resembling large trout in shape. Their skins are mottled light and dark brown, and white on the underside, with the tails being darker, unmottled brown. Browntails are easily caught, even by whalers working harpoons and nets from ashore, and yield much edible but oily beige-hued flesh that despite their diet, doesn't taste bad. It is, however, heavy on the stomach and an acquired taste. Browntail oil is gained by boiling the hide, and yields a fitful, flickering, brownish light when used in lamps; its horrible taste bars it from cooking use (except by orcs and goblins, most of whom drink the raw oil avidly). It is, however, ideal for "waterproofing" canvas (it makes the cloth resist being waterlogged, protects it from rotting, growing molds or breaking down in the sun), and when mixed with several other (secret) ingredients, works as a very effective sealant on leaky wooden hulls, and so is much prized by pirates, who often come into harbours to hunt whales more than raid shipping.

Now, as for your second question: I honestly don't have a single favourite region in the Realms, because I can't choose between the Dalelands, Cormyr, Waterdeep, Silverymoon, the Unicorn Run, and the Border Kingdoms. I love 'em all. (This is like asking someone to choose which of their children is their favourite!)

So saith Ed, who can talk "Salty Old Cap'n Highliner Pirate Seadog" with the best of them. No, DON'T encourage him.

Especially if you're a flirtatious female.

And even vaguely human.

love,
THO

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On July 23, 2006 THO said: Will, it's like this: I can rarely swing the time off from my job to attend GenCon, but I often, ahem, detect something we just have to "deal with, right now" in the vicinity of the RCA Dome in Indianapolis, on a few specific dates, if you know what I mean...

Ed doesn't anxiously await GenCon so much as he writes like heck and hopes he can get done whatever he has to get done, before GenCon rushes up to meet him. He loves attending GenCon, yes, despite the cost (writers don't make all that much, and Ed is one of those rarer sorts of guys who loves to shop), and says it "recharges his batteries" seeing old friends and meeting fans.

He wasn't planning on doing a SWORDS OF EVENINGSTAR reading at GenCon, except perhaps informally, to friends (because all GenCon events have to be carefully planned and cleared with the GenCon staff, and it doesn't seem that WotC included such an event on their request list), but Ed usually doesn't know his "final, final, FINAL" con schedule until mere days before he starts the drive down. So, if you see him at the con, ask him to do a reading. If he gets the chance, he will.

love,
THO

July 25, 2006: Hi once again, fellow scribes. Ed herewith tackles a query from Naeryndam: "Do you have any information detailing Antarn the Sage's life or perhaps stats (if he is still alive)? The only information I can seem to find on him are quotes from "The High History of Faerunian Archmages Mighty"."

Ed replies:

You have found the only in-print Realmslore on this individual, but here's more:

Antarn the Sage is indeed still alive and flourishing, as a wealthy sage in Athkatla. It's hard to get to see him these days, as he grows elderly and increasingly reclusive in his modest, always-shuttered tower in the east end of that city, and deals with would-be clients through two trade agents: retired adventurers (fighting-men) named Hyelan Zorandel and Drethtar Wildtree, who take turns dining at Taerandamlur's feasthouse (we would say "restaurant") of early afternoon and evenings on Antarn's coins, awaiting anyone who wants to drop by their table and try to hire the sage to provide information on a matter. Zorandel and Wildtree are empowered to engage Antarn's services, setting very stiff fees (10 gp minimum, even if no lore is given; refusal to pay means Antarn will never entertain another query from the same source; on top of this, 10 gp per name, yes/no answer, or location provided, plus 25 gp per identification, simple description, or simple explanation; fees escalate for more complex lore, usually starting from a base of 50 gp and easily reaching 80 gp). They later bring back written results to the same tables in Taerandamlur's (which stands on Sardel Street, and is a many-lamp-hung, haughty place of marble pillars, many wines, and superb food), for clients to return and collect. Throughout such dealings, the short, slender, dapper, brown-bearded (he dyes it to retain its chestnut hue) Antarn is never directly seen.

Antarn does go out to buy his own provender (he cooks for himself, Zorandel, and Wildtree), to (rarely) stroll and see the evening sights, and to seek highcoin (refined, quieter and older) ladies-of-the-evening, with whom he likes to play board and card games before "bed games." On such

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occasions, he avoids identifying himself to anyone, and goes about protected by an [[ironguard ring]], a [[ring of shooting stars]] and an assortment of minor magic items. Antarn is a loner who has devoted his life to study, and copies stolen books (except for actual spell text) for various Athkatlan thieves (whom he deals with through Zorandel and Wildtree) in return for their supplying him with whatever books he wants to consult (temporarily stolen from Athkatlan private and temple libraries). He's perfectly content to live out his days reading and writing, with Zorandel and Wildtree as his only real friends (as well as employees; they also serve as his bodyguards and errand-runners when he wants them to), having other human contacts only on his terms. He faces danger calmly ("fatalistic" is a good description), and can't be moved by threats of torture, ruin, death, and maiming. Book burning will enrage him, but he will remain in firm control of his outward emotions and speech, turning to inwardly plotting doom...

In game terms, Antarn is a LN male Tethyrian human Exp14 [sage: Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility and royalty)]. Antarn will provide lore about the deeds, lineages, and descriptions of practitioners of Art, but NOT about spells or arcane lore, pretending to know "regrettably, almost nothing about magic." His major work thus far is THE HIGH HISTORY OF FAERUNIAN ARCHMAGES MIGHTY, but he has also penned the chapbooks DURSUNDER STREET: A LOCAL HISTORY and HUNTSILVER ERRANT: A LIFE OF ONDAMARR HUNTSILVER (about a young male adventurer of the Huntsilver noble family of Cormyr, who came to Athkatla almost a century ago and made his fortune, ending up transformed into human female form and the wife of a very rich Amnian cloth merchant, Harstel Maunkvaer).

So saith Ed.

Who roleplayed a meeting between the Knights and Zorandel (an amiable but formidable individual), once. We never had dealings with Antarn, though. As Torm put it, "Hire some stuffy sage to tell us something when it's much more fun to find the right person to tell us for free - - after we've taken hold of his throat and shaken him long enough?"

love to all,
THO

On July 25, 2006 THO said: A postscript, to Na-Gang: Ed DOES have notes on Tharsult, because I've seen them. He probably stopped hammering them into Realmslore web-columns when Eric Boyd asked for Tharsult info (figuring Eric would use them). I'll add your request to the heap on his desk, but right now he's so blamed busy that anything that involves a search for something may not happen until after year-end.

But then again, maybe he has it right in front of him, right now.

love,
THO

July 26, 2006: No, Ed "retired" from Toronto Public Library (North York Public Library) when his wife did. He now works part-time in a different library system (in Port Hope, Ontario; Ed's there about 15 hours a week or so; sometimes more, sometimes less). He's also chair of his local library board.

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Ahem. Hello again, all.

This time Ed pulls together parts of two widely-separated posts by createvmind (don't worry, neither he nor I have discarded the rest of those posts; they, too, will get answered in the fullness of time): "Side question, the Skindancer in MM3 does it exist in YOUR Realms?" and the earlier "One last thing, do half-vampires exist in YOUR Faerun?" and replies:

Yes, both half-vampires and skindancers exist in the Realms, but both are rather rare (the latter only as guardians in certain ancient "dungeon" tombs).

Ed also responds to this, from createvmind: "Looking forward to hopefully meeting you at Gencon."

I hope we can meet, and talk Realmslore somewhere. Aside from buying gaming goodies and seeing old friends, meeting fans of the Realms and enjoying the Realms together is the reason I come to GenCon. I'll look forward to it!

So saith Ed.

Who can certainly talk.

love to all,
THO

July 27, 2006: Hi, everyone. Ed tackles two related posts this time: first, from RodOdom: "Have the Malaugrym had any dealings with that other shape-shifting race, the dopplegangers?" and second, from createvmind: "The above post just made me wonder if there are female Dopplegangers and what would be offspring of her and Malaugrym?"

Ed replies:

Oh, yes, the Malaugrym have had dealings with dopplegangers (mainly enslaving them; quite a few dopplegangers have ended up as agents of Malaugrym). And yes, Malaugrym and dopplegangers are cross-fertile and have had offspring, but NDA as to just who, and on what powers that who has. :}

So saith Ed.

Who's sitting on something VERY interesting. About which, of course, I cannot say more.

love to all,
THO

July 28, 2006: Hello again, everyone. This time Ed makes reply to Kuje's post: "Hey Ed, I've always wondered if you could tell us more of Kyrial Alathar Pellinore, son of Chiros Pellinore. Third Lord of Everlund and proud servant of Tyr.

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This guy always interested me ever since I saw him mentioned a few times in the Spelljammer black boxed texts in some of the Spelljammer material but I've never really seen any FR logo'd material on this person.

Does Everlund have some spelljammers? Does Kyrial captain any spelljammers? Or what's the deal with him? :) So basically, I'm just asking for any general details about him...."

Ed speaks:

Yes, at least two (and probably more) of the mansions of Everlund are grounded and overgrown (but still usable; in emergencies, they'd come bursting up out of the ground, shedding garden earth, vines, and the like) spelljamming vessels. One of these (which looks like a simple three-floor stone keep, bulging out into a cylindrical tower at its northeast corner) is Kyrial Pellinore's home.

Kyrial is a much changed man, in recent years. He "fell away" from Tyr, and then returned to the god, but not before faking his own death (over a decade ago), to get out of all civic duties and end a dispute with an angry husband that was shaping up into something that might have riven the ranks of Everlund's Elders.

He now poses as his own cousin, come back "from afar" to bring up "the young Pellinores" (Aunglautha, Neerelle, and Jahanrisse, the three daughters, now beautiful but rebellious teens, of Kyrial's now-deceased younger brother Bran; Bran and his wife Klarra were killed fighting off wolf-riding orcs who raided Everlund in a howling blizzard some years back). The three young ladies know his secret, but haven't let it slip out. Yet.

Kyrial is tall, aging but still athletic and handsome, broad-shouldered and goatee-bearded. He was once stern, just, and warlike, then became a scourge-of-the-ladies, and is now just, kind, gallant, and now much less driven to conquer all the good-looking females in sight. (His spelljamming is also largely behind him.) These days, he's interested in covertly defending Everlund (avoiding much of its society and politics, and working with Harpers and local druids and rangers to patrol the surrounding countryside as scouts, so no raiding bands will ever get close to Everlund again without its defenders being warned and ready), and in living quietly with his new lady: Emmura Silverlock (LG female moon elf Rgr6/Wiz7/Bladesinger4), whom he rescued from Zhentarim captivity while adventuring (she had been "experimented upon" magically by Zhent mages and beholders, and is under a "curse" [recurring magic Pellinore has not yet found a way to remove] that every few days causes one of her limbs to alter into scaled snake-body form or taloned, furred panther-like form (transformations that cause her agony), and stay that way for 1d4+1 hours, changing back with the same pain. Aunglautha, Neerelle, and Jahanrisse know of this affliction, but no one else in Everlund does - - because no one in Everlund has ever knowingly seen Kyrial's mysterious "Lady Silverlock" (there's much rumor about her). She (or one of the three younger ladies, pretending to be her) dons an iron mask and an all-concealing cloak and ankle-length robes, if anyone visits unexpectedly.

Obviously, there's a tale here I'm not telling anyone, yet.

Time... I need to find a spell that will give me a lot more writing time...

So saith Ed, Master Spinner of Realmslore, Cryptic and Otherwise.

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love to all,
THO

July 29, 2006: Hi, assembled scribes. Ed herewith tackles createvmind's queries: "Hello Ed, How does one find out the all the secret names of a deity that they don't serve especially if the person is not evil therefore above torturing that deities loyal follower? And does this knowledge confer any power or leverage to the person?"

Ed replies:

As to your first question: I don't know. You'll have to roleplay it to find out. (Hint: joining the priesthood of that deity and ascending its ranks to receive names in instruction, study of religious tomes, and through prayer is the best way to discover ALL the names of a deity. Those unfriendly to a faith, who try to learn about the deity of that faith, will encounter hostile and prepared resistance from worshippers of that faith as they gain more and more names, because the deity will become aware of it and instruct its faithful accordingly. Peeking at holy texts in temples one sneaks into - - and then leaving, without taking or desecrating anything, is the swiftest way to learn more than one secret name at a time... provided, of course, that you search the right book in the right place in the right temple, and manage to get in and out whilst doing the minimum amount of harm to any priests encountered.)

The answer to your second question is: Yes. First, knowing some names makes possible the performance of certain prayers, leading to the granting and casting of otherwise "forbidden" or "restricted" spells. Second, knowing some names confers actual rank within many priesthoods ("Oh! If you know THAT, the god must consider you fit to be a THIS!"). And third, knowing more and more secret names of a deity draws you closer and closer to understanding their true nature, falling under their sway, and becoming a fanatical worshipper of them. [Yes, this IS a roleplaying instruction to DMs. :)] In short, learning a few secret names of a deity can be useful in PC dealings with clergy of that deity, give a PC lore they can sell or trade to NPCs, and help in PC understanding of what said clergy is doing, locally. Learning more than a few secret names of a deity is only helpful to PCs who want to embrace that deity and rise in the service of that deity. As a weapon to use against that deity or that deity's clergy, it's more dangerous to the wielder than to intended targets (deities make sure of this).

So saith Ed.

Creator of the gods of Faerûn, from Shar to Mystra to Eilistraee to Lurue.

love to all,
THO

July 30, 2006: Hello again, all.

No, Wooly dearest, Ed created Gwaeron Windstrom. Trust me. I have a pencil lore write-up of Ed's from 1981 (when no one in gaming had yet heard of Bob Salvatore), that provided my character a quick paragraph of lore information about Gwaeron.

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Speaking of Realmslore, and deities...

This time, Ed responds to Uzzy's post: "Hello Ed! Another question about Lliira from me. Ive been looking through various bits of lore about Lliira, looking for a reason as to why Lliira has two Portfolios, those of Freedom and Liberty. They certainly get mention in various Lliiran based feats, etc, but with Lliira being described often as a flighty and detached Goddess, I dont see where she has Freedom and Liberty from (except maybe having Freedom due to her dancing nature, Freedom of Movement and all that)

Basically, what im asking is this. Where is this part of Lliira coming from? Would revolutionaries/freedom fighters really worship Lliira? Because, even with Lliira having those Portfolios, I dont see it happening. Perhaps shes just neglecting those Portfolios?

Thanks in advance."

Ed replies:

I see your point. I suspect you're using one pair of particular meanings of "freedom" and of "liberty," whereas I and other Realms designers are using other meanings.

First, let's look at some basic dictionary definitions (from a Pocket Oxford, edited down by me to remove etymology, etc.):

"FREEDOM: personal or civic liberty; liberty of action (to do); frankness, undue familiarity
take freedoms with: boldness of conception; exemption (from): privilege possessed by city or corporation; membership, citizenship freedom of: free use of company, city, house"

and

"LIBERTY: Being free, freedom, freedom personified, right or power to do as one pleases or to do;
at liberty: free, disengaged, having the right or permission to do;
(natural liberty, civil liberty, etc.)"

Now, as one might expect, those definitions refer to each other, but they're pretty clear once you disentangle the various meanings. They can be simplified down into "freedom" being the actual lack of restraints, rules, barriers, and so on, on behaviour, and explicit permission to be free; and "liberty" being the "feeling free" mental attitude of the free, that lets them understand their freedom and take advantage of their freedom by actually ACTING in a free manner.

Or one can match the meanings with the words the other way around; the fact that the two words have become so confused, over the years, is due to loose usage (see immediately below).

By your mention of revolutionaries and freedom fighters, you seem to be linking "freedom" and "liberty" firmly with warfare (what I call the "Fourth of July speechwriter's" use of those words; for example, the phrase "freedom is on the march" is an oxymoron to someone not thinking of freedom in militaristic terms, just as "freedom reigns" is an oxymoron unless the speaker is using "reign" in the benevolent sense, to mean something light-handed whereas "ruling" means dungeons and headsmen and soldiers bursting into homes to root out miscreants).

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Please don't misunderstand me: I am NOT saying freedom and liberty aren't worth fighting for (nor that they can usually be gained without fighting for them).

And the Realms has more than a few deities who govern (many aspects of) fighting. However, by and large, Lliira isn't one of them.

The Scarlet Mummerys (details upcoming in a Realmslore web column on the WotC website, as I told you in an earlier post) are the main exception: they ARE fighting clerics within the priesthood of Lliira, but their role is mainly defending the faith and Lliiran worshippers. They do attack adherents, temples, and clergy of Loviatar, and act against those who seek to stamp out or punish revelry. They do so in order to keep other priests of Lliira from having to take up arms or break off being carefree and happy.

Lay worshippers of Lliira, however, aren't ever expected (by Lliiran clergy) to fight with weapons to promote freedom and liberty. (Though they won't be chastised by Lliiran clergy for, say, drawing a dagger to defend themselves, as that's also an act of personal freedom.) They are enjoined to act as if they are free, so as to make a locale, society, and situation more free. (Freedom is the act of doing what we want, so if we all try to do what we want, we'll be free - - or at least, more free.) For instance: in a town with strict laws and large numbers of heavily-armed Watchmen poking their noses (and drawn swords) everywhere, the mood will likely be law-abiding, but also very quiet, wary, even fearful. A Lliiran's way is to laugh, dance, frolic, tell jokes to and about the Watch, and "act carefree." Not to attack the Watch, but to make everyone carefree and heart-light (or at least happier). Break the tension. Offer wine and small gifts to the Watch and everyone else. Enjoin mourners at a funeral to stop weeping and being grim, and tell stories about funny things the deceased said or did. Try to get into male-only societies and clubs if they're female, and vice versa if they're male, and ask continually why everything isn't open to everyone. (But do so in a playful way, not an antagonistic manner.)

Glance back at those dictionary definitions. Out of the various meanings of Freedom, a devout Lliiran promotes liberty of personal action, boldness of conception, frankness, and familiarity - - to a Lliiran, there's no such thing as "undue familiarity;" nothing is 'too much' (in the public baths, the Lliiran is the guy who cheerfully comments on the sizes of all the penises around him - - and his own).

In other words, a Lliiran is always trying to (peacefully and politely, working through legitimate channels) change laws that restrict (e.g. "women can't come in here" or "all taverns must close at dawn"), always speaking the truth (where someone wearing a horrible and expensive new hat asks a neighbour if they like it, and the neighbour to be polite says it's nice, a devout Lliiran says cheerfully that it's horrible), and treating everyone like an intimate friend (there are no taboo subjects, which can be embarrassing, but also liberating - - that word again - - because a visitor, just arrived in town, can complain to a Lliiran she's never met before that her underthings are itching, and ask how to wash them or alter them to fix that). Lliirans are always in the forefront of new ideas, new styles of art and music, and always supporting (and working to make sure they'll be successful) festivals of misrule (where the servants are served by their masters for a day, or guild apprentices run riot)

Back to the dictionary definitions, to Liberty this time. A devout Lliiran celebrates and promotes in others the joy of being free, the right to do as one pleases - - again, working against restrictive laws, breaking minor written and unwritten rules ("No singing in here!" Lliiran response: start trilling away) where societal safety won't be harmed (a Lliiran is NOT an insensitive, airheaded idiot, and won't joke about dead babies to a bereaved mother or shout "fire!" in a crowded

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chamber), and breaking their own and others' routine. "Enjoy the moment!" is a Lliiran saying; "Do something different!" is another. "Why not?" is a favourite Lliiran response to just about anything.

It's very important not to use freedom or liberty in a militaristic sense when speaking of this goddess or her followers. These are the people who put flowers in the mouths of guns, and do the "free love" thing, speaking out against oppression and aiding the oppressed but NOT fighting the oppressors. They are the Gandhis, not the men with guns. They are NOT the anarchists and freedom fighters who use bombs or slayings or open warfare to try to change things. They may work with, and heal, hide, and help such fighters, but those fighters are more likely to venerate or be clergy of Tyr, Lathander, Tempus, Torm, Garagos, or even Helm or Red Knight.

Whereas clergy of Ilmater concentrate on enduring oppression, clergy of Lliira make fun of oppressors and try to lighten the hearts of the oppressed. Lliiran clergy who know of an armed plot to overthrow an oppressive regime would NOT help fight against that regime with weapons - - but they WOULD (if asked) spread word of plots and preparations ("gather here at dusk" and "hide your coins and be ready to travel"), help bankroll the freedom fighters, provide diversions and shelter and healing, mock and hamper armed authorities seeking to quell the rebellion, and so on. They will WORK FOR freedom, but not FIGHT FOR freedom (and so are often labelled "flighty" and "uncaring" by others, labels you echoed in your post).

So saith Ed.

Helping to make clearer why all those similar divine portfolios really are distinct, and need different deities backing them up.

love to all,
THO

On July 30, 2006 THO said: And Myth Ondath was Ed's creation. First seeing print in the Ruins of Myth Drannor box, but first appeared in play in an inscription on rotting parchment Rathan found on stuck to a damp dungeon floor during our Knightly explorations: "Beware. They wait in Myth Ondath, their task unfinished. The living are their tools and weapons."

Needless to say, we hastened to follow that up - - until Torm found some treasure, and its guardian, and thus distracted us all.

love to all,
THO

July 31, 2006: Well met again, all. This time, Ed makes reply to GothicDan's post: "To the great and wonderful Ed Greenwood: I was considering making a Sun Elf character for roleplay (and possibly later as the main character in a writing piece), and in looking over possible Gold Elf Houses, Alastrarra caught my eye. I know that this House played a major part in Elminster's past (a la the novel). But I was wondering, is there any information known to you about the House as it stands today, in modern Faerun? Are they powerful? Prevalent? Weak? Declining? Primarily resident in Evermeet only, or also with branches in Silverymoon and/or Evereska? Connections to the Eldreth Veluuthra?"

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Any knowledge at all would be very much appreciated. :) Thanks in advance!"

Ed speaks:

"The great and wonderful Ed Greenwood"? Don't know the guy. I'm just Ed. :)

However, I probably am the best person alive to attempt to provide any new Realmslore about House Alastrarra. So, here goes:

Today, this family is small in numbers, considered "old, respected, and minor" (very much as their reputation has always been), and holds a low public profile, eschewing strong stands or actions in elven commerce, politics, or military ventures. So they wield little influence or power, but are respected (as "true, staunch" elves, representing well-behaved, conservative elven society).

There are no more than about sixteen Alastrarran elves left on Evermeet, but more than forty in Evereska - - where they dwell in sprawling mansions of shaped, living wood (trees and shrubs) in extensive landscaped gardens. A favourite family sport is magically taking falcon shape and hunting (not to slay, only to find, catch up to, and then turn away), and as a result most family members know the countryside around Evereska, and events there, very well. Some elderly female Alastrarran elves are expert weavers (and so make magical garments from time to time) and harp-makers (ditto).

The head of the house in Evermeet is the truly ancient elf Imrae "Starshoulders" Alastrarra (CG female sun elf Rgr4/Sor18, who is a tall, gaunt, frail, almost wraithlike friend to many she-elves, who come to sip wine with her and talk, thankful of a haven from the often-fierce gossip and feuding among highborn elf ladies - - because Imrae simply refuses to take part in such disputes, ignoring insults and slights, and being gently friendly to all). She's a beloved friend to many, widely respected for her "gentle, loving" nature, and although she uses her influence in small ways all the time to patch up disputes and mend or strengthen friendships, she chooses to have no voice in the weightier politics of Evermeet.

The real day-to-day leader of House Alastrarra, however, is Olond Alastrarra, who heads the branch of the family in Evereska. A white-haired, vigorous LG male sun elf Rgr11/Wiz9 of grand voice, handsome features, arresting charisma, and masterfully shrewd and intrigue-mastering mind, he pays close attention to all that goes on in Evereska, and advises his kin in just what to say and how to act so as to maintain the family style of lying low and keeping out of trouble. Perhaps his favourite saying is: "We are Alastrarra. We say little, watch and learn much, do the right things - - and will endure when louder, prouder elves are fallen and swept away by their follies." Most of Evereska thinks Olond cares for little more than his gardens, but all of House Alastrarra know better.

Possible successors to Olond include the young, energetic, and carefully diplomatic in public and loyal to Olond's directives brothers Melander and Imyrar Alastrarra (Melander is a Rgr9 and Imyrar a Ftr6/Sor2). If Olond wants them to be at a particular feast or meeting to watch what happens, they'll be there. If he wants them to jaunt (House Alastrarra knows the whereabouts and details of using many portals) halfway across Faerûn to procure something or speak to someone, they do so. With alacrity. They trust Olond (and their trust is not misplaced) to better House Alastrarra and all elves, and find purpose and meaning in serving him.

I've split Ed's reply here, to avoid running into the post size limit, and will provide scribes with the second half tomorrow.

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love to all,
THO

Hello again, all. Here's the rest of Ed's Realmslore reply to GothicDan, re. more information on present-day House Alastrarra:

There are no known connections between any Alastrarran elf and the Eldreth Veluuthra. Nor does the house have "branches" outside Evermeet and Evereska.

The family DOES, however, embrace the tradition that "restless younglings should seek and find themselves, where'er their feet may lead," and accordingly doesn't shun young Alastrarran elves who go off adventuring. Wherefore there are lone members of House Alastrarra in Silverymoon and somewhere in the Thousand Swords south of Altumbel (plus anywhere else you'd like to place PC Alastrarra elves, in your campaign).

Faerendil Alastrarra ("Faeren" to his friends) is a CG male sun elf Ftr7/Rog5/Wild Scout 2 who dwells in Silverymoon, making a living as a guide assisting merchants who prefer to "travel the back ways" between the Gem of the North and other settlements in the Marches (usually because they have valuable or illicit cargoes that Faeren carefully doesn't ask about). He's an avid fan of adventurers, loves to meet visiting adventurers and hear of their exploits, and dreams of acquitting himself ably in some dangerous, splendid adventure. Soon.

Nurue Alastrarra ("Nue" to friends) is a CG female sun elf Rog2/Sor9 whose glossy raven-dark hair reaches to her ankles, and whose blazing golden eyes peer sensually and challengingly out at the world from under black, prominent brows. A hedonist who loves all manner of sensual experiences with partners of many races, she wandered the Inner Sea ports sampling festhalls, Loviatran whipping rituals, and just about everything else. She slew a drunken loxo who raped her in Soorenar, and fled from arrest for this (the loxo was a favourite trusted servant of one of the richest merchants of Soorenar, Mharaunkh Myrtalis) onto a merchant ship that turned out to be a pirate vessel. The crew of the [[Bright Sail of Neldar]] loved her (and she, them), and for most of a season she sailed with them, until the ship was wrecked on a shoal in the Thousand Swords, in a fierce storm. Neldar and most of his crew drowned, but Nue and a handful of pirates made it ashore in one of the ship's boats. She has resumed her wandering life, shedding pirates who used their swords (and so ran afoul of local fisherfolk and villagers) where Nue used her charms, and is still exploring, seeking adventure, and wondering what the Yuirwood - - and the court of The Simbul - - are like.

So saith Ed.

Who happily generates reams of such lore when asked (and not too busy: churning out books and books of it is, after all, his livelihood, and - - even to a longtime editor like me - - his schedule is awesomely busy).

love to all,
THO

* August 2, 2006: Hi, all. Ed happened to be at work on something that allowed him to make swift answer to creatvmind's query: "If not NDA and you are creator of him, is Gwaeron Windstorm his truename and if no can you hint at one...hee hee."

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Ed replies:

Yes, I did create Gwaeron Windstrom. His truename is "Aarthon." Shhh, don't tell anyone. :}

So saith Ed, who has happily crept around deep woods a time or two. And spent some summers as a Service Scout and later as Camp Ranger to many campers. I've never forgotten him walking up to us in the pitch darkness, silently in moccassins on a beaten dirt path, holding up a rotting log on which a CRAWLING phosphorescent fungus was glowing. He set it down beside us, and after we'd chatted for an hour or so about life, the universe, and the usual everythings, the fungus had migrated half off the log...

I've passed on all the recent scribes' comments and questions to Ed. As for him doing something similar to House Alastrarra in the Realmslore columns: he'll not be able to do anything soon, because he's handed in all the columns currently contracted, so as to "win" himself time to write three novels and one top-secret project he's told me not even a little bitty hint about!

love to all,
THO

August 3, 2006: Hello again, scribes. Ed herewith responds to this post, from Arivia: "A pair of questions for Ed:

1) What about body modification in the Realms? We know that at least ear piercings exist, but what about nose or lip piercings? Are ear piercings only used in high society for earrings? Or, to put it another way, any cases of bone fragments being used for piercings? How about other forms of modification, such as scarification or corsetry?

2) Any details you can share on Kururn Blackalblade (see page 150 of Power of Faerun), or will those have to wait until the Border Kingdoms series reaches Blackalblade the town? Oh, and please say there's an entry on the Realm of the Smoking Star on the way!"

Ed replies:

1. Please see Page 4 of my replies in the 2004 vintage of this thread, Page 69 of the 2005 version, and especially Page 37 of the 2005 thread (wherein I answered this question directly, if briefly, in response to Woolly Rupert). To summarize, except among clergy, nipple and genital piercings are rare. Ear piercings are the most common, and usually for dangling earrings. Other piercings are unusual to rare. (The "punk" look of the modern real world would be interpreted in a Faerûnian port as someone from afar, having the "usual look" of wherever that was, and in Faerûnian backlands as some sort of religious dedication or practice. It would not be something most observers would want to emulate.)

Ritual scarring is usually religious in nature, and reflects a rite of passage or rank attainment in divine service (lay or priestly). For example, a cleric of Loviatar would at very low level participate in a ritual where she said prayers while being whipped in a particular spot until an open wound developed, and then would continue to pray while dyed salt was ritually put into the wound to increase pain and impart a particular colour to the wound, and then go on praying while senior priests used brazier-warmed pokers and burning brands to cauterize the open wound so as to

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make it a permanent scar. (Other faiths use ritual branding, sometimes administered after drugs to lessen pain.)

Corsetry is very common, from fat male merchants and female goodwives just wanting to "improve their shape, as meets the eye" (and so donning various foundation garments, meant to stay hidden under clothing) to all sorts of alluring garments (meant to display the body, and at the same time be displayed as adornment).

Yes, bone fragments are used among human, dwarf, gnome, and halflings in Chult and among serpentfolk everywhere for (where anatomically relevant) ear, lower jaw, and forearm adornment, but these bone pieces are usually deliberately shaped and polished into little figurines or tooth shapes marked with luck-runes (or in the case of arcane spellcasters, the bones themselves can serve as material components for necromantic spells, or the runes they bear have magical uses).

2. Well, I didn't impart all that much about Kururn in the Blackalblade web entry, because he's long dead. Or (heh-heh) perhaps undead, in your Realms campaign.

In the 'home' Realms campaign, he haunts a particular tavern - - and the alley behind it - - that occupy the site where his house once stood, as a silent, wraith-like phantom with burning eyes. He watches everyone who "comes too close," growing multiple heads to do so, and is insubstantial and silent, but menacing (he's guarding the bulk of his treasure, which was buried deeply and never found when his house collapsed and was cleared away for the building of the tavern).

No one had yet dug his coins up - - but when they do, I'll have Kururn materialize as a boneclaw (MM3, but able to fly and fade in and out of tangibility), to slay - - but do so stealthily, stalking the treasure-finders everywhere across the Realms and attacking them only when he can get them alone, asleep, or otherwise at a disadvantage. The moment he leaves the site of his onetime home, he'll lose the ability to manifest multiple watchful heads, but he'll always be able to unerringly teleport back to that place. He'll seek to slay any treasure-takers, and restore his treasure to where it was.

As for the Realm of the Smoking Star: of COURSE there's an entry coming on it. And on every other nook, cranny, stream, rill, and waymoot of the Border Kingdoms. Would I leave you wanting?

Oho, Arivia, be careful how you answer THAT sort of Ed question.

Me? I'll just be over here, carefully out of earshot...

love to all,
THO

August 4, 2006: Hi again, all. This time, the request for Ed's lore comes from Jamallo Kreen, to whit: "Who was the disembodied Netherese Archwizard "Ander" back when he was alive, and what details are known of him besides what is in Elminster: Making of a Mage? (Yes! My effort to read El's life story backward to its beginnings has progressed all the way to Athalantar.)"

Ed replies:

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Mharrander Dorolkh is the full and proper name of this Netherese archwizard, who was born in - 1546 DR in Tzindylspar, to a lowborn merchant family of Netheril who traveled tirelessly fetching mundane supplies and items for various arcanists. He was one of some forty children, and his father, Surrane Dorolk, eventually sold Mharrander (who'd exhibited a natural aptitude to 'feel' the presence and strength of magic) to an archwizard, one Kazindrol - - a cruel, bald, bearded arcanist who exulted in taking beast-shape and hunting, rending, and devouring other creatures. Kazindrol sought immortality through the ability to send his mind intact into beast body after beast body, possessing and controlling all he entered, and prided himself on being able to inhabit and command two bodies at once (he saw this not only as essential to avoid dying in a slain body, but as a demonstration of his superior force of intellect).

Kazindrol had need of many assistants, but slew or transformed those he saw as growing into threats to himself. Mharrander never achieved this status, being always too obedient, eagerly obliging, and paltry in training-at-Art, and so was on hand when six of Kazindrol's apprentices all attacked their master at once. The spellbattle was swift, spectacular, and deadly, ending with the top of Kazindrol's tower shattered and Kazindrol and four of his apprentices reduced to ashes, a fifth caught in a spell-cycle that kept him helplessly transforming into a bewilderingly rapid sequence of different creatures (all of them wounded and pinned under rubble), and a sixth triumphant but ravaged by pain, and lashing out at everything in sight - - including Mharrander, who slew this sixth, snatched all the magical tomes and portable items he could find, and fled (leaving the wounded fifth apprentice to be blamed for everything, when neighbouring arcanists arrived to plunder Kazindrol's magic).

Mharrander took himself far from Netheril, into high mountain caverns, somewhere to the south, where dragons laired. There he studied, soon finding a magic that would allow him to snatch creatures from afar for food, and another that would preserve dead bodies in a stasis field. He soon ringed his caverns with dead, floating beholders (that had perished of natural causes, or been on the verge of doing so, ere his magics plucked them to his presence), to dissuade exploring visitors, and began years of study and mastery. From time to time, as the years passed and the world changed, he emerged to explore and test his magic. First he slew or tamed dragons, and then under cloaks of magical concealment observed what others were up to, concentrating most on fellow Netherese arcanists - - and in particular on those working on longevity magics.

Only the human contacts of his explorations, and "feeling involved in unfolding life" through his spyings, kept Mharrander from going insane from sheer loneliness. He took to calling himself just "Ander," and indulging in mimicry of those he spied upon.

He stole such secrets as he dared from archwizards pursuing longevity or immortality, and kept watch over their abodes and doings; whenever one of them perished, Ander swooped in to gather all he could of their magic and research. He sought his own route to immortality or at least longevity through seeking to master regeneration, and in tinkering with "the stuff of flesh" so that parts that did regenerate would not age, but return with the vigor of youth.

For many of his organs and tissues, he achieved what he sought, but saw no way to destroy and regenerate his increasingly aging head and brain without dying. So he turned to wraithform magics, and his stasis fields, hoping to buy time until he could find a solution - - or someone else did, that he could seize or steal it from.

Such tactics bought him centuries, but no solution offered itself. So at least, reluctantly, he turned to exploring lichdom and its magics, still using the "long sleeps" of stasis fields to buy more time.

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Which in the end brought Ander to his encounter with Elminster encountered, in ELMINSTER:
THE MAKING OF A MAGE.

So saith Ed.

Who glossed over much, but has presented here far more about Ander than has hitherto been revealed anywhere.

Ed also adds a quick postscript to Gillies:

I've been asked about a local D&D playing group several times at the Port Hope Public library, but haven't found one yet. There was one in Cobourg, but its members have migrated steadily west, to Whitby and Oshawa. Keep watching this thread: if I find one, I'll post it here, and tell the librarian at TCS, too!

So saith Ed.

Who's throat-deep in work, as usual.

love to all,
THO

August 5, 2006: And Ed says:

"42."

Of course.

Ahem. Hello, scribes!

Ed received all of the recent flood of related queries, sighed, grinned at Wooly's comment, nodded at Smyther's insight, and told me that right now he dares only answer the second of Eytan Bernstein's questions: "Does Faerun have tectonic plates that cause seismic activity?"

Ed replies:

Yes - - and no.

(There you go. You're welcome. Now run along, have a nice day, there's a good chap...)

Just joking. Yes, Toril has tectonic plates. No, they don't often cause seismic activity, because the earth nodes 'drink' the kinetic stresses, and let out that energy in other ways than earthquakes, faults, and slippages. So the fault lines are there (and many volcanic flows run along and up through them, so volcanic locations give a surface observer a rough idea of where some plate boundaries are), but the plates aren't "on the move" nearly as much as they are in our real world. As of right now, at least. :) And for now, that's definitely all I'll say on the matter. Sorry. (Cue sinister NDA symphony, looming dark and rising...)

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So saith Ed.

Who's probably got "Peter and the Wolf" on in the background, again.

love to all,
THO

August 6, 2006: Hi again, scribes. This time Ed tackles RodOdom's queries: "The Realms is criss-crossed by immense spans of roads and trails. At night when people retire from travelling do roads serve land-bound monsters? Do roads connect monster populations in a significant way? Would a goblin in the Vast Swamp be able to direct a lost traveller to Suzail? (assuming the goblin is in an unusually civil mood.)"

Ed replies:

Yes, roads do serve land-bound monsters: as paths for travel where armed road-patrols are few or absent, as navigational aids ("follow the rabbit-proof fence"), and as sources of food (where there are roads, there are eventually settlements, and frequently encamped travellers).

Roads connect SOME monster populations in a significant way (intelligent creatures who by nature travel far rather than remaining stationary or moving only small distances. Flying beasts often use roads and rivers as navigational aids.

And yes (creativmind's hilarious "not too bright" goblin offering notwithstanding), most goblins in the Vast Swamp are intelligent and well-informed enough to know about the busy trade-road that passes nearby, which two countries it links, and the names and natures ("busy place, lots humans, markets stink bustle bustle bustle") of the nearest major cities in each direction, along the road.

So saith Ed.

However, other scribes chimed in helpfully, and in response RodOdom clarified and expanded his questions: "But are even the most busy roads used and patrolled at night?"

What I asked, in an admittedly unclear way, is whether monsters would be so familiar with the roadways as to get around in Cormyr.

For example, would a goblin would know how to get from the Vast Swamp to his cousins in the Marsh of Tun by using the kingdom's roads?"

So Ed then replies:

The busiest roads in a FEW places (interior southern Cormyr and Sembia, for example, and everywhere in Thay) are used at night. Roads in many more places (such as Cormyr in "the heart" box bounded by High Horn, Arabel, Suzail, and Wheloon, plus all of the mountain passes) are patrolled by ready-for-war army units, even if not by caravans (lone peddlers always face the "camp and risk attack, or walk on with my two mules and hope for the best" choice, if they haven't found an inn).

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Most goblins in the Vast Swamp would know that the Marsh of Tun is "THAT way, past lots of busy humans in glittering armor and their castles - - and mountains, too!" A few senior goblins would know the way more precisely, and be able to scratch out a crude map of how the roads run, where settlements are, ways over or "through" (humans would say "under") the mountains, and so on. A handful might have made the journey. Unless the Vast swamp was suddenly becoming far more dangerous for goblins than it usually is, no goblin would particularly want to.

So saith Ed.

Who roleplays sneaksy, slyly sucking-up goblins to the hilt. Torm and Rathan just roll their eyes, these days, and gut the little beauties - - or pick them up and hurl them out the nearest window, or head-first into the nearest chamberpot and then sailing through the air into a handy dungeon room with a door that can be spiked shut.

love to all,
THO

P.S. For the above sentence, cue sound effect: Ed's nasal, wet goblin voice rising in pitch and speed, yammering away in rising fear as the goblin vainly pleads/cajoles/makes offers... and then (one way or another) is abruptly silent.

Ahhh, it makes a girl smile.

August 7, 2006: Hello again, fellow scribes. This time Ed answers Skeptic, in the matter of something Ed said in these threads back in 2004: [[[It's very important that gamers not follow their real-world (usually monotheistic) thinking when considering Faerunian situations: the Realms is pantheistic, and "everyone knows" ALL the gods (at least of one's own race) "really exist." Unlike our real world, there's no denying that the folk praying to another god next door aren't just as correct as "we" are, because often "we" will also be praying to that other deity soon (if only for appeasement). The faith lies in believing this or that personal, dream-vision-induced, or priestly interpretation of the deity's will or intentions or prohibitions, not in believing the god exists.]]

Skeptic asks: "One of my players is asking me what exactly you mean by "everyone knows" and "really exist"?"

There is a subtle difference with "knows" and "everyone in the world believe", what is the most correct one for describing it? (Ex. "Earth is flat, Earth is round"). If it's the first, which proofs are shown to them to make them knows?

Let's say it's prayers' visibles effects: knowing that with spells, a wizard could mimic easily many "divine powers" (like raising dead with a Wish); wouldn't it be possible for common folks to think that there is no Gods and only "wizards who thinks are doing faith-based miracles"?

Let's say it's ToT : Some would argue that seeing Gods walking the land was the ultimate proof, but I doubt Ed were taking it into account in this answer. In the opposite case, it means that the relationship between mortals and Gods really changed during this RSE, if it's the case, I would like to hear Ed about it."

Ed replies:

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All of the conditions you mention are possible for players and DMs employing real-world, modern-day thinking, in which belief in a deity (often a 'supreme' or lone deity) is often a matter of faith: believing in a Divine One of some sort through "faith." That is, belief that for many individuals is bolstered more by sermons and interpretations provided by an organized priesthoods than by personal contact with the deity.

Things are different in the Realms. ALL intelligent beings, whether they worship any deity or not, are born and grow up "knowing" the gods are real, and that they manifest or even "walk among us" daily. EVERY intelligent being receives dream-visions that they believe are sent by the gods, among their other dreams. The nature of these visions makes it clear that they are divine in nature (an individual may need or want a priest's interpretation of the meaning of a dream-vision, but does NOT need the priest to confirm it came from a god). In most cases in which an intelligent being prays fervently to a deity (i.e. really meaning the prayer, not cursing or saying something by rote with real attention on something else), there is a manifestation, even if only minor (tingling of excitement from Tymora, rosy glow inside one's head from Lathander, the clang of sword on sword heard in one's head from Tempus, and so on). In other words, the praying being KNOWS they've made contact (perhaps not been heard or heeded or agreed with, and perhaps only with a god's aura or servitors rather than receiving the personal attention of the deity at that moment - - but they've been heard). Individuals who go to temples in which exalted [high-level] clergy perform exacting rituals ("super-prayers," if you will, with sacrifices and beautiful, heart-felt devotions: dances and eloquent pleas and fervent worship) often witness larger and more spectacular manifestations visible to all (surging excitement throughout the very air, and every body of every person, in the temple of Tymora [similar but more lustily stirring sensations in temples of Sune, Sharess, and Loviatar, with differing "tinges," of course]; a rosy glow in the air over the altar in a temple of Lathander; the sounds of battle [shouts, screams, the clang of steel, the thunder of hooves, war-trumpets] being heard out of empty air in a temple of Tempus, with the clang of emphatically crossing swords to mark agreement, recognition of a sacrifice or something promised in a prayer, and so on).

Certainly a cynic could say, "Ah, but it's just the priests doing that with magical trickery! Sure, magic comes from the gods, but so do we all - - and wizards can get the power out of the gods without any of this fawning and obedience!" However, the cynic would have to ignore the dream-visions that come to him, even if he doesn't pray. ALL of the gods are real (their power determined in part by the number and fervency of their worshippers), and the cynic would have to ignore all the signs he sees around him, daily, of the power of the gods (trees shooting up overnight from seeds blessed and planted by a priest that the cynic watched doing the planting, manifestations seen by many, and so on). The cynic could REJECT "the gods," or A god, but that's different than not believing in them.

In our real world, magic of the "instant whizzbang, I hurl my fireball" variety doesn't exist. In the Realms it does. In like manner, deities of the "the Great Xoblob walks past, glowing, and I weep, wet myself, and tremble uncontrollably in the thrall of energies racing through me, just through being brushed past by his divine power" variety certainly don't seem to have daily contact with most of us in the real world; if we believe they exist, we must take it on faith. Folks in the Realms receive far more "daily evidence" to bolster their belief, even if they never knowingly happen to touch or get close to, a deity.

The Time of Troubles wasn't unique in that "gods walked the lands." It was unique in that "Hey, everybody, they're ALL here this time! And they're upset! And they can't go back to where they dwell! And they're lessened in power, and they're fighting each other! RUN FOR THE HILLS!"

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It's not that every last goblin or fishwife or elf-child goes through every day thinking they talk to the gods and the gods listen and personally reply; it's that all of those beings cowers at the thought of ever personally coming to the personal attention of any deity, but knows all of the deities are at work around them, all the time, and are immensely powerful, and are best heeded (live life the way the priests say the god wants - - and keep a close eye on the tongues of those priests, who many after all from time to time twist things as we all do, eh? - - and we'll be in good standing with the gods, and they'll do right by us). Life in the Realms is a series of practical choices, forced by situations ("Must eat, so must get food"), and after that a series of moral choices (Chauntea would want me not to chase the raiding goblins across the newly-sewn field, but Helm and Torm and Tempus would all want me to get after them to make sure they don't get away, so... whose creed do I cleave to first?).

In the Realms as in our real world, there are many folk who ignore the gods (and certainly priesthoods and overt worship; aren't the nightly parade of dream-visions, and what I say and do in my dreams in response, enough?) as much as possible and just try to get on with their lives. There are also "true believers" who turn to the veneration of one primary or patron god above all. Most folk are somewhere in the middle, praying when it's prudent (and on special holy days or occasions such as weddings, funerals, and births) and in moments alone when they seek guidance or reassurance or a lifting of their spirits; the rest of the time, they (in the words of Rusgul the Smith) "let the gods see to the doings of the gods, while Rusgul sees to the livelihood and forge-work of Rusgul!"

Now for obvious reasons, with the United States as the primary market for the D&D game, the religious aspects of both the Realms and the religious environment postulated in the core D&D rules (from the beginning) have had to be de-emphasized.

Real people play this game, and decide to sell or ban or otherwise control access to the game by others, and so the game and its provider dare not offend the majority of said people. Moreover, to be heroes, characters (played by the game's players) must be self-willed (as "destiny" and "divine meddling" increase, "free will" and therefore "the freedom to have fun and to act as we want to, and therefore to do heroic or evil things" decreases). Add in the roleplaying possibilities afforded by organized priesthoods (with their own corruption, internal intrigues, and political involvements in the fantasy landscapes D&D campaigns unfold in), and it becomes even more desirable to make the gods "fade into the background" and push their believers (plus devils and demons and other "nasty" servitors we can fight) into the foreground.

So anyone, player or DM, can be forgiven for saying, "But there's nothing much in the printed rules or novels that says life is so gods-heavy in the Realms as all that!" That's quite true. Yet the hints and more than hints are there in all of the gods-specific resources (FAITHS & AVATARS, et al). The extent to which you put active divine involvement into your game is left up to you. As it should be.

(However, to game designers like me who "think Realms" daily, the initial players' questions you posted evoke a reaction along these lines: "Huh? How exactly does he ignore or dismiss his daily prayers, then? How can he even THINK such things?")

So saith Ed.

Offering fictitious pantheistic religious guidance to millions for more than two decades.

love to all,
THO

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August 8, 2006: Hello again, fellow scribes. This time Ed makes reply to Winterfox (and Lore Seeker, and Neriandal Freit and The Sage), about this (Winterfox's query): "A general question, for Ed and anyone who wishes to answer: on the NWN board, a poster insisted that Faerun = roughly thirteenth-fourteenth century Earth. Rino and I said no, not really. Said poster replied with a quote:

From the 1987 Forgotten Realms: Cyclopedia of the Realms by Ed Greenwood, Jeff Grubb, and Karen S. Martin:

The Forgotten Realms are a world very similar to the Earth of the 13th and 14th centuries. Most of the area under discussion here has until recently been covered by wild forests and unsettled grasslands. Civilization is still a novelty in much of this world...

The people of these realms (including man, dwarf, elf, gnome, and halfling) are similar in mindset and advancement to the men of the 13th century. City-states are common, and nations on the increase as more of the wild lands are pushed back and gathered under a single king or government... Literacy and the quest for knowledge in[sic] on the rise, with the recent introduction of printed hand-bills in Waterdeep.

Quoi?

Lore Seeker added: This is how Wikipedia describes Faerun.....

"Economically and technologically, Faerûn is comparable to Western Europe during the late middle ages. Gunpowder (here called smoke powder and different in its composition from historical gunpowder) is starting to make an appearance, but much of the armament is still dominated by swords, spears, bows, and the like. Most of the population consists of farmers, organized somewhat loosely in a semi-feudal system. There are also a number of notable cities, and trade between nations is common, comparable to the Renaissance era. Likewise, there are regions where more barbaric tribes and customs persist."

I think the level of advancement of civilization varies from region to region but overall, the above description sounds relatively accurate. But I would think this is best left answered by the creator himself, Mr. Greenwood.

and Winterfox responded: Well, to be sure, the discussion in question was more about language. The poster said he feels Middle English is the closest to the language used in Faerun because he thinks the Realms is comparable to 13-14th century Earth; I argued that the level of technology overall brings it closer to the Renaissance, and therefore closer to Early Modern English.

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Neriandal Freit chimed in: I'll go ahead and say it for everyone, Realms/Faerun IS NOT like nor is meant to appear like 13-14 century EARTH or ladder periods there of it.

Just because they have castle, robes and wars does not make it like that.

And Lore Seeker added: Ah, but now we must consider the varying dialects of English spoken. I assume it would vary just as greatly as it does here in the U.S. and other English speaking countries. Also, level of education in the different regions of Faerun would have a major impact on spoken English as well. For instance, I would think the average person living in Silvermoon would be much more well spoken than someone living in some small farming village or even a place like Ten Towns.

The Sage summed up: Ed has repeatedly said that Faerun is mostly not based on -- or rather similiar to -- Earth cultures, except for the parts that TSR added on. His most recent discussions on this are in the '06 replies.

-- Now, fellow scribes... let's try to keep the "Realms is comparable" discussions to another scroll and leave this one dedicated just to questions for Ed.

Whew. Ed replies:

As I've said many a time before, here at Candlekeep and elsewhere, trying to view the Realms in terms of real-world history just doesn't work, except on a personal level. The text Winterfox cited, from the Cyclopedia (and not written by me) is doing just that personal level thing: it's attempting to explain "what the Realms is" to someone completely unfamiliar with it, and possibly new to fantasy roleplaying. It's akin to a history teacher drawing a swift analogy ("think Venice, only without the canals") and is as inaccurate and invalid on the level of specific details as all such analogies.

Where real-world comparisons break down, always (leading us, on Internet discussions, down sidetracks into arguments about Roman battlefield superiority or ancient Chinese medicine or the advent of stirrups in warfare or "what if the Nazis had done thus and so" debates), is when we move beyond the personal level of helping someone understand "the basics" about the Realms into using real-world comparisons in wider discussions among gamers. I realize that inevitably we must and will make real-world comparisons - - or comparisons to what we think we know of Earth history (or other fantasy settings, like Middle-Earth) from what we've seen at the movies or read in books - - because we've got to have SOME frame of reference to understand this elephant all we blind people are trying to examine, and the real world is what we all share. The problem is, we don't all share the same experience of it. My schooling can't be replicated by posters at Candlekeep because most of my professors are dead now, for one thing. :}

Neriandal Freit is quite right to say that the Realms isn't like any historical period of Earth (and how can it be? We lack zap-bang magic, dragons, and truckloads of summonable monsters, just

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to name three factors in passing), and was never intended to be viewed in that way. "Technology" and "social advancement" (and please note that those terms in and of themselves betray real-world value judgements; folk in Faerûn, particularly survivors from Netheril, may disagree sharply with the notion that the passage of time brings "progress") does indeed vary from place to place in the Realms, as Lore Seeker pointed out, and does indeed seem more Renaissance than medieval (as Winterfox and Rinonalyrna Fathomlin quite correctly argued on the NWN board) in some locales and regions.

However, huge chunks of Realms real estate ARE "sorta" like "roughly thirteenth-fourteenth century Earth." And as the text in the Cyclopedia said, literacy IS on the rise (as overland trade increases in number of travellers, amount of goods carried, and penetration of trade routes deeper and deeper into "neglected" hinterlands), in the short-term "peace" between orc hordes and "really big Realms-shaking disasters." City-states ARE the most common form of "civilized" society.

The problem comes when one tries to move from shorthand understandings of the Realms to specifics. "Oh, so if they've got city-states, they must have X, BECAUSE THEY DID IN OUR REAL WORLD." The "because" just doesn't follow, in many cases.

Here, Winterfox, you've presented me with a classic case of that "next step:" the debate on NWN board about real-world languages because of views of the "state of advancement" in the Realms.

Unfortunately for everyone concerned, it just doesn't follow (no matter what the factors, unless they happened to be a large-scale invasion of people through a gate/oops, portal, from England "back in the day") that written or spoke tongues in the Realms would be closer to Middle English or Early Modern English - - or Old High Norse, for that matter.

Our real world doesn't and didn't have long-lived, very "civilized" elves (or dragons, or dwarves) living with, around, and among humans, in many cases "there first" before the humans, and using their own languages regardless of what humans did. In the case of the Realms, one of course in North America equates the Common Tongue with English, and the Common Tongue has spread because of the high birth rate and energetic travels and settlings of humans, and the ongoing trade-travelling that goes on among human-dominated settlements. One can argue that this is analogous to the real-world spread of English through exploration and colonization and the timing of the British Empire (and the spread of Christianity, for that matter), but of course the Realms has no monotheism and has had many empires, most of them non-human - - and one must scramble to find common factors between the Realms and the real-world. Like much academic debate, arguments tend to be made by ignoring elements that don't fit one's views or hypotheses, and linking together (into increasingly flimsy and grandiose castles in the air) those that do.

Not that I'm blaming any scribes for holding such views. Unless you're part of my original gaming group, there's no way your experience of the Realms can be of anything but the published Realms - - and someone who reads ALL the Realms novels and game products will find many instances of overt real-world elements and even people (e.g. the Dalai Lama!), authors assuming real-world customs and inventions and habits, and so on. Some of these make me more than roll my eyes and gnash my teeth, but - - they're done. Moreover, from the beginning of the published Realms (check Jim Lowder's posts here, about being assigned to edit out my Realms dialect writing from SPELLFIRE), there's been the practical necessity of changing my personal fantasy world to something twelve-year-old American males who just want a good fast adventure read to enrich their enjoyment of the game stuff they're buying (TSR's original target audience, remember), will be able to understand enough to enjoy. I'm not disagreeing with this necessity (Jim has often told the tale of having to explain what my line of dialogue for Elminster meant to

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fellow staffers: "Think ye me a codloose winker?"). I'm pointing out that the "prithees" and "Good my lord, how dost thou, I trow?" elements have largely gone away, in printed Realms fiction, in favour of "Yup. Nope. And one for my horse, too!" plain, "everyday" emphatic American speech. It may help clarity in storytelling, but on the other hand if we were all wading through largely impenetrable Realms novels with huge glossaries at the back to guide us through the dialogue, I suspect Winterfox and Rinonalyrna Fathomlin could never have found themselves in such a debate about which version of "heritage English" is prevalent in the Realms, or that Realms languages are "closest to."

When it comes to languages, Lore Seeker said it best when he pointed out that local variances in education, dialect, and interaction with "the wider Realms" are going to create so many differences in language complexity and usage from place to place that trying to decide if an overall level or structure of language is like "Middle or Early Modern anything" is... largely pointless, and difficult to reach agreement on, anyway.

I completely disagree with the "economically" and "semi-feudal" wording in the Wikipedia quote, by the way - - but agree that as a "this isn't, strictly speaking, true, but if you think of it in this way, you'll 'get it' in overall outline; just don't trust it on a details level" description, the Wiki entry, as quoted, works. That's the problem with truly detailed worldbuilding: in one key respect the Realms IS identical to our real world: it's so complex, and can be viewed in so many ways from so many starting sets of values and understandings, that it's just as subject to furious debate as our real world is. All too often. :}

What's deeply ironic to me is that this very discussion is one I had with Jeff and Karen back in 1986, as they gently told me that this or that aspect of the Realms was going to have to "go away" or "change" to fit TSR's needs in adapting the Realms to D&D. As an old museum guard used to say in my childhood in Toronto: "Nothing new to see here, folks; move along, move along..."

So saith Ed.

Prithee, sainted Master Mine, wilt thou do me the deepest honour of a backrub, when next we meet in fleshly directness? (Oh, yeah, one more thing: your turn to provide the wine, big boy.)

P.S. Realmslore returneth after GenCon. A few days after GenCon, that is, folks; Ed drives to the con and back, visits with family along the way, drops by Stratford to take in some plays (and shop!), and usually dives deep into extra projects or glitches he gets told about at the con.

Ed hopes to arrive in Indy Wednesday, but has meetings and dinners and ceremonies (yep, all three!) waiting for him, if he gets there in time (to say nothing of the usual shlepping of bags up to the hotel room, and then wandering off to wait in line forever for his con badge), so he doesn't know if he'll be able to say hi to any Candlekeep scribes that night. However, if you can catch him anytime after that until late Sunday night...

P.P.S. To confirm: yes, Zanan, the yochlol are Gary Gygax's creation, and would be "core Greyhawk" because that's all there was, at the time.

P.P.P.S. Oh, and to Rinonalyrna Fathomlin: no, I don't know what sort of fungus that was, and Ed can't remember, either. Yes, it IS creepy. With none of the fun of the other thing we used to do when camping (try this ONLY if you don't mind insects crawling on you): the guys used to catch fireflies in jars, and after dark gently insinuate them, by hand, deep into the hair of gals who had

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long, flowing hair (which was most of us, in the 60s and 70s). The visual effect of the bugs flaring into full radiance, on a lass (like, ahem, me) sitting in the forested darkness, could be stunningly beautiful. Ah, those were the days...

P.P.P.P.S. Wandering mage, you're very welcome. * I * can't wait until the Knights trilogy advances chronologically to where we're in Shadowdale, and Torm and Rathan are in on the fun...

I'll pass your thanks on to Ed straightaway.

love to all,
THO

August 20, 2006: Hi again, all.

So last year's Spin is up at last, Wooly? Good to know!

Ed's back, and wants to let Kajehase know he had a VERY good time at GenCon, and won't soon forget five-hour (! Ed, you rogue, you!) dinners with the lovely ladies of the Books Department and Pistachio Omelettes. He also wants scribes to know that he was delighted to meet some of you for the first time (such as creatvmind), and to see some of you again (Kuje, he did try to contact you on Sunday, and wants to e-chat with you more about your project, which he described as "superbly promising"), as well as old friends from the Realms-list (Jeff and Malcolm).

Ed is going to be punishingly busy for the next few months, and may occasionally fall silent for a few days here and there, but he hasn't forgotten the burning need for Realmslore all who love the Realms have, and his duty is assuaging it.

Wherefore, this time Ed tackles a timely query from Realms Lorelord George Krashos: "Something that has been bugging me ever since the release of FR4 The Magister (yes, more than 15 years now - we lorelords of the Realms tend to do such things often) - is "Whisper's Rod of Transportation" linked in any way with Whisper of the Zhentarim (soon to be showcased in "Swords of Eveningstar", plug, plug)? If so, how could he make one given his lowly magical abilities as statted (not that stats count for much)?"

Ed replies:

The short answer is: no, the Whisper for whom the Rod is named, and the Whisper encountered by the Knights (and darn it, the usual Evaporating Pagecount Problem forced me to give that second Whisper VERY short shrift, along with tossing out most of the last third of the planned novel), are two different people. Both human and both wizards, but that's where the correspondences end. For different reasons, they're both NDA right at the moment, but three novels from now in my writing schedule (around February 2007), I should be able to draw breath long enough to start wiggling my way through the NDA forests enough to be able to tell you more of the "Whisper of the Rod." (Gods, didn't THAT sound like an English schoolboy flagellation story!)

So saith Ed.

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Who is frantically writing those novels, as usual.

love to all,
THO

August 21, 2006: Hi again, all. Well said, Faraer. And by the increasingly long and hairy arm of coincidence, Ed herewith tackles this, from Faraer: "Ed, could you describe the experience of a worship ceremony by a worshipper? (implicit question: is it a profane, essentially social ritual, or do the worshippers experience the presence and myths of the god? or is there a lot of variation?)"

Ed replies:

My recent response to Skeptic (about folk in the Realms "knowing" the gods exist, as opposed to real-world "faith") should have largely answered you, I hope. The short answer is: there is indeed a lot of variation, from deity to deity, and culture to culture, and individual to individual. Worshippers do indeed experience manifestations, visions, dream-visions, and the "feeling of presence" of the divine when they participate in heartfelt rituals (particularly solemn temple rituals, with a lot of other faithful, and led by powerful clergy). Most folk in the Realms, even when they swear casually ("Aww, Talos take me, but 'tis hot!") or heatedly ("Bane's burning balls, man! D'you think I LIKE standing here taking arrows in my shield and shieldarm while you debate which fireball to hurl! Get ON with it!") or even out of habit ("By the untasted dung of Moander!"), make such utterances believing the gods hear. They also, almost certainly, do that swearing thinking the god won't respond to them, because they know the gods hear a lot of it, constantly, and are wise enough to know that it doesn't "count" as much as a ritual (a ritual involving a sacrifice, or personal pain, or intense rapture or concentration or fervor, in particular) does. There are indeed 'rote' social observances (the priest of Talos cries, "All hail Talos! The rains we need come again!" and everyone knee-deep in mud mutters, "All hail Talos," without much enthusiasm), but everyone understands that the Gods Hear All. And conduct themselves accordingly (usually not venerating one god above all others, but primarily worshipping one god due to their professions, or the usual situation or season).

So saith Ed the Ever-Worshipful.

Or Blasphemous, if you prefer.

love to all,
THO

On August 21, 2006 THO said: Yes, I'd noticed the suspicious timing of the appearance of that review, myself. And asked some American friends who'd had it rush-shipped from Amazon just when their copies showed up. The review came first. It even beat Ed's first signing session at GenCon.

It's a real pity that some gamers attack other settings that they view as competitors to "their" setting. I know Ed loves and uses them all.

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Then again, most Amazon reviews aren't worth the time it takes to read them. I think every scribe who reads one should begin by asking, "Does this reviewer make the childish mistake of equating their own personal preferences with quality or lack of quality?" If you think the answer is "yes," disregard the review. The reviews that are left after you do that probably will be useful. I'm always pleased when something to the effect of "I didn't like, but - -" shows up in the review. It shows me the writer is trying to stand back from the book enough to be fair about it.

love,
THO

August 22, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time I present Ed's answers to Kaysae, re. this: "Greetings, Ed of the Greenwood!

I have lurked here for a while and I finally have a question to ask, hopefully you have an answer! First, however, I just want to say how much I appreciate the lore you impart here at Candlekeep. I've enjoyed every scroll.

Now, my query. What are the benefits of taming the Stonelands, other than stemming the tide of monsters, Zhents, and the Shadovar? Does it offer anything in the terms of resources? I mean, what incentive is there that fortifying the eastern-most fringe of the territory wouldn't accomplish?

Looking at Elminster's Ecologies and your descriptions of the Stonelands here at Candlekeep, I have to ask, is the Barony just a ruse by the Crown to get adventurer's to harass the opposing forces therein? It seems like (barring Epic magic) an impossible task. It almost seems easier and more efficient to wall off the entirety of the Stonelands and lob in barrels of smokepowder day in and day out.

Thank you again!"

Ed replies:

Kaysae, you're very welcome! I hope you enjoy the Realms (upcoming surprises and all) for years to come!

As for the Stonelands: you've quite correctly identified the stemming-the-tide benefits of taming that region for the rulers of Cormyr. And, yes, the offer of a barony IS a ruse to give adventurers something useful to the kingdom (as opposed to mischief intended to line their own purses, that gives the realm headaches) to do, and of course to weaken the everpresent monsters, Zhents, and suchlike so as to minimize their raids down into "Cormyr proper."

Yes, it IS an impossible task, given the "breakneck" terrain (endless knife-edged stone ridges, with precipitous-sided ravines between them) that prevents the building of roads and large settlements, the making of accurate maps and the movement of armies... and so on.

However, there ARE lots of resources in the Stonelands: veins of metal ores and gems, rare herbs and plants that are either succulently edible or that serve in the making of scents, cosmetics, drugs, and dyes, some timber (hard to get out, yes, but there nonetheless), and of course the aforementioned monster life (edible meats, eggs that have a market value, hides and other "body part" alchemical components, a market for live caged beasts, and so on, again). Not

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to mention large caches of well-hidden treasure (cut gems, coins, statuettes of ivory, jade, jet, and even solid sapphire, ruby, or emerald, and even magic items) stashed in various spots in the Stonelands (such as cavern strongholds that could serve ably as homes or hideouts for adventuring bands). So it's territory worth venturing into for some adventurers, but land I'll never expect to see truly tamed and added to "everyday rural Cormyr."

So saith Ed, describing our old stomping grounds.

Ed forgot to mention one treasure we Knights found there: an extremely angry drow priestess (of Lolth) who'd been captured by the Zhents, flogged until she was raw, tied spreadeagled between two trees, and left hanging there in the sun, day after day, to die and serve as a warning and way-marker. Some day I'll tell the tale of our rescue of her (Torm was VERY affectionate to her), and of her response (which led to one of the weirdest adventures we ever had).

We also had some quite different fun, once: we came upon a Zhent messenger resting, with his foulwing steed grounded. We overcame him, questioned him, relieved him of his magic items and coins, tied him into his saddle, enspelled his steed - - and made it fly full-tilt into a rock pinnacle (splat). Torm called it "our improved Zhent warning and way-marker."

love to all,
THO

P.S. Yes, of course that led to some heated moral debates within the party. Penances were arranged, apologies made, and we agreed never to do such a thing again. (By "the next time," of course, Torm had thought up something far nastier.)

On August 24, 2006 THO said: Why, THANK you, N-F!

RevJest hath cajoled, and I (belatedly) answer the call:

Ahem. Your command is my wish (in the words of masochists everywhere).

Torm and Rathan were scouting in one direction (seeking a Zhent trail we knew was somewhere near), whilst the rest of us were scouting in other directions. Rathan saw the priestess first, from a distance, but thought her to be a human who'd been tied up and then crisped with fire magic, to be a warning-marker.

Torm's eyesight was a little better. He told Rathan that the "corpse" obviously meant a Zhent cache or hidehold was near, and (as a far-from-stealthy cleric) Rathan should get back to the rest of us, to inform and bring us hither - - whilst Torm the Professional took care of creeping around and spying.

Rathan agreed and departed. Torm went straight to the priestess, cut her down, took her to the nearest swampy ground to lave her in mud, gave her water to drink and rubbed ointment into the worst of her weals (and picked the maggots out of them), and told her that Lolth had abandoned her, allowing the Zhents to so mistreat and humiliate her, but that Eilistraee had personally commanded him to seek and find her, and "treat her as a lover."

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She received this news in bewilderment that overrode her disbelief, and rather timidly responded to his efforts to befriend her, giving her name as Aelrae and doing nothing to fight or defy him (though without spells, weak and wounded, dehydrated and only able to stay conscious for brief periods, she was hardly in a position to resist). Torm sang to her, stroked her, washed and fed her, combed out her tangled hair, and gave her sips of healing potions when she was too sleepy to be fully aware of what was going on.

By the time we found them, Aelrae and Torm were more than friends: they were lovers, inseparable and all over each other and constantly engaged in barbed, teasing conversations. That frankly made the rest of us afraid, because the two of them were developing ever-more-elaborate schemes to do damage to the Zhents running caravans through the Stonelands.

At first we sought to dissuade or stop them, but we were deep in the Stonelands, with Zhent patrols starting to look for us, and Aelrae and Torm threatened to reveal our location and plunge us all into a "last stand" battle against the Zhents if we didn't go along with them in their planned raids. So, we went along with them, our rubber arms firmly twisted. :}

Those two started by stalking and slaying a Zhent mageling so they could get his rings and wands. Then they started stealthy night ambushes, making us play the "diversion" attackers, and in about a tenday disrupted all Zhent travel through Yellow Snake Pass. The exasperated local Zhent commander, not daring to admit to his superiors that anything more than "blundering brigands" were "annoying" Zhents in the area, tried one all-out attack, a few traps that Aelrae and Torm watched being set up and so were in no danger from at all - - and then gave up on the Pass and turned to an older, slower way the Zhents had through the Stonelands: a narrow, winding subterranean caravan route that was very narrow and hence slow (only one-way travel was possible at a time).

Aelrae and Torm promptly found two caverns where their captured arsenal of wands could trigger cave-ins, and collapsed them - - walling up a large Zhent caravan alive, trapping them in a section of passage now cut off at both ends by the fallen rock filling the two caverns. They would have to dig or blast their ways out, or die in the dark from lack of air, water, and food.

They tried, but their blasting spells only brought down more of the passage - - by which time Aelrae and Torm were at one end of the blockage, awaiting Zhent rescuers and adding them to the imprisoned by triggering more cavern-falls in their wake.

Eventually all of this drew some high-ranking Zhents to the Stonelands, to see what was amiss - - and of course the Zhents there (not wanting to be slain in torment) fed them all sorts of wild stories of various formidable foes. Aelrae and Torm happily looted and ambushed some of these higher-ups, until Manshoon himself arrived on dragonback - - whereupon Aelrae astonished Torm by kissing him farewell and stealing the dragon (revealing to him that it was her lifelong ambition, the stuff of her childhood dreams - - and that she'd fallen out of believing all of his Eilstraee tales long ago, but stayed with him because he was so tender and clever and fun)! The last we saw of her was the gigantic black dragon winging west with her clinging to its back and Manshoon frowning at it, trying to decide what was making his steed behave so oddly; had it scented a suitable mate at last? If so, he didn't want to do anything that might mar its mating. So he let it (and Aelrae) go.

By which time we'd gotten a weeping Torm well away from Manshoon's spells, because Jhessail had seen and recognized Hesperdan approaching from afar, and the last thing any of us wanted was to get caught between Manshoon and the REAL power among the Zhentarim. Florin and Jhessail burned a lot of our arsenal of magics whisking all of us right out of the Stonelands and

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into hiding - - right in the heart of an unfolding intrigue in Westgate! THAT little plot in the end took us into one of Vangerdahast's Purple Dragon pay caches, in a secret location in Cormyr, and Torm got over his heartbreak by wading chin-deep in gold coins, and figuring out how to shift them all back to Shadowdale (I won't tell you how he managed it, because we might need to use a variation on his tactic someday, and if all of you start doing it the Purple Dragons and fistfuls of opportunistic Sembians will both be ready to foil us).

Years later, when Torm was depressed, Jhessail paid one of the top courtesans in Saerloon VERY well to submit to a shapechanging magic that left her looking like a scarred-by-recent-flogging drow female, and sent her in to surprise Torm for a night. In the morning, she wearily informed us that Torm had certainly surprised HER, and that she'd earned every last copper coin Jhessail had paid her.

Torm, ever the rogue, went around smiling like a contented cat for a tenday.

As I said, one of the weirder adventures we Knights have yet had.

love to all,
THO

August 25, 2006: Hi again, all. THO here once more (wearing my gown held up over my waist for the special benefit of Chosen of Moradin and dearest Wooly, to whom I say: there's nothing at all wrong with doing this, except you have to hold it up with your teeth, which hampers breathing; do enjoy my lack of underfrillies, by the way) with some quick housekeeping for Ed and divers scribes:

Chosen of Moradin, you posted a question from one of your players about flora and fauna of the Great Dale. He is aware of the details contained in the UNAPPROACHABLE EAST sourcebook, yes?

creativmind, Ed has dealt with deity-specific oaths several times here at Candlekeep, but those non-deity-specific "basic" curses you're seeking are found in a reply on Page 33 of the 2004 "ask Eddie" thread (hidden on page 2 of the Chamber of Sages).

Also, Skeptic, you asked "1) Do I have pending questions for Ed except the one about yuan-ti and other snakefolks in the north?" and "2) I'm looking to play with the FR setting in another game than D&D, so I want to remove some "D&Dism" from the published (3.x) realms. Would it be okay to ask to Ed a series of short questions like "does X come from the setting or D&D rules/design principles"?"

The short answers to 1 and 2 are both "yes."

The longer answers are:

1. Yep. Specifically: a rider to RodOdom's query about Skullport (its secrecy or lack of same in Waterdeep); queries about the Roaring Dragon House (DRAGON article); queries about the Masked Lady Lhestyn; queries about a now-destroyed temple of Bane that once stood near Secomber; a request for quick info on Phlan, Melvaunt, and the ruins of Yûlash/Hulburg/Sulyaspryn (that hopefully SONS OF GRUUMSH and MYSTERIES OF THE

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MOONSEA have largely answered, though of course Dargoth and others have posted requests in this thread for Ed to clear up Realmslore inconsistencies regarding those publications); a question about the current status of Llorck (that Ed has been avoiding thanks to the RPGA Green Regent campaign; can any scribes post for us all here some indication of how that now-wound-up campaign affected Llorck?); a question about reptilian monsters in the relatively-cold-climate Serpent Hills / Backlands / Forest of Wyrms areas; and a recent request for Ed to tell us all more about the Unicorn Run. (We don't forget a single question, folks, even if some of them are taking two years to answer!)

2. Yes, by all means! Bring 'em on! (So saith Ed.)

A man who obviously LOVES punishment, at least when it comes in the form of being buried under ever-increasing heaps of Realmslore queries from eager scribes...

Evil Knight, I'm sorry, but Ed has no idea when his next book signing in California (which would also be his first book signing in California) will be. He rarely has time to do book tours these days, though he sometimes drives to libraries and bookstores where he's been asked to do a public appearance (if they're located in Ontario, Canada, where he lives). The best way to reliably get to meet Ed is to attend GenCon Indy and try to pre-arrange a meeting with him; many Realms fans and writers do that, every year. But thanks for the praise, and watch this thread, because if Ed ever does know he's heading to California, he'll let everyone know, right here!

And to Wandering_mage, Ed and I both say: Thank you. Such thanks and praise warm us in our weary and depressed moments (when things go wrong or it becomes apparent that WotC has lost ANOTHER file from years upon years ago, and could Ed just whip up a replacement and send it in in, oh, say, the next five minutes or so, because designers are waiting), and make all the time and work worthwhile. So, thank YOU.

love to all,
THO

August 26, 2006: Ohhhh, but Steven, all sorts of good things go into designers' mouths when they're open. Or so (purr) Ed tells me.

Ahem.

Hi, all! This time, Ed answers Kuje, in the matter of: "How do elven light houses, in places that elves have ports, Evermeet most likely, differ from human light houses? Are there any magical light houses, I figured that there might be. How do the different light houses on the ports of the Sword Coast differ from those that could be found on the ports of the Sea of Fallen Stars? Maybe give us some details on the different light houses found in a few of those ports. Any details about any light houses that can be found among Spelljamming ports that are in Wildspace and on the planets..."

Ed replies:

Many early human lighthouses were built as copies of elven ones: that is, soaring towers at the mouth of a harbor (e.g. Baldur's Gate) with lights atop them.

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The main difference between elf and human lighthouses is that almost all of the elven beacons employ stones enspelled to glow intensely in darkness, rather than fire (that must either burn wood, something elves find distasteful, or burn oil, something they rarely have enough supply of "to just burn it, every night").

Humans (with brief exceptions, e.g. Netheril, Myth Drannor at its height, Silverymoon and Halruaa right now, and so on) have far more rarely had access to sufficiently powerful magic to make bright, unfailing night beacons. (Holy sites, such as seashore-located major temples) are an exception to this.

Therefore, human lighthouses usually are glorified wooden bonfires - - that is, beacons perched on natural rocky heights, or atop towers. They are often roofed over with stone or something treated to inhibit burning, so as to keep blazing beacons or fires alight during driving rainstorms, and to keep handy stored firewood dry.

Of the human lighthouses that do employ magical radiances, more of them are "always on" (so that they are physically hooded when keepers want to "show no light," whereas elven lights have more sophisticated enchantments that can be turned off by touching them and uttering phrases, but otherwise go "on" and "off" in accordance with the light or darkness around them).

Sword Coast lights must be visible from far out (above shore fogs), and so tend to be high up. Sea of Fallen Stars lights more often tend to be low down, near water-level, and to be used as "leading lights" (in other words, a mariner who sails so as to get them "lined up," one above the other, is on the correct heading to safely find a narrow navigable channel or harbor mouth in the dark). [This is of course a generalization, and hence correct only in the majority of cases, not in every instance.]

For obvious reasons, spelljamming ports that are entered through holes (hollow asteroids, or berths that are cavities in such places as the Rock of Bral) will often employ pairs of lights as "leading lights," to avoid having incoming vessels crash near their entrances.

Many Sword Coast pirate ports are customarily 'dark,' and lack towers. They may have war-beacons on rocky heights (employing treated wood that will burn specific colors, when lit on special occasions to send specific messages such as "War! Ships assemble here!" or "Keep clear! Port now in enemy hands!"), but usually "show lights" only at water level, by using "light ships" (beacons on moored ships, usually too old to be seaworthy, that are near shore, and can be swiftly scuttled to "turn them off," or towed to lead hostile mariners astray (onto shoals), rather than by permanent lighthouses.

Evermeet has two sorts of magical beacons: visual and "attuned." Attuned beacons, when activated, give off magical radiations that can be felt or sensed by those using the correct spells, or carrying the right magic items, rather than emitting any radiance. Attuned beacons can be "homed in on;" some of them even cause spelljamming helms to "sing" or resonate at particular pitches, that drop in volume or key if a ship changes its heading or moves away from the beacon source. There are family attuned beacons, royal beacons that the navy uses - - and no one, these days, uses them much; captains either know their way around near Evermeet, or don't approach it at all because they aren't elves and fear the elven skyships defending Evermeet.

I'd love to give specific descriptions of a few dozen lighthouses and port approaches in the dark, but I'm afraid I just haven't time. Sorry, Kuje.

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So saith Ed.

Who continues to be frantically busy (something we'll all benefit from, eventually, remember).

love to all,
THO

August 27, 2006: Hello again, fellow scribes. This time Ed answers The Sage, re. this: "I'm more than a little hesitant to add to my own backlog of questions for Ed to answer ... but a discussion with a fellow scribe over an aspect in another setting got me thinking about how this aspect is reflected in the Realms. It's about inbreeding, specifically... among the many royal families -- human and demihuman -- and/or long established noble families across the Realms. I know about instances of inbreeding in published Realms material already, for example... like that which is somewhat common among long isolated Underdark races, as well as the inbreeding that occurs among the ruling class of the Gugari people in the Hordelands. There are slight references in other sources... mostly with regard to noble families looking to keep favorable traits within their own family, but I'm looking more for Ed's personal take here and how he's handled the concept in his home Realms campaign, as well as any additional thoughts and/or lore he'd like to share with me. I realize this can be a sensitive subject, and if you feel it's inappropriate to answer here, I'll understand if you do not wish to elaborate. However, I'm intrigued by this somewhat, and I'd like to learn a little more about how such an aspect is realized in the Realms."

Ed replies:

No, no, nothing is inappropriate to discuss. After all, you're talking to a man who's discussed the visual success of her breast augmentation with a perfect stranger at a LIBRARIAN'S convention, very much in public. (She declined my offer of the taste test, but she was laughing as she did it.) Ahem. Inbreeding: as royalty sets the laws in almost every place in the Realms that has royalty (except in a few city-states, not yet detailed, where priesthoods have strong influences), there's nothing illegal about inbreeding. It's rare, and when it does happen is usually mothers marrying sons because the father (the king) has been slain, and the mother wants THAT son (often a bastard) to rule, or fathers (kings) marrying daughters. Sometimes brothers hitch up with sisters - - and uncle/niece and aunt/nephew pairings are quite common and aren't even thought of (in the Realms) as inbreeding.

Yes, there are inevitable genetic problems. When they become obvious is usually when rules start to get forced into place (and the drooling idiots get locked up and never spoken of again, or killed in "accidents" if they don't have to be kept around for possible backup breeding purposes).

It's important to remember that many of the Realms deities encourage "sex for fun" (or even "sex for religious rapture") and their priests have magical and pharmaceutical means of preventing contraception, so "it's only incest if the female partner gets pregnant." This, by the way, usually means family members satisfy their curiosity and indulge feelings of mutual affection, and then go looking for less "safe and familiar" but far more exciting partners, elsewhere.

What the Realms DOES have, in most places, is laws against bringing rulers back from the dead umpteen times, or ruling as undead. Sometimes a raising done quickly, after battle, can be passed off as "healing," but otherwise it's usually "death is final, for crowned heads" (to avoid

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factions bringing back centuries-worth of kings as pretenders and tearing kingdoms apart in endless civil wars).

So saith Ed.

Who seems to own an adequate supply of incest repellent in real life, I might add.

love to all,
THO

On August 26, 2006 THO said: We Knights asked Ed about this back when the novel first appeared, and his lore-reply (adopted by TSR at the time, I believe) was that Vangey not only suffered the ravages of aging, he suffered backlash effects from all of the many, many "wards linked to me" and "alarm/detection spells linked to me" and "wizard locks and seals on chests and coffers linked to me" (notably those on the Royal Vault) and so on and on and on, for all the magics he'd cast or inherited (as Royal Magician and Court Wizard, including some darned big "ahast" spells), all across Cormyr.

These "hanging" or constantly-operating or "inactive but sleeping" magics didn't all fail, but his mind and body were the container for all of their energies flailing about, as he fought to get all of them back under control and "tamped down again." Which left him, as far as the Realms around him was concerned, very much "out of it."

Hope this helps,
love,
THO

August 28, 2006: Hi again, all. Thanks, TheRedBard, I'll relay your post to Ed right away. (His reply might not be so swift, because his family is visiting him for the next week or so, and THAT insanity occupies most of his time!)

However, he DID manage to send me a lore reply.

This time Ed answers lobotraxx, about this: "In the short story, coming out of the Realms of the Underdark, "A Slow Day in Skullport" there are several characters that are mentioned at the end of the story that may show up in future stories. The characters are Torthan, Voundarra, Zarissa, and a black dragon called Vulharindauloth. Which novels do they show up again in to tell more of their fate because it kind of left that part hanging? Thanks again."

Ed replies:

Nowhere yet, Lobotraxx. One of the keys to making the Realms seem alive is to create endless "loose ends" for later use, either as DMs or "official" designers and fiction writers (witness all the novels that spotlight supporting characters I've created, from Khelben to Elaith to The Simbul and Lauzoril, written by other writers than me). The four characters you mention are one of those loose ends, although I do have plans for them - - if I EVER dig myself out of the logjam of seven

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contracted novels that I'm flailing around in right now, and have some time to spin short stories again.

By which time, of course, it'll be the right occasion to rap on the Publishing Groups' cubicles at Wizards again and do another short story collection. :}

So you haven't missed out on any appearances yet. Now, back to Chapter 33 of [NDA] for me...

So saith Ed.

Who hasn't stopped being a large and increasingly fat and hairy tease, I see.

love to all,
THO

August 29, 2006: Hi again, all. Ed tackles a query from HunterOfStorms this time, to wit: "I've recently been looking through Power of Faerun with particular interest in the Heralds section and am wondering whether the Heralds (in the context of the over-arching organisation) are humanocentric - ie. only keep track of human related heraldry (even in mixed populations) - or whether they maintain a broader purview. Which leads into a couple of questions :)

How far back beyond their founding would any records of the Heralds stretch (and how accurate might they be - are they that interested in confirming any snippets of lore they might uncover relating to heraldic lines before their official records begin)?

Is there any Herald presence in exclusively non-human settlements, eg. Evermeet, Evereska, Luiren, The Great Rift etc.? Or even in predominantly non-human places? If not, then do the Heralds communicate at all with the equivalent heraldic lore keepers of other races - and who might these lore keepers be?

Hmm, possibly more than a couple of questions :) and I'm sure I'll think of yet more in the future.

The recent House Alastrarra reply was lovely, Might we possibly see more of a similar nature in Realmslore columns, perchance?

Many thanks as always,
Hunter"

Ed replies:

A pleasure! To respond to your last, first: I'd love to serve forth detailed Realmslore all the time here at Candlekeep, but I'm going to be tearingly busy for at least the next two years with all sorts of things that I mostly can't tell anyone about, yet. I literally have to snatch about ten minutes a day to write a lore reply and then fight with my aging dialup for another fifteen minutes or so (it loves to disconnect me, often and repeatedly) to get it posted. I deeply, achingly wish I had more TIME to do... everything. :}

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Now, as for the Heralds: they are definitely humano-centric. They were started by humans who saw the route to civilization to copying the elven family pride, cherishing of traditions, remembering the past clearly and celebrating good achievements and "honour." Elves, by and large, didn't cooperate with them and still don't (Myth Drannor and scattered individual moon elves are exceptions). Half-elves (rebuffed by "pure" elves) eagerly did and do cooperate. The Heralds are interested in all genealogy and heraldry (human first and foremost, just because it's the main corpus of their work, and "mustn't be neglected"), but in general, elves and dwarves are too proud and private to yield up family or clan records and lore to mere humans (and the Heralds are predominately human and half-elven), gnomes and halflings are often whimsical when it comes to matters of heraldry, thinking it's silly pretention and quite aside from the serious business of being able to orally recite family trees back into the "Dawn Mists," and orcs only want to cooperate with the Heralds long enough to stick blades into them and get them onto a roasting-spit for a swift meal. In a settled urban population, the Heralds would certainly keep track of the genealogies of all races - - but note that they are interested in ruling, "founding" or armigerous families, not ALL families.

Their records back before their founding are very spotty and shaky, but they are intensely interested in "confirming any snippets of lore they might uncover relating to heraldic lines before their official records begin," and often pay sages and others whose judgement they know they can trust to undertake investigations (as well as buying lore-records from all manner of adventurers and peddlers, trustworthy and decidedly un-).

There are permanent heralds attached to the ruling courts of Luiren and some gnome and halfling holds; elsewhere, Heralds travel and make temporary "updating the rolls" contacts with non-human lorekeepers in such places as Evereska (at the pleasure of such lore keepers, though most demi-human faiths preach that cooperation with the Heralds is a Good Thing, and Should Be Done, and the Heralds strike up friendships and take care to make their services useful and available to the lorekeepers they're dealing with: "Of course I'll trade you the family tree of the Angrath family for what I want, and NOT ask why you want it"). The lorekeepers tend to be far-sighted family elders, sages, and heralds, envoys, and judges among the demi-human communities.

So saith Ed.

In the home Realms campaign, the Heralds are far more "everday socially prominent" than they are in the published Realms, by the way. One of these days I'd like to see Ed write a Heralds novel. Hmmm, think I'll suggest it - - just to watch him scream and tear out handfuls of hair...

love to all,
THO

August 30, 2006: Hello again, gentles! Ed answers createvmind this time, in the matter of: "Great lore which leads me to wonder in Faerun could one Nurue-like person have trained at a monastery in one place, spend years adventuring and then return to the monastic life style. Basically in Faerun could one be monk while young/orphan and not find it appealing then after adventuring say as ranger decide settle down and return to such monastic lifestyle. Does the Monk restriction in D&D overwrite realms living in preventing one from taking monk levels after cross-classing?"

Ed replies:

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Of COURSE one can leave the monastic life for adventuring and then return. In fact, most folk who've been maimed while adventuring and somehow survived and found their ways "home" end up in monastic care one way or another, either in "madhouses" or almshouses within the monastery or outside it, or by deeding their city and town homes or farms to the monastery in return for the monks caring for them there, as they live out their lives. So one can indeed be born in a monastery or raised in a monastery, then leave to become a ranger, and then later decide to return to that or another monastery (unless one's behaviour as a ranger so angers a deity as to prevent it, which is very rare). Rules "restrictions" should NEVER override setting lore, although DMs must take care that "bending the rules" doesn't allow a player to run roughshod over campaign balance, unintentionally or cunningly, by getting this concession and then that concession, until a PC is all-powerful and the fun has been ruined for everyone else.

So saith Ed.

Who was a fond Brother Cadfael reader, when "Ellis Peters" was still alive and bring us new tomes annually.

love to all,
THO

August 31, 2006: Hi again, everyone. More Realmslore from Ed, this time a response to Jorkens, re. this: "What is the size of the major Faerunian rivers? I am thinking of average width and depth. In the sources I have seen the only information is the sailabilty of the waterways, but nothing more. I also wondered about the riverbanks on the major rivers; are we talking heavy vegetation, grassy banks or marshes. The Ashaba is pretty easy to guess, but i am wondering about rivers like the Chionthar and Winding Water.

I am sorry for increasing the already mounting heap of questions, but I cant remember ever seen anything on this subject.

Thank you for any information you can give on the subject."

Ed replies:

See Page 24 of this (2006) thread for a detailed answer about the River Surbrin.

The rivers of the Sword Coast North tend to be cold, gravel-and-rock bottomed, and fairly clear, with "wetweed" mosses growing under their strongly-flowing waters, and good fishing. Most are forty to sixty feet wide in most places (water only, not their much wider valleys), and have banks of rocks, shrubs, and little "washout" clefts choked with driftwood, pebbles, sand, reeds, and stunted trees.

As one moves south, into warmer climes, the rivers broaden (sixty to eighty feet) and the trees have some hope of surviving longer and growing taller, so the banks get lined with clumps of trees except where humans and other races are stupid enough to cut such growth back. Flow slows, the rivers get shallower (usually around ten to twelve feet at the deepest) as well as broader, and sunlight gets a chance to warm the waters more, so algae and underwater growth and life is more abundant.

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The Winding Water is a slow, meandering, dark-water river with oxbows and marshes flanking them for much of its run. It tends to be about fourteen feet deep in most places, but the land flooded by it contains many clefts and hollows, which are now forty- to sixty-foot deep "hidden lakes" in its swamps and main channel. The banks of the river are hard to find, cloaked in reeds and then a zone of "spongy" wet ground overgrown with tall grasses, willows, and other root-wet trees, before giving way to other trees on slightly drier ground.

By contrast, the Chionthar is like a shipping channel for much of its length: eighty feet or more wide, thirty feet or more deep, slow-moving in its lower stretch (below the confluence), silty (so one can never see through the waters), and serving as the sewer of the cities along it.

In short, the rivers of Faerûn are very much like rivers in the real world everywhere (sans modern phosphate and heavy industry pollution, of course), and offer the full variety. Trees and other riverbank growth is abundant wherever it hasn't been cut back by intelligent-race (usually human) activity or settlement.

So saith Ed.

Whose cottage is on a mighty river system.

love to all,
THO

September 18, 2006: Hello again, fellow scribes. (Didja miss me? Well, I'm BAAAAACK!) Ahem.

Hearken once again to the words of Ed, who makes reply to Gillies re. this request: "Hey Ed and THO, Its me again. I'm wondering even though I haven't found a DnD group to play with, would it be a smart idea to get the players handbook and the monster manual and some dice? So maybe I can start making my character and such."

Ed replies:

Gillies, if I were you, I'd go to the Avid Reader in Cobourg and see if Wendy has the Players Handbook and current issues of DRAGON and DUNGEON in. Even if the PH isn't "in stock" (she'll order it in if you want, or J&B in Trenton or some of the shops in Oshawa will have much larger selections always in stock), I'd buy the DRAGON and DUNGEON and take them home to drool over and "get the feel" of the game and adventures.

In a "story" or heavy roleplaying game of the sort I run, knowing your character's "back story" and so being able to think and act as they would, and using only the knowledge and attitudes they would have, is crucial.

However, the game can be played in many different ways, and some DMs don't give a hoot about such things, and play becomes like a football game, with the players huddling between combat rounds to discuss who should cast which spell, who else should use which battle tactic this round, and so on.

I personally am of the opinion that long-lived, vivid campaigns MUST be heavy roleplaying (or they will never become long-lived, or consistently vivid), but to enjoy such a play experience

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you've got to have a DM and fellow players who "buy in" to the same view. It can be a real emotional wrench if you spend hours upon hours detailing a character, only to have a DM laughingly kill such a character in a brute-force, "you stepped in the wrong place ha ha you die" trap, two minutes after play begins.

One of my personal benefits from creating the Realms has been the ability to "walk around the world" and explore it, spinning stories of what happened, what mysteries characters ponder, and what may happen next in endless daydreaming fantasies. That's something you can certainly indulge in, while looking for folks to play with. I would consult the scribes here for the links to the free downloads of past Realms products that lurk on the Wizards site (and elsewhere), and peruse these for hours of fun reading (don't worry about the game stats, just names and places and lore).

And have fun!

So saith Ed, who's incurably in love with D&D and the Realms.

I'm afraid he's not "back yet" from the Dreaded Deadline Doom, and will be able to reply only sporadically over the next week or so. So I'm snatching the opportunity to do lots of little work side-errands that have been piling up, and may be a day or two tardy in peeking into Candlekeep for your latest posts. Yet, please, keep them coming: we'll get back up to speed as soon as we can!

love to all,
THO

September 28, 2006: Hello, all. Ed is still overwhelmed with getting through three urgent projects, but plays hooky for long enough to make reply this time to varyar, in the matter of: "Hi Ed and THO, I'm curious if the elves have any particular names for the Outer Planes, and in general what their view of extraplanar affairs (the Blood War, Cyric's shenanigans, etc) might be compared to a human perspective (if there is 'a' human perspective). Many thanks in advance!"

Ed replies:

varyar, as you implied, I'm not sure there is a single clear "human perspective" on extraplanar goings-on such as the Blood War (given how little most folk in Faerûn know about such things, and the filters - -usually priesthoods - - they hear what information they do get, through).

Nor am I so sure the elves have a single coherent view of such matters. The general elven attitude towards the Blood War would be that it's undeniable proof that the races involved are insane and worthy only of destruction (as that seems to be all they devote themselves to), and that the antics of human deities are also proof that humans are an immature race who go insane whenever handed too much power - - but all stereotypes are very likely to be inaccurate on an individual-case basis.

Again, the elves have many names for the various planes, but one collective name for the Outer Planes is "Uvahlura," an old name that has come to mean, roughly, "other-than-here places of extremes."

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So saith Ed.

Who wants to remind all scribes that: "races rarely think in neat collective terms; elves and dwarves in particular, as long-lived, individualistic and creative races who possess strong individual characters, tend to hold a very wide variety of views on life and procedures and places and groups of beings."

love to all,
THO

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