

So saith Ed

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

Part 14

Apr - Jun 2007

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April 1, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time Ed continues to tackle recent queries (don't worry, he hasn't forgotten that there are 2004 questions not yet answered, and he has them all, believe me), and this time responds to Zandilar's question: "Anyway, now I've had a chance to chew over some things, there really was only one thing that I'd like to hear Ed's reasoning for from the second post on the topic of Eilistraeeans on November 6th 2006..."

Ed said: [[There is no Eilistreean prohibition on marriage (or sex) among either lay worshippers or clergy, and never has been. There are many female drow clerics who prefer to remain single, either because a lesbian or other facet of their personalities makes them most comfortable being partner-less (as opposed to having a steady partner of either gender), or because they see married life as a distraction (or time-stealer) from their whole-hearted devotion to the Goddess.]]

I ask:

Wouldn't a lesbian tendency mean the priestess concerned would seek out the company/companionship/love of another female rather than remain celibate? Or are you saying that Eilistraee doesn't approve of lesbianism? Given how permissive the Realms are (and the parenthetical comment regarding steady partners), I'd say the latter isn't true... but I'm curious as to why you'd attribute the desire to remain celibate to a lesbian tendency? (I'm a lesbian myself, and I know it doesn't make me want to be celibate!)

Thank you (both) again!"

Ed replies:

Hi, Zandilar. No, I wasn't saying anything at all about being celibate. Reading the Eilistraee worship scene I slipped into SILVERFALL, even in the toned-down state that saw print, should suggest very much otherwise. :}

Nor was I saying anything about Eilistraee disapproving of lesbianism. That would be very odd, given the number of lesbian worshippers She has. :}

I meant only this: that it has been observed that many female drow clerics who venerate Eilistraee have chosen to remain "single," where the definition of "single" means "not having a steady partner of either gender."

My "lesbianism" comment in that sentence is there to point out an obvious reason why many such females haven't taken a male partner: they don't want to because they are lesbian (rather than, say, "bi"), and don't dwell in a society where there's a social need to take a male partner for protection, or to conceal their natures, or for any other reason.

Most of these single Eilistraeean clerics (lesbian or not) haven't taken a lone steady female partner because they have found themselves part of a "family" of many fellow female drow clerics of the Dark Dancer (again, as seen in that scene in SILVERFALL), and so they have a dozen to a score of partners, rather than just one (again, lesbian or not).

I am not saying that as they grow older they won't take partners; I'm saying that at any one time, when one looks at the clergy of Eilistraee, one will see a large proportion of female drow clerics who are, at that time, "unpaired."

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And yes, obviously a lesbian tendency would indeed mean the priestess concerned would seek out the company/companionship/love of another female. No priestess of Eilistraee "has to" be celibate, and many priestesses of the Dark Dancer live with many fellow priestesses, and haven't settled on "just one" (other priestess or other female or male lay worshipper) as their lifemate, bedmate, or anything else.

So saith Ed.

Who wrote a lot of specific, detailed, and explicit lore on these ladies that several TSR editors found TOO explicit, and "sat on" (which of course means: no, he can't just post it here, as it belongs to TSR/Wizards). However, all scribes should gather from this that there are heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual female drow clerics of Eilistraee, and that regardless of personal nature in matters sexual, many female drow clerics of Eilistraee live and work with other female drow clerics of Eilistraee in long-term-stable groups. One can imagine that within some of these groupings there is a lot of sex taking place, and often - - but I'd like to remind all scribes that it's wrong to "automatically" assume such things about any stable group, such as: a family, a band of adventurers, or even a real-world football team. Just because they work together and stay together for years, it doesn't follow that, if I may stoop to a colloquialism for a moment, they're "all bonking each other."

love to all,
THO

On April 1, 2007 THO said: Hey, now, Charles, the sahuagin invasion wasn't "brushed aside" in any sort of "blasé" manner.

It was covered in Mel Odom's Threat From The Sea trilogy and the accompanying Realms of the Deep anthology. (So it got four books of coverage! Not specifically the attack on Waterdeep, which was referred to in those books, but then, that was what Ed and Elaine were "painting in" here.)

The flashback to it is presented as a Prologue to make it clear that it's a setup for the novel (in this case, the young male villain's "connection" to Waterdeep, and background), rather than part of the main narrative of CITY OF SPLENDORS.

To answer your "what got cut" question: an entire Gemcloak and his subplot, throughout, a folk tale of Elaine's that Ed termed "short but very pretty," a lot of detail from the fight scenes, description and dialogue throughout the entire novel, and a lot of New Day inter-reactions (various guild members reacting to the increasing troubles in the city, trying to decide if they wanted to go along with it or try to stop it), tons and tons of "nobles behaving like asses at revels" details, and a lot of the Amalgamation subplot. Hence the unsatisfying resolutions of some of the storylines.

However, all in all, I'm darn glad Ed and Elaine tried to cram too much into the book, rather than settling for giving us a more empty, boring narrative. They certainly succeeded in what Ed told me was their main aim: make Waterdeep "come alive" with the smells and sounds and all, and "seem real" to the reader.

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love to all,
THO

On April 1, 2007 THO said: Enthusiastic agreement.

I know that "omnisexual" nature of deities is also Ed's view (and, hey, he created the world and most of its deities). One divine ability is the ability to shapeshift and/or control the forms of one's avatars, so there's nothing in the essential natures of most deities to prevent them appearing as of either gender (or both, or none), or for that matter any species. Most CHOOSE not to "jump around" all that often, just as we real-world mortals tend to have habits re. the clothing we wear (few men search out Victorian-style petticoats to wear to the office every morning, but they COULD).

The Realms has a substantial body of both "temple-approved" (clerically acknowledged) myths and colloquial legend (tavern and old wives' tales) about deities taking various forms to trick or test mortals, or to best one another.

So, yes, it's best not to label fictional Realms deities with real-world sociological terms. :)

love to all,
THO

April 2, 2007: Hello again, all. A number of matters, this time. First, to the Red Walker's query: "What does Ed do for fun when he is not reading???"

His writing just seems so fun and uninhibited that it seems he must be influenced by "outside" forces!!!"

Ed and I both had a good chuckle over that. His usual replies to this are: "Skydiving sex," and "Being a stunt man in porno movies," but the truth is: Ed loves to eat and to drink fine wines (and certain beers), but now has a heart condition and diabetes (writers who sit for hours a day at the keyboard be warned!), and so now drinks very rarely, and eats lightly and in a healthy manner. His fun consists of: reading, writing, and chatting or gaming with witty, intelligent people. Sounds very boring, but that's the truth. No drugs, ever (except heart and diabetes medications, and, literally, a few glasses of wine a year), and the orgies of his youth are also few and far between, now, too. He and I have lots of fun teasing each other, mind you (something Ed does with lots of friendly females), but 'tis just that: teasing.

Second, To RodOdom: no, your wiki-photo-related request isn't out of bounds at all, and Ed will be eager to answer it. Soon.

Third, to althen artren's query: "Hey does anybody know if there is a question limit per post? I don't want to breach any protocols here."

I reply thus: not as far as Ed and I are concerned. However, please don't expect Ed to reply to each and every question in a multi-query post at the same time. Some easy answers (like this one, above) will be dealt with swiftly, and others may wait years (so neither Ed nor I have

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"forgotten" the questions in your two posts that aren't answered in THIS post, and Ed will get to them, in the fullness of time).

To this althen artren query: "Have you ever given out a description of your Netheril? I have read on the boards that your version was different, but haven't really seen anything on how different."

I can reply for Ed:

Ed handed in "his" version of Netheril to TSR, and they own it, which means details of it now can't be made public anywhere without the permission of Wizards of the Coast. Neither Ed nor Wizards have any interest in publishing lore that contradicts what is now official, so Ed has contented himself with providing additional lore, down the years, that has found its way into such tomes as LOST EMPIRES OF FAERUN. More may come out in various ways in the years to come, but don't expect to see any "sudden exposé" lore-flood.

And to althen artren's subsequent, linked queries: "Illitran Starym made a deal with Moander so he could pull his family's moonblade without getting killed. In my version of the realms I have Moander ridding piggyback in Illitran's mind and then taking up residence in the moonblade, using its magic to keep him alive and shielding him from danger.

At the time of the Claiming, would Moander have been strong enough to survive a situation like this?

Would Corellon be "aware" of any alteration of a working of High Magic like this, and would he have reacted?

Would mortal magic or elven high magics be able to detect him in the moonblade if he is trying like hell to hide?"

Ed makes reply, thus:

Yes, Moander would have been strong enough to do this. No, Corellon would not be aware of "any" alteration of a working of High Magic, only of the vast majority of them. In other words, if Moander (or anyone else) altered a High Magic that wasn't itself active at the time, and did it in precisely the correct manner, they would escape notice (for a while, at least).

By the preceding sentence, I am saying two things: the vast majority of meddlings WOULD be noticed, because they wouldn't be done in "exactly" the right way to avoid attracting the deity's attention; and, no one can alter a High Magic as it's being cast or as it's being discharged/taking effect without being noticed (in other words, if you change a SPELL in any other state than "hanging" [cast previously, but waiting to be triggered and "go off"], you'll be noticed). It follows that meddling with magic items that have an ongoing existence is easier to get away with - - in the short term.

If Corellon had noticed such an alteration, yes, he would have reacted, because he would have "felt" Moander's divinity, however feeble - - and smelling another god at work on "your own" attracts divine attention like nothing else! :}

And lastly: yes, most magical means would detect Moander's presence, as "something odd, not part of the founding spells, and STRONG - - stronger than anything should be" in a moonblade. However, only precisely correct means of magical probing (most of which processes would

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expose the prober to Moander's influence or mind-attack, or even "possession" [mental takeover, so he'd be riding their mind]) would determine that it was Moander. Moander's longterm residence in a moonblade would begin to manifest around the blade in terms of rot, decay, and corruption (scabbards rot or rust, swordbelts and baldrics, anything the blade touches or is laid upon weathers a trifle, etc., people who handle or wield it grow skin molds or get diseases, or even suffer flesh-eating diseases).

So saith Ed.

Oooh, sounds like FUN.

love to all,
THO

April 3, 2007: MISbehave, Asgetrion?

For Lady Heralds, this is the way we're SUPPOSED to behave! (Just for you, I'm typing this post fetchingly clad in the cords with which I tied myself into the chair.)

Ahem.

Hello again, all.

As promised, Ed tackles this, from RodOdom: "Dear Master Ed and Lady THO, I'd like to ask of Ed a different sort of query. On Wikipedia and other sites I see some really stunning photos of natural landscapes of our real world and I wonder where in the Realms I may encounter a similar place. If I may present a single picture and ask where it reminds Ed and THO of:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Sugarloaf.JPG>"

Ed replies (with reference to Purple Dragon Knight's suggestion of Shadowdale):

Nope, not Shadowdale. Too "open" (and a LITTLE too large-scale in the range between topographically high and low points; aside from the Old Skull - - which stands out as a landmark because it's so locally unusual, remember? - - and more isolated heights such as Harpers Hill, the Shadowdale area has small, deep ravines in the woods, and LITTLE ridges - - such as Fox Ridge - - but is otherwise flat to gently rolling). More than anything else, Shadowdale "meets the eye" as cloaked and dominated by the great forest around it.

The photo is pretty close to the appearance of parts of both Harrowdale and Tasseldale, though. And even closer to some of the inland stretches of the Vast, in the "midlands" between the mountains at the north and south ends of that countryside.

Nice scene, but most parts of temperate Realms farmland have more woodlots, tattered little corners of "wild wood," shrub- and tree-cloaked hedges, and so on. Not every little patch of ground is grazed and farmed, because there are so many factors (wars, severe winters, orc hordes, raiding monsters [from goblins up to hungry dragons!], resistance from elves, druids, korred and pixies and treants and dryads and other forest critters, and so on) causing populations

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to decline (so, not enough hands to work every inch of ground, no need to do so to glean enough crop yields, and no desire to, when "wild" areas yield animal food for the stewpots and hearth-spits).

So saith Ed.

Who in the past referred several TSR designers to real-world photos in popular library reference books, to see the "look" of various locales in the Realms. A much harder thing to do today, when so many libraries have such paltry and more-diversely-sourced reference collections.

love to all,
THO

April 4, 2007: Indeed. Ed is very generous, and I hope we don't collectively burn him out. I ask him about that from time to time, and he always says he doesn't mind in the slightest, but I wonder, sometimes, if it's because I'm crawling all over him, asking him.

Wooly, I hope you have your reply e-mail from me, by now. And no, I'm afraid Ed isn't QUITE out of the woods yet, to clear his keyboard enough to furnish new columns. He has family descending on him (for an Easter visit), has just plotted a short story and a novella for two separate anthologies, and is starting his taxes. He just finished proofing (proofreading) two of the three novels he'll have published this year, and is starting on another novel, a game sourcebook, and his second serialized Castlemourn story for GAME TRADE magazine. He just prepared the budget for the local library board he chairs, and of course continues in the day job, too, and is currently reading "about twelve books a week" for judging the World Fantasy Awards. So the platter isn't staggering, but isn't near-empty yet, either.

The fun will begin again later this year, Ed tells me, when he'll be writing the NEXT three novels all at once (Knights 3, Niflheim 2 for Tor, and Falconfar 2 for Black Library/Solaris).

By the way, has anyone seen a "hard print copy" of the Castlemourn campaign setting, yet?

Now, to the Realmslore reply for this day...

Ed hath heard the pleas of Kazzaroth, but mutters in my ear that there are reasons those older questions can't be properly answered yet. He did, however, entertain a few of the new ones (again, the others aren't dismissed; they join the ever-growing pile), to wit: "How do wizards/sorcerers in general in the Realms view powerful bards who can cast fairly powerful bardic spells? What do commoners think about a bard who can literally crumble a castle with high vocaled singing or create powerful mind affecting spells/abilities? Would the bard still be viewed as a 'entertaining minstrel' or would their reputation as casters (note; not as performers but as casters) scare potential performer patrons off?"

Also I have wondered is bards' singing (basically bardic music feature use) somehow related to Weave? Meaning that does Weave 'sing' to the bards and does Weave have some sort voice or musical element (which can be heard only by those who are deeply attuned to the Weave, perhaps including experienced/powerful bards) what bards are exploiting when they cast bard spells?

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I have read that times when spellfire or high magic rituals (or other sort powerful spellcasting nearby) have been used, some fellow arcane casters and Chosen of Mystra have sensed disturbance in the Weave and it had sometimes described like someone is playing harp off tune or someone is playing a harp well. I wonder, is that a metaphor or do Chosen of Mystra really 'hear' the disturbance of the Weave?"

Ed replies:

There's no general attitude towards bards on the part of wizards or sorcerers; some individuals have prejudices, but part of my creating an ever-expanding infinity of spells, spell processes, confusion about magic, alternative systems of magic, and so on, is to keep magic in the Realms as it should be: a vast, mysterious field full of wonder, beyond any one mortal's comprehension, so there's "always something new," and so that if you see a spell being cast and make an assumption about the caster level of its source, it's just that: an assumption, and not a certainty. I want to keep "elbow room" for DMs and Realms fiction writers (and yes, obviously this is at odds with game design, and its need for specifics).

So, WISE wielders of magic respect everyone else, because you never know when yonder patched-elbows minstrel will smash down a wall with a Great Shout or a plucked harp - - just as you never know when that little bird (or tavern doxy, kneeling nearly-nude at your feet looking up hopefully and trying to negotiate a good price for her charms) will turn out to be The Simbul in disguise, and with her temper growing short. :)

Commoners tend not to fear powerful bards overmuch unless that particular person caused a great calamity or much destruction in their community or that they personally witnessed, in the past. Why? Well, EVERY bard and most minstrels have all sorts of wild tales told about them (that they caused this ruler's haughty wife to disrobe and dance for them with their "obviously magical" singing, or blasted their way out of a castle dungeon by destroying most of the castle with a sung spell or "magical chord" on their lute, or that they broke a harp string deliberately and caused every sword - - or swordarm - - in a room to snap like a twig), and so people stop believing such chatter, except as juicy entertainment, until they see proof with their own eyes. And the bards and minstrels are the television, rock concerts, and latest news reports of the Realms, all rolled into one; people in isolated or rural areas hunger to see and hear them. So the "scaring off" you mention does happen, yes (particularly in a castle or town preparing for war, when a ruler fears that a bard or minstrel might be an agent for the enemy, arrived to do mischief), but is rare.

The Weave is just one mortal conception of all the magic, all over the Realms, and "magic" is really "natural forces, and ways we can call on them." So yes, bardic singing and playing that has magical effects is calling on ever-flowing, mainly invisible natural forces that are at work in the Realms and are integral to the world, but such bardic activity "accesses the Weave" in a different manner than, say, the spells of wizards. The Weave is a way of seeing and talking about natural forces and their patterns, and the Weave IS the goddess Mystra.

Some bards, and other individuals who are sorcerers or wizards (or for that matter, cobblers or shepherds), can "hear" the Weave in their heads, but it's rare for anyone to hear the Weave aloud - - and such occasions are almost always discordant janglings caused when something "goes wrong" or great power is suddenly unleashed. So, yes, some individuals may believe the Weave sings to them, and may be inspired by what they "hear."

More often, the Weave (the flow of natural forces, remember) is felt rather than heard. (A vibration in one's bones or teeth or entire body, like deep organ notes too low in pitch to hear, but

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that resonate through one.) This is how most spellcasters and all Chosen of Mystra perceive "disturbances in the Weave" (or, if one prefers, sudden dramatic surges or shifts in the everpresent flows of natural forces). So they "really feel it" more than they "really hear it," but no, it's not just a metaphor.

So saith Ed.

Creator (though not namer; that would be longtime Realms editor and designer Julia Martin) of the Weave.

love to all,
THO

On April 4, 2007 THO said: I'm not sure how much Ed is "cleared" to say about this trilogy right now, but if you surf to:

<http://www.solarisbooks.com/books/dark-lord/dark-lord.asp>

... you can read a little about DARK LORD, the first book (due out September 07), vital stats:

hardcover, ISBN 13: 978-1-84416-519-3 and ISBN 10: 1-84416-519-1

I know Ed has turned in the final draft of the MS.

Elsewhere on this same site, there's a press release announcing the purchase of the entire trilogy.

I'll see what additional info I can careXXX ah, cajole out of Ed.

love to all,
THO

Ahem, yes. :}

Well, Tor has put up some information about Ed's "non-drow" dark elf novel, DARK WARRIOR RISING.

Surf to:

<http://www.tor-forge.com/darkwarriorrising>

It's a Tor 304-page hardcover,
release date September 18th, 2007
ISBN:978-0-7653-1765-0
(ISBN-10:0-7653-1765-6)

And I asked Ed a little about it; his answers were very exciting. I "must read" for this lass!

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love to all,
THO

April 5, 2007: Well, you'll have quite a choice of Ed novels, by then:

SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE (Knights 2)

DARK WARRIOR RISING (Niflheim 1, from Tor)

and

DARK LORD (Falconfar 1)

And no, Ed doesn't get to Seattle much. He loves it, and would love to visit Jeff & Kate (Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak) again, plus the rest of his old TSR friends still resident in the shadow of Ranier, but... plane flights aren't cheap on a writer's budget, and there's this little matter of time...

Speaking of which; hello again, all. This time I bring you Ed's response to createvmind's question: "Are there Tar Pits in Faerûn above or below ground?"

The Sage promptly provided lore aid thus: "The Pits of Mystra, in the Helmlands, are above ground. And, as I recall, the tar pit featured in the Moonshae trilogy was above ground as well. Ed will likely have more."

Indeed Ed does; his reply follows:

There are also above-ground tar pits in Chult, in Veldorn, in the Alamir Mountains bordering the Lake of Steam and on some of the islets in the Lake of Steam, in Ulgarth, and in several other areas well southeast of Ulgarth.

Down in the Underdark, there are tar rivers whenever specific conditions are met on the borders of lava flows (through veins and "tubes"), and "pits" where these rivers flow into or through, but don't entirely fill, caverns. So although those conditions are only rarely met, that still means thousands of tar pits, most of them quite small, exist (usually several in a small area, such as a string of caverns close to each other, along the line of a "hot rift" or "searfish flow").

So saith Ed.

Who once coated three Knights of Myth Drannor in tar. We managed to get out of it, but couldn't move - - until we unbuckled our armor and left it behind. To promptly face attack when nude or near-nude. Certain players took a long time to forgive Ed for THAT one. Particularly the character who faced foes who set her tarry hair on fire.

Making up, after, was fun, though.

love to all,
THO

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April 5, 2007: Thanks, Kuje.

D-brane, I just asked Ed about your query, and he replied:

On an "average" day, I'll read a daily newspaper, try to finish off any crossword puzzle that's got my wife stumped, and I'll have four new and one "old favourite re-read" on the go, plus a magazine or two. Sometimes (for example, when I'm rushing to a deadline), my reading time will go down, and the on-the-go books will go up in number; once, it rose to fourteen. :)

Right now, I'm doing my taxes, a short story for Wizards and a cat fantasy short story for an anthology, a serial for Game Trade magazine, and a Paths of Doom novel for Castlemourn. Aside from the World Fantasy reading, I'm re-reading Spellbinder (Melanie Rawn) and the latest Dana Stabenow Kate Shugak mystery, and reading Dust (latest Martha Grimes) and an ARC of The 100 Mile Diet by Smith and MacKinnon, which relates their year-long attempt to eat only foodstuffs that traveled less than 100 miles from source to their dinner plates. During the next two weeks, the World Fantasy stuff (which is flooding in) will receive ever-heavier attention (so my meagre reading-now roster will get even slimmer); thereafter, it'll go up again.

So saith Ed.

Who will return with more lore replies soon.

love to all,

THO

April 6, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time Ed responds to a query from Foxhelm, that evoked some replies from other scribes.

Here's Foxhelm: "I have a question, but I believe that it's NDA, but I still have to ask it.

Is Storm Silverhand truly barren or is it that Mystra is holding back a miracle birth of a powerful child that could change the Realms if born? Or something like that?

Just curious..."

Rinonalyrna Fathomlin then posted: "Obviously I don't have an answer, but I want to mention that I like the idea of Storm being barren. Storm has often been described as "motherly" towards other people--it says a lot of positive things about her that she can be so motherly when she's never had children (and perhaps partly because she has no children of her own?).

That said, I think she could conceive if Mystra wanted her to, but if she already has a maternal role towards the people in her community, then maybe that in itself is fulfilling for her? Plenty of people in real life are infertile, and having someone like Storm being infertile brings a sense of realism to the Realms that I do like."

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And The Sage then posted: "Seven Sisters tells us that Storm is indeed barren -- confirmed by the fact that she was unable to conceive with Maxam, much like during her other earlier dalliances. Whether Mystra has had any direct hand in this, is likely something Ed knows more about. 'Tis also likely that despite Storm's unique case, Mystra may indeed have the final say on whether she can get with child, just as with the other Chosen. We should remember also, that Mystra alone decides whether any of the offspring her Chosen are indeed "allowed" to cause, will display any aptitude for magic or become Chosen themselves. This particular aspect of Mystra's influence could have special meaning in Storm's case.

And while it is interesting to speculate on whether or not Mystra has a hand in preventing Storm from having children [for fears about some potentially powerful Nate Grey-styled offspring being born] consider, rather, that a child from Khelben and Laeral is a child of TWO Chosen, not one and another human/oid. That is a very unique situation and, as I see it, could potentially lead to some rather eyebrow-raising circumstances."

To all of this, Ed replies:

Storm wasn't barren at birth, but was damaged during the adventures of her "teenaged" years (actually, of her teens and twenties). As to the precise nature of what happened to her; well, that's where the NDA comes in for now, I'm afraid. As of "right now, Realmstime" (and over all the time back to that early calamity, which I will go so far as to term a "violation") Storm can conceive only with divine aid (Mystra, Azuth) -- not just godly approval, but active godly help.

In the matter of approval, she is "controlled" by Mystra in the same way that all Chosen of Mystra are. This restriction doesn't bother her in the slightest; she enjoys mothering others, as Rinonalyrna Fathomlin pointed out, and she also enjoys being free to do anything sexually without fear of becoming pregnant. Not that she is any sort of sexual predator; I mean, rather, that it's one more thing she just doesn't have to worry about.

She's perfectly content with things as they are, being as she gets to "mother" scores of Harpers - in the same way many real-world women get to be a mother to many foster children, regardless of whether or not they have (or can have) any of their own.

So saith Ed.

Who would love to tell more tales of Storm Silverhand (AND Mirt, and Durnan, and Narnra, and for that matter Narm and Elminster and Elaith, and...). If he ever gets the chance AND the time, of course.

P.S. To Rinonalyrna Fathomlin: Ed can't tell anyone details about his cat tale yet, but I will be sure to post details here as soon as he can. (All he did let slip was: "Can't! Tasslehoff might pull my beard!")

love to all,
THO

On April 6, 2007 THO said: Well spotted!

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You've hit upon one of Ed's "home" Realms roleplaying wrinkles that TSR glossed over lightly so as to avoid a lot of confusion. Couple what you've posted about with the spell creation processes Ed outlined in VOLO'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MAGICAL, and you've got the basis for an intensive roleplaying campaign (perhaps one-player-one-DM, perhaps as many as three players) centered on advancing as a mage through spell research, experimentation, intrigue, and a little adventuring.

Ed had a LOT of "faulty" Realms spells out there (that is, floating around the "home" Realms), to confound both PCs and NPCs. Many spells found in tombs are traps or "planted" lures; those of us who played what 3e calls "arcane spellcasters" had to be VERY wary.

love,
THO

April 8, 2007: Hello again, all. This time Ed responds to WalkerNinja, re. this: "Ed, I've got a party of 6 characters. They found 6 rather simple crowns buried in the tombs of orcish kings at Xul Jarak (the Sons of Gruumsh Module). So far, they rather enjoy wearing them, and found it fortuitous that they had 6 members and 6 crowns (maybe it's fate!) Honestly, I think it's pretty cool.

I've got three questions about crowns and crown wearing.

What would ceremonial burial crowns of the ancient orcish Thar dynasty look like? (each crown is valued at 200gp in the module, but is otherwise undescribed).

These adventurers will be headed to Cormyr soon. Are there any laws against the wearing of crowns by non-royal/noble persons in Cormyr? These companions have a badge, but no sanctioned heraldic device. Would the heralds have issues with crown wearing by non-royal/noble persons?"

Ed replies:

Great questions! Okay, in order: orc crowns of Thar would look like this: a broad (3 inches "high") head band of beaten gold (as a coating on a much harder metal), with the front having three "teeth" (flat-topped protrusions, like the crenelations of a castle battlements), the central tooth being taller and wider than the other two. So: heavy, not ornate or finely-worked, very visible, and sturdy. No gems, no engraving, no words or symbols etched anywhere. Good gold, but only a thin layer, hence the low value.

There are no laws in Cormyr prohibiting anyone wearing crowns (or the coronets of nobles, or the circlets of young princes or princesses) EXCEPT for wearing such a symbol OF CORMYR, if you're not entitled to it.

In other words, a pretender or bastard offspring putting on a state crown of Cormyr (even an old crown that's been long lost, or one taken from a tomb or Palace effigy) is committing an act of treason (penalty to be determined by the reigning monarch, or failing that, any living legitimate Obarskyr or member of a succeeding royal family, or failing that the Royal Magician, or failing that a Council of most senior nobles [[all Dukes, to begin with]]).

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So anyone else, who shows up wearing any sort of crown that isn't a crown of Cormyr, is okay (though they may earn some hard looks until onlookers, Purple Dragons, War Wizards, and Heralds are certain it isn't a crown of Cormyr). In this case, they'll be fine: at a glance, the crowns of Thar are far too "heavy and crude" in appearance to be mistaken for anything of Cormyr.

The Heralds will only be troubled by non-royal/noble persons wearing crowns they're not entitled to; if adventures show up wearing crowns that are either of unknown origin (which is what those crowns of Thar will be to all local and Crown heralds; only High Heralds will be able to readily identify them, without asking where they came from), or that are theirs by known right of conquest or discovery (in other words, if said wearers are known to have slain King X of Y, and are now wearing the regal crown of Y), they will be assumed to be "all right" by all Heralds unless accusations are made otherwise. So if a local herald asks one of the adventurers where the crown came from, and figured out from the reply that it is of an extinct line of rulership in Thar, that's fine; it's not the lawful regalia of any current ruling house of Thar, and so can be worn as a trophy in the same way that some orcs affix the skulls or heads of foes to their shields or helms or shoulderplates of armour as "look who I felled!" adornments. Perhaps not in the best of taste, but not illegal.

The crown-adorned adventurers may well catch the eyes of a lot of ladies (and young men searching for heroes to look up to). Not to mention more than a few thieves. :}

So saith Ed.

Who's given us all a vivid mental picture (and the obvious adventure hooks) at the end, there. Good points to have cleared up, Cormyr fans!

love to all,
THO

April 9, 2007: Hello again, all. A few quick responses this time.

First: createvmind: You're very welcome. Keep the questions coming.

Second: Kuje, Ed agrees that it's been far too long since he last shared with Candlekeep scribes a new selection of Realms curse words, specific to region or race or deity. Begging duly noted. He WILL get to it.

Third: to AlorinDawn, re. this: "I have another question about DMing the Realms. Having the same characters play on and off in our current campaign since '91 has required the replacement of a number of heads of state due to assassination, death by natural causes, etc., the rearranging and extinction of some power groups and a decent number of human NPCs who are now visibly aging or downright old who were spry and young when first introduced. I have several file folders and plastic boxes of info saved. How the hell do you keep track of it all???"

Ed replies:

Increasingly, as my aging brain overflows (it reached "full" some years back), I can't keep track of it all. I simply can't.

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I certainly wanted to, but I find Realmslore created by other folks than me in recent years just isn't "sticking" in memory. I have to go back and check it again and again, and often consult with the Lore Lords of the Realms (Steven Schend, Eric Boyd, George Krashos, Brian Cortijo, and several others) to make sure I haven't missed passing mentions or simply forgotten licensed product content (such as the various computer games).

When play in the Realms began, I used to write out salient points of all play sessions in longhand in an endless series of examination books (my father taught in a university, and "blank" examination books had to be rounded up and destroyed, except that like anyone who grew up fatherless in the lean Second World War years in rural Ontario, he held the view that one NEVER throws away unused paper [or string, or...]). All PC names I wrote in block caps for ease of finding them at a glance, and typical notes would run something like this:

"[Realmsdate]: FLORIN, ISLIF, and JHESAIL went to the Old Skull to dine and meet incoming caravan for news. TORM to Lharessa's for some paying fun, observed known Zhent agent (tall man with scarred ear, pale yellow eyes) departing through back door; did not pursue. FLORIN thought one caravan merchant might be THE SIMBUL in disguise, but "he" smilingly evaded questions. F, I, J left the inn late, and when walking to the Twisted Tower across meadow were attacked by six (?) black-clad men who gated in, and had sleep-venomed daggers. Slew four, but bodies "winked" out. Two fled through gates, JHESAIL reduced to 4 hp and "slept," brought to Old Skull for healing."

(et cetera): these notes mentioned all magic items gained, lost, and used up, all PC and important NPC deaths, quotable quotes by PCs and others, NPC capsule descriptions ("red eyes, limps, untidy") in the margins.

Now, when my recall is gone, I can re-read the notes and often be jogged into remembering whose house we were playing at, the weather, what we ate, strange things worn (or taken off!), and even jokes. And yes, I had to scribble darned fast.

Often, when THO sends me a question, my brain instantly tells me, "Oh, yes, you've covered that, in print [and it'll tell me in DRAGON or in a TSR/Wizards product] or on the Wizards website, or in the home campaign." And then my brain stops, and smiles at me, and I growl, "When and where?"

... And answer comes there none.

So I have to sit down and start LOOKING, growling ever more heartily. Yes, things would work better with a searchable electronic index. I have pdfs of most older Realms products that I can search (individual product by individual product) for occurrences of specific words or names, but that's it. And I have less than no time to generate such a thing - - when there are always deadlines looming and money to be made (writing is how I feed myself, remember) and NEW Realmslore to proffer to Realms fans.

And that (big cheesy grin) is how I "keep track of it all."

(However, certain longtime GenCon attendees will remember a night at the Safe House when a waitress who was also a devoted Realms fan stopped by my table, yanked her top up to bare her upperworks, and asked, "Remember these, Ed?"... And I did. After eight years, with her name and birthday and favourite character, which I obediently drew where she asked me to. Of course, she's probably washed it off by now.)

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So saith Ed.

Who can relate dozens of such stories. Some of them involving me.

love to all,
THO

April 10, 2007: Hello again, fellow scribes. Ed is pleased to answer Penknight this time, re. this recent query: "I realize that I have asked a great deal of questions about Myth Drannor and all, but I would like to ask another question about Cormyr if I may, ma'am. In and around Cormyr, do they speak with 'thees' and 'thous', or is it more like every day speech here? Also, how articulate are they? How does the speech of Cormyr differ from, say, Waterdeep and the rest of the Realms? Thank you kindly, ma'am; and also thank you, Mr. Greenwood. I appreciate your time."

Ed replies:

A pleasure, Penknight. In Cormyr, "thees" and "thous" tend to be used by heralds; folk trying to be "flowery" (such as poets, minstrels, bards, cryers, and some courtiers and amateur orators and "advocates" [nascent lawyers; folk paid to eloquently speak for those unable to unwilling to do so, before magisters, at trials, and to courtiers] seeking to give an impression of being learned or cultured or long-established); and older folk, the grandsires and great-grandsires [and granddams and great-granddams].

Most folk in Cormyr are quite eloquent, but more plain-spoken (see my novels SWORDS OF EVENINGSTAR and ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER, the "modern-Realmstime" scenes in CORMYR: A NOVEL that Jeff Grubb and I wrote together, DEATH OF THE DRAGON that Troy Denning and I co-wrote, and for that matter, the forthcoming SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE, for examples). Rural Cormyreans tend to speak more slowly and softly than folk of Marsember and especially Suzail - - which have the swift, loud, and sharp tones of any larger city in the Heartlands, like most of Sembia and Waterdeep - - but only the northeast (Arabel and beyond) has a broad, "backcountry" [some modern real-world people might say "hick"] sound that some Suzailans sneer at.

So saith Ed.

Note that his reply here touches on AlorinDawn's recent (and still unanswered) query about accents, and his (ditto, ditto) question about making areas seem different during play, too.

love to all,
THO

On April 10, 2007 THO said: Left to the DM, deliberately. Kept secret until VERY shortly before the event, and not talked about, afterwards. Always a wilderland setting, usually (but not always) far from both trade routes and large settlements. I can compile a fragmentary list of eight or so years (with gaps; not a continuous run) from my Realmsplay notes, but often Ed kept the locales mysterious from us even when one of more of us Knights got "smuggled into" a MageFair.

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love to all,
THO

April 10, 2007: AlorinDawn, I'm afraid Ed's "Gnome Talk" work is NDA'd at the moment (although you MAY in the fullness of time see it on the Wizards website).

Wenin, your query about the Citadel arises purely as a result of the "redrawing of the maps" that occurred in 3e. If you consult Ed's original maps, it's much clearer as to why the Citadel was the base of operations (for mounted patrols to accompany caravans against raiders out of Thar, remember, NOT massed armies duking it out with massed armies of orcs and ogres) for defending the cities of the Moonsea northshore.

To quote Ed (from the notes he furnished TSR back in 1986, which had earlier been given to we players as part of a "player pack" of background info):

The Citadel has been primarily a base and retreat-refuge, not a fortress any foe musters an army against and comes looking to besiege. Thar was more of a land of rivals all raiding on their own than it was ever a regimented realm with any sort of organized military. Its warriors generally took to the field in more of a "vast, howling mob" that was to be feared for sheer numbers and savagery than tactical skill or cunning. Such musterings were rare; usually Thar was the source of endless raiding bands, all operating independently of each other (and in recent years, preying on mining caravans). If the caravans stayed too close to the mountains on the east, the orcs infesting those mountains swarmed and annihilated them - - so most went far to the west, and tried to dodge the far less numerous ogre raiding bands.

That last sentence should make it clear why the Citadel was and is useful, situated right where it is. And why, by controlling it, Zhentil Keep was able to acquire most of the wealth and dominance among the northshore Moonsea cities.

lakhovas, I understand your hunger for lore, but Ed has actually covered much of the coinage you ask about, here at the Keep. Follow the link Kuje has helpfully provided, and there's quite an impressive list already provided. Coinage, like matters of the gods, seems to be something Candle-bearing scribes can't get enough of, and keep asking about.

love,
THO

On April 11, 2007 THO said: Wenin, I feel I should elaborate a little re. the Citadel of the Raven.

The Citadel wasn't initially built to defend the Moonsea cities from Thar, but rather to safeguard the mining-caravan routes (the main reason for the continued existence of those cities).

However, it has been used to aid in their defense ever since, as a base from which mounted warriors can ride out to either battle armies ("raids in force") heading south before they reach the walls of those cities and manage to isolate them save for naval travel (risky to impossible in winter months, remember, and at any other time of year there are often too few ships at hand to evacuate a doomed city or rush enough reinforcements, food, and weaponry in, in time).

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Even more importantly, forces based in the Citadel can sally forth to attack orc or ogre armies from the rear - - and have done so on several occasions, to devastating effect. This made elders in Thar and among the orcs of the mountains very wary of trying to conquer cities (so armies were never mustered; only the boldest local rulers mounted raids). It also made the flind and ogres both believe the Citadel had to be defeated before any attacks on the Moonsea cities could succeed.

So in two ways, the Citadel provided a buffer for those coastal cities, to keep orcs, ogres, and flind from continually surrounding their walls and harrasing everyone dwelling therein.

Sorry for lengthy gabbing.

love,
THO

April 11, 2007: Well met again, gentles. This time Ed tackles a question from AlorinDawn: "Ed & THO, Thanks so much for the great reply on the "beasties" I inquired about. This time I pose a little more complex of a question. Having DMed on and off in the Realms for the last 20 years and detailing quite a bit of the Realms I still find it challenging at times to make location A seem much different than location B. Can you lend any tips to a fellow DM to help in these regards such as what basics you use to differentiate places and folks from the next."

Ed replies:

Well, I can try. :}

These work for me, because I've always used an "acting, roleplaying" style. I'm constantly describing what the PCs' surroundings look like, and I'm always acting NPCs (yes, with "funny voices"). In general, if you remember to have rainstorms (and describe them), mention the sunrises and sunsets, and so on, you underscore for players that time is passing. If they're on the move, be sure to describe the landscape unfolding, from time to time. Caravan masters and some tavernmasters and innkeepers may tend to "speak the same Common, the same way" in many places in the Realms (just as, say, staying at Real World Hotel Chain A can be very similar in New York, Toronto, and Berlin), but other places do have accents and "manners of speaking."

I'll leave the accents for answering your question on accents, but mannerisms can be used even if you deliver every NPC's speech (regardless of age, gender, or race) in the same (your own) voice. The differences can be heightened if you use different voices, of course.

In general, I make Southern speech faster and more fluid, with a lilt and more pronounced "S" sounds. Think of it as the difference between French or Spanish or Italian or English spoken with a Puerto Rican accent versus clipped Germanic or Scottish (or John Wayne's "Yup. Nope."). One FLOWS more than the other.

To this, add local figures of speech. Perhaps, in your Realms, people from Waterdeep always add, "You see? You see again?" instead of "Umm." to their conversation, whereas folk from Amn instead add, "No?" and Cormyreans say, "Sort of thing" and Sembians say, "Yes?"

So when your party's fighter would say, "Blast my bones, it's started to rain."

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A merchant in or from Waterdeep says, "Ah, you see again; it's started to rain."

And a merchant of Cormyr says, "Ah, blast, we'll all be wet again; RAIN, sort of thing."

And the Sembian says, "Urh. Rain, yes?"

Whereas the Amnian says, "The sky falls on us again, no? Always happens about now, no?"

Now, it's easily possible to overdo this and drive your players nuts, but if you have TWO OR THREE characters in a new place (preferably with different voices, like a croaking or gravelly old geezer, a sort-spoken chambermaid or tavern lass, and a deep-voiced, hearty innkeeper) ALL use the same mannerism, your players will start to "feel" the new place (as different from the one they've just come from).

My longtime players instantly know, when their characters have stepped through a gate, where they've arrived, if they can hear locals talking - - just by years of hearing me use local colloquialisms (expressions and uniquely local uses of words, that have other meanings elsewhere; for instance, "Scroll them!" in Amn or Sembia means launch legal proceedings against, or a complaint to the authorities about, "them," whereas in Waterdeep and Cormyr it means "teach them to write") and mannerisms.

If you combine these elements with accents, you should be able to vividly nail down "different places" as distinct from each other in your players' minds (again, travelling merchants, pilgrims, other adventurers, and so on are exceptions to "localspeak"). And if you do what RodOdom's Wiki photo suggested, and have a few visual aids for players about what places look like (hint: if there's architecture, make sure big civic and fortress buildings look different from place to place!), that, too, will help them "feel the difference."

Good luck, and you're quite welcome re. the beasties. :)

So saith Ed.

A superb DM (for us, anyway; I love watching him act, even if he is a ham).

love to all,
THO

April 12, 2007: Hi again, Candlelit scribes. I bring you once more the words of Ed of the Greenwood, this time in response to Jamallo Kreen, who asked: "FRCS indicates that most PCs might learn a lot of languages, depending on their species and home region. But those are PCs. How many languages would an average person in Faerun know? Would "Common" even be common among those living in very rural or xenophobic areas?"

Ed replies:

The average rural person in Faerûn would know the local language of their region or race (and usually a local dialect of that, too, meaning "a subset of words and speech-pattern

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mannerisms/sayings understood locally but not elsewhere"), and a smattering of Common (or more, depending on how often they come into contact with travelling merchants).

In other words, almost everyone can say "Yes, No, Friend, Foe, Eat, Need, Water, Help, Hurt, Warning, [names of races, from orcs through humans, plus the "big in legend" monsters like skeletons, dragons], now, soon, tomorrow, sunrise, sunset, cold, hot, danger, safe, trap/hazard, too high, too low, let's dicker, weapon, attack."

A rural person living in a village on a steadily-used trade-road would know far more, whereas one living a village farther away from the road might not - - but anyone who regularly traveled from remote steadings and hamlets to market, or to stop over at a tavern, in that village on the trade-road would know at least a "rough working vocabulary" in Common (though stay-at-homes in his/her same household might not).

So saith Ed.

Creator of the Realms and thoughtful world-builder.

love to all,
THO

April 13, 2007: Hello again, all. This time Ed responds to this interesting query from Athenon: "I've been following Wolfgang Baur's Open Design projects at Live Journal. For those that don't know, he's taking commission from patrons to create adventure products in small print runs and in PDF format. I was wondering if Ed had ever considered doing something like that. It might be a way to get products out that might otherwise not see the light of day through Wizards... Thanks!"

Ed replies:

Yes, I have been following Wolf's projects (initially hearing of it through Jeff Grubb, and shortly thereafter Steven Schend; hence the blurb from me Wolf quoted) with interest for some time; Wolf contacted me as to the best "in Realms" location for one adventure.

I think (with a great game designer AND editor rolled into one, like Wolfgang Baur, doing it) it's a brilliant idea and a great service, and the one area in which small operations and PDF have it "all over" traditional print gaming publishing (with the admitted Achilles heel that I face: having too primitive a Net connection for electronic payment, and being in another country with a different currency; I'm waiting for Wolf to visit GenCon or another con in the U.S. I also happen to be attending, so I can hand him a wad of American cash and get signed up for a bunch of these - - not so much because I want to play through them, as it is that I love to watch game design decisions being made and a design taking shape; and if it's in response to subscriber demands, it will fascinatingly "open" in its unfolding functionings).

Now, with all that said, I for several years wrote custom fantasy short stories (most of them grew into novelettes and novellas, because I'm long-winded) for charity auctions at gaming conventions, handing the finished work AND copyright to the auction winner, after I'd written a tale with their specified character, plot element, and sometimes an item or situation, too, in it. I loved doing those, even though they ate literally months out of my "earning a living" creative time.

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However, I completely lack the time to do such a thing myself right now (what with all the novels and game products and articles and consulting I'm doing, to earn a living), and of course couldn't do anything Realms-related except through Wizards. So, I'll just watch Wolf, and enjoy...

So saith Ed.

I, too, like to watch (she purred), when I'm not the one doing things worth watching (she winked).

love to all,
THO

April 15, 2007: Beautifully put, Garen Thal. I ferried your reply to Ed, and he fired back a response:

Perfect! Saves me firing up the old keyboard; couldn't have put it better myself. Dead on.

So, Blueblade, consider this one answered.

love to all,
THO

Who hasn't forgotten her duty; pray heed my next message, which brings Ed's lore response for this day.

Oh, and Sage: PDK was right; say nothing. The Lady K and I can probably both think of better uses for your mouth.

April 15, 2007: Ahem.

Hi again, scribes.

Lest you think Ed is only answering questions posted here in the last few weeks, it's back to the year 2005 this time, to a series of questions posted by CorranH: "I also posted the below in the DM forum. But I discovered this forum and since the questions below pertain to books by Mr. Greenwood, I hope you won't mind me posting the same questions here.

I will be starting a new Forgotten Realms campaign soon and it will be set in the Western Heartlands. To be precise in a village (of my own making) on the south bank of the River Reaching, upstream of Hill's Edge. The campaign will start somewhere around 1366 DR and (hopefully) last at least until 1373 DR.

I've been reading up on the area in all the books I have (most of all the published FR material), and a few questions remain. I hope someone more knowledgeable than me in FR canon can help me with these.

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Skull Gorge is just upstream and there seems to be a lot of conflicting information about it. All books tell about it being the final stand after the Battle of Bones (the best source: Elminster's Ecologies). However, some state that since the gorge has been empty, home to goblinoids, home to monsters (either of the last 2 options in some cases under Zhent control) or, hinted at in the 3rd Edition FRCS, fiends. The Tashara of the Seven Skulls article (Dragon 206, page 76) says one of the seven skulls resides there with a number of monsters. All this can't quite be explained by it being in a certain chronological order. If anyone could shine some light on this that would be much appreciated.

Also, on one of the maps of the Interactive Atlas it shows something called the 'Misty Stair' just downstream of the Skull Gorge. It's very likely this is a waterfall; however I can find no reference at all to this in any book. Anyone know where I can find any information?

Forgotten Realms Adventures, page 121: 'Zhent "Long Road to Riches:" a controlled caravan route from Zhentil Keep to the Sword Coast, via the Tesh valley, Daggerdale, the Stonelands, the Desertsedge and Goblin Marches, Yellow Snake Pass (guarded by the great Zhentarim fortress of Darkhold), Skull Gorge, Dawn Pass, Llorck, Loudwater, and the River Delimbiyr.

Volo's Guide to the Sword Coast, page 123; 'Feuding tribes of giants dwell in the Hill of Lost Souls and the Battle of Bones (two craggy areas named for past human struggles). The giants battle endlessly over the rolling grasslands between the two areas.'

So, how do the Zhent on their 'Long Road' get past the giants, since it seems to be directly in their path? Do they pay the giants to leave them alone, have they dominated them? Skirting around them seems unlikely. BTW, on the new 3rd edition map, the Skull Gorge ends pointing south, below the Hill of Lost Souls, making the 'Long Road' even crazier. Is the Trade Way really that dangerous to take for them?

The FRCS, page 225 says about the Zhents in Yellow Snake Pass; 'until early in 1372 DR., when Thayan wizards and mercenaries from Hill's Edge drove the patrols into cavern shelters in the Underdark. For the moment, Yellow Snake Pass is free.'

The Bane - Cyric strife within the Zhents had already made me decide that Darkhold (being Cyricist controlled) has split from the 'Eastern' Zhents in all but name. The 3rd edition books aren't quite clear if this split is a reality. The question that comes to mind is; if Darkhold is alone now and no longer receiving caravans from Zhentil Keep (they focus on the Dark Road) what are they going to do? They have no industry, so caravans (and smuggling) to the Sword Coast seems unlikely. What will be their focus?

Also, what is the weather like in this region? I like the weather table they used in the Silver Marches supplement; I might use the River Valley entry from it, but might that be a bit too cold?

Finally question (I see I have rambled quite a bit already); what kind of fish would be found in the River Reaching between Hill's Edge and Skull Gorge?

Thanks."

Ed replies:

Okay, here we go. :}

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First off, I apologize greatly for the delay. There were plans to set key battle scenes in a one-shot FR novel in the Class series in Skull Gorge, later superceded by plans to have a hidden citadel located in the gorge in ANOTHER FR novel, so I had to just keep quiet and wait (until first one and then the other notions were set aside by others, in favour of other ideas).

Skull Gorge is indeed a large gorge through which the River Reaching runs, and the Misty Stair is a series of cascades or waterfalls (surrounded by an everpresent mist of spray created by water rebounding up from its rocks) upstream of it.

The river is icy-cold (shocks breath from creatures falling in, carries them away swiftly throughout its run from the Stair to below the Gorge, which are the spawning areas for dreel (short, fat, green-black river eels that live on algae and carrion, and keep the river waters clean and clear; they taste like mucous, but are quite nourishing, and if fried with the right herbs or spices, can be nice; due to their appearance, they are sometimes called "trollfingers"), dartflash (small-human-palm-sized, bony silver fish that swim in short, very fast "darting" straight-ahead rushes, and are usually netted or scooped; edible and usually steamed until the bones are soft enough to crunch and eat, though a human adult needs a helm-full pile to make a meal) and mursk (fat, slow-moving green-brown fish that are unpleasantly oily in taste, but can be fried to skim off oil that will burn in lamps "as is"). These three creatures range all the way down the River, though overfishing has made mursk almost unknown in its lower reaches.

The weather table I created for SILVER MARCHES (it got modified and improved greatly by Wizards, probably by Rich Baker) is usable for this area, but in summer months is a tad too cold; winds blowing across the desert create cold extremes in winter and brief hot spells in summer, so in summer roll two dice, the second being a d6, upon which any odd number means use that table, but "even" means substitute a much warmer weather result of your choice.

In a word, weather in this region is: windy (down to gentle breezes at night), so there are frequent weather changes.

Right: on to Skull Gorge. Yes, it was the site of a legendary "last stand," and for years haunted by undead as a result, which kept it empty of most other life. Hobgoblins eventually moved in, led by shamans who managed to deal with the undead, but disputes arose among the hobgoblins and they warred amongst themselves.

For a long period of time after that, a succession of various wandering goblin, orc, hobgoblin, and even bugbear bands took up residence in the Gorge, fought with and drove out whoever was already living there, and were in turn supplanted by the "next wave" of opportunistic invaders. The fish were plentiful, and so were huge numbers of birds nesting on ledges, who could be driven off with sticks or flung debris and their eggs taken; the krawthant and smokewings in particular simply go on laying eggs until they manage to hatch a chick or die trying, so their eggs can be taken again and again.

From time to time wandering monsters happened along and decided the Gorge would make an ideal home for THEM (being as it has food, water, and shelter in the form of almost a dozen shallow "fissure" caves in the gorge walls). On most occasions the resident goblinoids slew the monsters, but sometimes the monster or monsters prevailed - - until the NEXT goblinoid band or more powerful monsters happened along. Wyverns nesting nearby regularly raided, devouring anything they could catch sufficiently "in the open," and their depredations took care of some of the more formidable monsters.

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In this manner, the Gorge changed hands repeatedly over the years, until the Zhentarim started to scout the area, and started basing a succession of "magelings" (low-level wizards of Zhentil Keep desiring to "prove their worth" and rise in the ranks of the Zhentarim) in the Gorge who were given magic items with which to control bands of monsters (often hobgoblins or orcs) to patrol the lands around, keeping predatory roaming monsters away and running off or slaying anyone who wasn't a Zhent, or part of their caravan operations. Aside from defending the Gorge itself from intrusion, their patrols were confined to the area between the Gorge and Anauroch, avoiding the Well of Dragons.

Many of the Zhent magelings were cruel, overambitious fools, and either attracted attention by "sideline" activities in Corm Orp or Hill's Edge designed to enrich themselves personally (slaving, drug-running, kidnappings for ransom, protection rackets), and so were eliminated by senior Zhentarim, or tried to eliminate the warring giants to the north (that upper-rank Zhentarim wanted to remain as deterrent to humans or others seeking to prospect or establish trade routes or try to settle in the area) or take on other perils in the area (dragons, wyverns, etc.) and paid the price.

So they died, frequently, often with most of the patrols they were commanding (and in a few cases, at the hands of those same patrols).

The Long Road caravans didn't traverse the Gorge (aside from a rare handful of experiments in barging goods down the River Reaching; rare because Scornubel proved to be a den of far too many powerful rivals for the Zhents to take on, and defeat, all at once); they passed it by to the east, skirting the western Desertsedge; the Gorge was part of the "wall of deterrents" the Zhents wanted to keep between their trade-route and prying eyes (and swords) of rivals.

Skull Gorge was reconquered by the Zhents on many occasions, though their grip on it weakened as divisions developed within the Brotherhood; the skull (of Tashara's seven) took up residence, with spell-controlled monsters of its own and its magical "giant flying skull" image, during one interlude between periods of Zhent control, slaughtered several Zhent magelings sent to retake the Gorge, and retreated (present whereabouts unknown) when the Zhents sent a small group of accomplished wizards with a few spell-controlled death tyrants.

More recently, the Zhent grip on the Gorge weakened still more (again due to strife within the Zhentarim), fiends were summoned by some Zhent wizards seeking to rule the Gorge (wizards who perished, leaving the fiends lurking there), and with effective Zhent control gone, a temple to Velsharoon (The Crypt of the Arisen Army) was established in the Gorge.

The ultimate Zhent aim involving Skull Gorge was, however, achieved: the area has a firm reputation as "dangerous, haunted, and crawling" with all manner of monsters (just pick your wild story), and nearby settlements such as Hill's Edge and Corm Orp wouldn't dream of trying to found ranches or prospect for metals anywhere near the Gorge, or the wilderlands to its east.

Of course, in the meantime, the Black Road route across Anauroch was established, shortening the Zhent "faster, privately-controlled" caravan route between the Moonsea and the Sword Coast.

The Long Road, that skirts Anauroch, was established purely because the Zhents of the day were too weak to magically exterminate or control the Bedine AND the natural perils of the desert (the city of Shade is, of course, a recent complication in all of this). Yes, its route is long and torturous, but preferable to the longer and far more expensive "public" routes through Cormyr, Iriaebor, et al because the Zhents could move weapons, armor, battle-ready mercenaries, drugs, slaves, and other items that rulers of places long the public route might stop, seize, or make war on the Zhents because of.

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The Zhentarim DO have magic enough to make both tribes of giants simply shun their passing caravans (allowing them through where others, not specifically magically equipped for such a passage, cannot). Yes, many Zhent goods DO just appear on the Trade Way through Soubar and other stops, or are dispersed through Scornubel, but again, the illicit nature of the majority of the most profitable shipping makes bringing such goods through places the Zhents came to control or dominate (Llorck, Loudwater), and then via barge past most scrutiny until they can leave Zhent hands, preferable to the Trade Way or other "public" caravan routes.

The establishment of the Black Road, and changing priorities within the Zhentarim (the "make us all rich" overland trade project was a chief goal of the Zhentarim WIZARDS, not the later Fzoul-dominated priest/beholder cabal; the beholders formerly sided with Manshoon, but turned against him when they saw this project and others becoming seeming obsessions, and turning the Brotherhood away from THEIR goals, which remain largely mysterious [and heavily under NDA protection]).

CorranH, you are quite correct in saying that Darkhold "split from the 'Eastern' Zhents in all but name."

The 3rd edition books weren't quite clear on the specifics of this, for as long as possible, in order to give DMs maximum freedom in handling this as they wanted to in their own campaigns.

Here are some of the things an "isolated" Darkhold can do: act as a gathering place (and breeding pens) for slaves, and the magical alteration of slaves, and then ship them out for sale (perhaps primarily down into the Underdark). Act as a defended transfer point for goods from the Underdark being shipped into the World Above, and vice versa. Become a drug, poison, perfume, and drinkables (fortified wines, zzar "with something extra," and other exotic, expensive "doctored" drinks) manufacturing center and shipping source. Train wizards and send them forth on covert missions to coerce or slay wealthy individuals in Amn and Tethyr, and successful "shady" traders in Scornubel, and gain access to their businesses and property.

All of which, of course, would make Darkhold a prime target for Red Wizard infiltration and takeover.

And who's to say the beholders of the Brotherhood, or the Underdark interests, would let the Red Wizards get away with that? What if Zhents who had to flee Darkhold for their lives decide it would be wise to stay in hiding, wherever else they are, and hire or compel adventurers to "go in" and try to wrest Darkhold back from the Thayans?

Moreover, there are ancient and fell magics hidden in Darkhold that neither the Zhents nor the Red Wizards control. What if they awaken, and take a hand in the conflict in some way?

Heh-heh. Hope that's enough of a focus for your campaign, and that it doesn't come too late. (Or perhaps for a new campaign...)

So saith Ed.

Wow, now THERE'S a campaign-building answer. It takes Ed a while, sometimes (with very good reasons, as we saw), but he delivers. With a big smile on his face. In the dead of night, on your doorstep. (As I know personally).

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love to all,
THO

April 16, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. Ed deals with another vintage question this time, one posed by darqravenDD in early February of 2005: "Mr. Greenwood, I have placed this question in a couple different places (including a different place on this forum) and was told by Ms Elaine Cunningham that you Sir the one to ask this of. As you are the final word on Forgotten Realms Lore.

I ask this of you here, because I wish to know the Official Standing per date. Many wonderfully helpful people have given their thoughts on this. And though it may seem I am just asking and asking till I get the answer I am looking for, that is not the case. I simply ask you now Sir, because you ARE the final word on the matter and speak with the power of WotC behind you.

There for I place this before you, Sir:

In the current standings of the Realms, Would Lolth allow a male of exceptional merit to become a Cleric/High Priest of her ways? And would the Female Drow allow such?

I know that he would not have the same standing as a Female in his place. And the interactions between them would be very very interesting.

I am well aware that they are others Deities that would grant a Male Drow clerical power. One good example would be Laveth (Lolth's daughter as per Dragon Issue 84), but I am interested in Lolth, not the others. What is the Official standing on this?

I am also aware that in the past, it was allowed (2nd Ed rules).

If you would be so kind to tell us your thoughts on the matter.

Thank you for your time.. and I look forward to your answers, as they will help me greatly in a storeline I am working on.

darqravenDD

PS: I just thought of a side question: Would Lolth even worry about a Male Cleric/High Priest if he started to interrupt her plans?"

Ed replies:

I must begin my belated answer by saying flatly that I can't give you any sort of "Official" answer, and I DON'T speak with "the power of WotC behind" me (though that sounds as if it might be fun, especially if bellowed from horseback, riding through a moonlit night with gleaming sword brandished in hand).

One of the reasons this reply has taken so long is my reluctance to try to even tackle "rules" questions; for those, you need to consult Wizards. Another is my long, slow attempt to do so on your behalf, by asking various staff designers their opinions at conventions.

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Here's the result:

Yes, Lolth WOULD allow a male of exceptional merit to become a Cleric/High Priest in her faith. The key words here are "of exceptional merit." In other words, he's going to be a very, very rare exception to the norm.

No, female drow he met with would universally NOT recognize his standing, or aid him, if Lolth didn't flatly, firmly, and openly tell them to (speaking in their heads or manifesting directly). He would be hated and almost certainly attacked (to kill), and regarded as a madwits if they didn't receive Lolth's assurances, and a freak if they did.

Note that I'm making generalizations as to female drow attitudes towards him here, and considering only those female drow who venerate Lolth; other drow females might not react with such swift hostility (unless the male drow priest of Lolth attacked them, or announced his status and attempted to cajole, coerce, or otherwise hamper them).

I'm not sure that Lolth would "worry" about a male (drow, I assume) male cleric/high priest (of her faith, I assume) "if he started to interrupt her plans," but she WOULD have agents (such as other mortal drow) deal with him, promptly and harshly. Her dominance succeeds through tyranny; those who defy her or her aims must be seen to be punished horribly by her worshippers, so that they'll continue to obey her with alacrity.

So saith Ed.

Tireless delver into ever-richer and -deeper facets and layers of the Realms.

love to all,
THO

On April 17, 2007 THO said: I tend to read Realms novels as soon as they come out, regardless of their Realmsdate or status as part of a trilogy or series.

But that's just me. :}

Many of the "trilogies intended as trilogies" (Byers, Kemp) might well work better if read by someone who waits until they can read all of the parts in succession.

However, all of Ed's trilogies work just fine as "stand-alone" books that just get continued (or the same characters and places revisited) in later "stand-alone" books. I don't think any reader would gain anything by waiting until the entire Knights of Myth Drannor trilogy is published, before they started reading the first one. Plunge right in, I say! (Into books, too.)

love to all,
THO

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April 17, 2007: Hello again everyone. This time I bring you the words of Ed of the Greenwood in response to this post from Delzounblood: "ED & THO"

I have been thinking of asking this question for a while and I have even posted it on the boards for the other scribes to coment on.

For the past 5 years I have been off and on studying Ancient History and Lesser Known Theories of Mankind. (I know big subject!) I have been re-reading one of my favorite Non-fiction Books on this subject, and with a couple of points raised I wondered if anything similar had happened in the realms?

The book is Fingerprints of the Gods by Graham Hancock.

In the section I was reading the book discusses ancient Andean and Incan civilisations and their step up from Un-civilised Barbarians to the earliest know civilised cultures.

This seems to be the work of One man if you follow Andean legend or a group of men from the same culture.

In most places they named him Ticci Viracocha though he had many other names including Huaracocha, Con, Con Ticci or Kon Tiki, Thunupa etc. This man or men came and taught the barbaric tribes Math, Writing, Agriculture and gave them all the skills needed for a cultured, civilized life!

Then left and went forth into the sea....

The main questions:

Has there been any canon or anything hinted at that would reflect or in some way mirror the Andean Legend of this Foam of the Sea, Master of Science & Magic (as he is known) in early Toril history?

Did the races of Faerun have divine influence that could incorporate this legend in any way?

I am thinking more of the Old Empires or maybe the Maztican Empire etc:

I know FR is not a reflection of Real World, but I always find some mirror of a legend able to fit and adapt into game terms.

Maybe a manifestation / avatar of one God or another shaping their favored race?

Or as per the book hinted but an unknown super advanced race which for reasons unknown traveled around Toril on a civilizing mission?

Your thoughts and any canon please.

Thanks Delz"

Ed replies:

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There are lots of "strange tales" from the distant past that hint at "odd outlanders arriving, doing wondrous (or terrible) things, and departing again," and that's hardly surprising in a world wherein so many races have jostled for dwelling-space and supremacy, and magic works and is used so often by so many of them (AND so often dramatically, or recklessly, or tumultuously).

However, what there ISN'T is a shared sense of just one "unknown super advanced race" travelling about. Many races in a given locale, at different times in history, have shared tales about, and either argued about or "believed in" (shared a common belief), various different groups of visitors doing various things (sometimes gifting local persons with things, sometimes "settling" wars or installing or supporting rulers, sometimes toppling and replacing them). Tales of mortal heroes rising to found empires or make ideas into a new reality (social custom or technological advance or practical process) are common, but tales of gods "coming down" to do so are more rare. Folk of Faerûn seem to like or prefer gods who inspire or guide mortals rather than gods who "come and do things to" mortals - - and their tales reflect this.

Priests are taught "holy history" that attests that this or that god (usually their own) did indeed shape the destinies of races by causing this or that event (natural disasters, victories in war, ascensions or falls of prominent rulers, and so on). However, the holy histories of one church inevitably contradict that of another, and no coherent picture emerges that can lead a truly objective observer to say, "This tale, that one, and these three holy histories are really all about the same being."

On the other hand, most mortals, in Faerûn as elsewhere, aren't 'truly objective observers.' So there are many cults, cabals, priesthoods, small regional groups, and just plain folks across the Realms who DO share beliefs that this and that tale, coupled with the teachings of yonder church, "prove" X or Y.

There's nothing to stop you putting a civilizing Walker From The Sea (who later returns to it) into your Realms campaign as "X" (or "Y"). In this way, the Realms is indeed flexible enough to mirror the Real World (whatever that is :}). Many churches are fond of saying "This Long-ago Local Hero was in reality an Avatar of Our Deity, or Inspired by Our Deity," and although this is usually countered by multiple other faiths saying, "No, That Same Long-ago Local Hero was in reality an Avatar of OUR Deity, or Inspired by Our Deity, Not Yours," if those rival faiths dwindle or are absent in a given area, than the sort of figure you posit belief in will indeed become "accepted as truth" in that given area.

Go for it, and have fun, and keep watching canon closely; one never knows just what might turn up.

So saith Ed.

Who is NOT hinting furiously with his last sentence, but merely reminding everyone to keep their minds open (there's more room in an open mind than a closed one for new ideas, as the saying goes).

love to all,
THO

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April 18, 2006: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time I bring Ed's reply to this recent query from createvmind: "Hello All, During gaming last night I suddenly wondered, where do items go when a bag of holding or any such dimensional space is punctured and who's there to scoop them up? If I tried to find an object lost in such a way and used a spell what would I see when scrying the object?"

Ed replies:

I'm going to begin by assuming your question specifies "in the Realms." Otherwise, it's literally (ahem) not my bag. :}

Kentinal is quite correct in both his rules reply AND his "perhaps" suggestion.

[THO Interjection: Kentinal's relevant words: "What occurs is a rift or gate to the Astral Plane is torn in the space, and all items carried are lost. At least as per the core rules. Perhaps items of magic return to the Weave."]

The bag of holding or other magical dimensional pocket is destroyed, irrevocably and forever, and the energies of its destruction "burn" a very temporary (lasting less than a round) hole in the dimensional ether, causing a rift into the Astral Plane.

Any and all contents of the collapsing extra-dimensional space are violently scattered - - ("sucked," whirled, etc.) not in a way that damages the contents by impact with anything, because they're individually shielded by flows of energy swirling around them, but in a way that whisks them away so swiftly that no one and no spell can hope to "snatch and hold" any of them - - away, as the energies of the plane (I'm going to assume here, for the sake of keeping this answer to under a web-thread-page in length, that we're talking the Realms, as Prime Material, being the "plane" in which the bag or other dimensional space is located or opened into, prior to collapse) rush in, to "heal the rift" by equalizing pressure with the Astral (I'm speaking more metaphorically than physically here, to most clearly illustrate "what happens" from the point of view of observers on the prime plane). So the items vanish, too quickly to be grabbed, and the rift closes, only a little more slowly.

It's rare, with a bag of holding or other dimensional space of similar or smaller size, for any living creature to be "sucked through the rift" unless they are directly in contact with it AND WANT TO GO THROUGH, *AND* so do exactly the right thing (turning and aiming themselves, limbs together like a diver seeking to plunge through a small opening or deep into water, so as to fit through the rift before it closes and the roiling energies hurl them aside), OR they are already reaching into the bag or are partially in the dimensional space, grasping one or more of the contents, and ALLOW THEMSELVES to be "towed" through the rift by refusing to let go of the item. (A DM shouldn't give players much time to make a decision here OR debate it with other players; their character has literally seconds to act, one way or another.)

Magic items (including "normal" items that have simply had a [perhaps limited-duration] spell cast on them, like the famous rock with a light spell on it) are the exception to this "whisked anywhere, and lost" rule. I'll get back to them in a moment.

Before I explore THAT funhouse, I'd like to quickly deal with the other two questions you pose: "who's there to scoop them up?" and "If I tried to find an object lost in such a way and used a spell what would I see when scrying the object?"

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The answer to the first is: whatever beasties you want to be there, depending on where a particular item of the "lost" contents go - - and that depends on the cosmology you're using, prior events in your campaign (did adventurers from the Realms enter this same new-destination plane recently?), and where the DM deems that item to have gone. Usually everything gets sprayed, shotgun-blast-like, from a given entry point out into the Astral Plane. However, the violence of the rift may well open other rifts, into other planes, or the rift and trajectory of a given item departing it may be sufficiently close to a pre-existing planar transfer from the Astral to another plane, to send the item on elsewhere, so that it flashes momentarily through the Astral and then is gone. A great way to "tow" a PC adventurer into a new campaign setting, by the way...

The answer to your second question is: any scrying intended to find any "lost" content item would fail utterly. You can't find them that way. The "unless" here is: unless the item returns to the Realms (prime plane). I usually rule that the item is surrounded by an "echo" or aura of its violent planar travel that renders it invisible to all detection and location magics for a day or so, anyway. So to any attempts to immediately magically trace it, the item is simply "gone."

Right, back to the magic items being the exception, and Kentinal's good instincts: some (by no means all; here I ignore percentages and just make the possibilities part of a DM's storytelling "wiggle room," as in: what'll make the best adventure for the PCs) magic items do "boomerang" back to the Realms (along with anyone towed by them, or even other items that were lashed to them or physically connected to [or even tangled in] them in some way). Not to right where they departed the Realms, but a random "somewhere else" in the Realms. Cheap, nigh-instant intercontinental travel, with a "safe" arrival, as per a teleport without error in 2nd Ed. That does NOT guarantee that arrival is in a location that is itself inherently safe. If you appear inside someone's harem or guarded treasure vault, and experience a hostile reaction, claiming that magic not of your casting brought you there probably isn't going to mollify the displeasure of the locals.

So items flung through such a rift that had acquired magic, even temporarily, in the Realms often return to the Realms, in a random location. Again, a great way of shifting adventure to a new venue, or just thrusting a PC into a difficult situation where they may See Things or otherwise learn information (the duke's a traitor! the kindly old mother superior secretly summons devils to gratify her and carry out deeds for her! that oh-so-loyal noble is secretly meeting with foes of the city, like drow or illithids or rival city rulers!) that will plunge them into subsequent adventures.

There is no way of affecting where the new Realms arrival location will be - - unless the DM wants the will of a player character towed along to have some weight, and the player fervently and quickly uses it ("There's no place like home! There's no place like home!")

Right, there's my Realmslore reply. Have fun. :}

So saith Ed.

Whew. This HAS, by the way, been used on we Knights a time or two. An approach that promotes maximum roleplaying possibilities, you'll note.

love to all,
THO

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On April 19, 2007 THO said: Both Corky and Halflings Inc. are the creations of Jeff Grubb, then the TSR "traffic cop" and main designer of the Realms. For what Jeff's up to these days, see his superb blog, Grubb Street.

love,
THO

April 19, 2007: Hi.

To Calrond: Whoooo. You tread on Dangerous Ground For Mere Mortals. Ed will respond shortly (er, within the month).

To createvmind, Ooooo. Your player's character may indeed be in for a world of hurtin'... or not. Again, Ed will respond.

And hello again, all. This time I present Ed's swift response to Jamallo Kreen's recent questions, that he suggested I 'pare to the bone' when presenting this answer, so accordingly: "The Age of Worms Adventure Path concludes in issue 135 of Dungeon Magazine, and Eric L. Boyd has written articles and web enhancements which allow it to be played in Faerun (including Chult). In the adaptation, Kyuss becomes a minor Chultan god worshipped by only a few cultists (at first, anyway!).

If Kyuss, a Chultan demigod, is killed by mortals, would they be eligible for elevation to godhood by Ao (using TSR's ToT logic, informed by your uber-wisdom), and if so, would they inherit his domains or his portfolio or both, or only his divine spark, being left to become the gods they want to be? (I can't see a lawful good character killing Kyuss and then relishing the prospect of having the domains of Evil and Corruption dropped in his lap, nor a good cleric or paladin wanting to become a divine patron of undeath!)

Second, since killing Kyuss is a Herculean task (pun intended), and would probably involve a team of adventurers, would they all become eligible for divinity, or just the one who delivered the final death blow, and if it's divided up, would they all become DR 1 demigods, or would the divine spark be spread so thin that they all become DR 0 quasi-deities? I know how I presently intend to run it, if my players ever succeed in doing it, but I greatly value your opinion on this, Ed, and want to make my campaign as "Realmsian" as possible, even though there is no way in the Fugue Plain that you'd ever run this adventure path for your players.

Cyric and Midnight took out greater deities and became greater gods themselves, which leads to my third query, one which may extend beyond the realm of NDA and into the cosmic sphere of "it's none of your business, mortal!" If a mortal obtains divinity by killing a god, does he or she become the same Divine Rank as the deceased, or might Ao (who can do anything s/he wants!) raise the mortal to an even higher rank or place him at a lower rank (for some inscrutable reason unfathomable to the gods themselves)?

Fourth (and finally!), the Hand of Vecna makes an appearance in this adventure path, along with a high-ranking cleric of Vecna. Eric's adaptation makes Myrkul stand in for Vecna, but there just ain't no Hand of Myrkul artifact, and the [i]Crown of Horns[i] might not do as a substitute. Master Ed of the Realms, is it possible that Vecna finally has a small toehold on Toril and can grant

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spells there, or is it more likely that some other deity is impersonating him and granting spells in his name to his poor, ignorant cleric?"

Right, duly trimmed (scribes can examine the entire post on page 25 of this thread), and here's Ed's response:

Any mortal can ascend to godhood if venerated sufficiently; why some achieve divinity and some do not is one of the Ultimate Mysteries, that only Ao can answer (many sages may second-guess, but none can presage or predict with certainty). In general, the destruction (permanent death) of a demigod raises a very strong possibility that a new demigod will rise to take the place of the vanished demigod.

The portfolios and domains of any replacement aren't automatic; they have to do with the nature (mortal life, deeds, and interests) of the new demigod, and of the desires and actions of existing gods (who may or may not want to seize the vacant portfolios, and may or may not be prevented in doing so by the opposition of other gods, or their own too-different-from-the-desired-portfolio natures).

However, being the mortal slayer of any sort of god does NOT guarantee that said mortal will ascend to godhood, or replace the divinity they've slain. The Time of Troubles (Godswar, Fall of the Gods) was an exceptional time, with exceptional circumstances; so far as the wisest mortal sages can tell, in hindsight, Ao was trying to shake up the roster of existing gods and teach the survivors a lesson.

So a mortal killing a god now, or at any non-Time of Troubles time, might very well not Ascend to take the god's place (they might well believe otherwise, of course, with what priests may have said about the examples of Cyric, Kelemvor, and Midnight).

The "divine spark" you speak of is Ao's to compel or steer, BUT: any mortal (I stress: not already divine) godslayer who kills a god directly, hand-to-hand, rather than long-range (by spell or contrivance), will almost certainly be bathed in a "wash" of divine power blasting outwards, from the dying god.

They may well be slain or seared into twisted but still living ruin by such energies, but are usually also "touched" and changed by the divine fire rushing through them.

This is a DM's chance to change a character's race, alignment, and statistics of all sorts; I have usually used it to give characters stat boosts and "wild talents" (sorcerer-like "self-renewing" spellcasting abilities, for only a few specific spells or effects); in other words, nudging them a stride closer to being superheroes. They may well, of course, not know precisely what's happened to them, until trial-and-error or "funny happenings" afterwards clue them in. ("Hey, I fell into the fire and DIDN'T GET BURNED!")

So a character killing Kyuss would be eligible to replace him, yes, but highly unlikely. Yes, the entire party would be eligible, too, but if they didn't strike a direct blow against Kyuss, their eligibility would be even more highly unlikely.

If no one "in wider Faerûn" knows of their deed (and any of them telling someone about it emphatically doesn't count; a powerful wizard or priest with a reputation and believability of their own has to witness the slaying AND WANT TO SPREAD WORD OF IT), they probably wouldn't start getting worshipped by anyone; ergo, no demigodhood or any other sort of godhood. They

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might well gain powers I alluded to, above (darkvision, self-healing, feather fall or dimension door ability, vitality: a human gaining the lifespan and vigor of an elf, or an elf doubling their natural lifespan), but would then have to use those powers to do things and impress people to try to get someone to start praying to them. In other words, it's not likely at all that they'd achieve godhood by slaying Kyuss, but they might well gain personal benefits.

On the other hand, if the slayer is already a priest, and his/her holy mission of going up against Kyuss is known and approved of by the church or the deity (who would in turn order the church to celebrate it), said mortal godslayer might be deemed a "saint" or "holy champion" or something of the sort, of the deity they worship - - and it's from the ranks of such Holy Ones that demigods often rise, especially if something befalls the main deity. Worship of a saint would keep that mortal alive and vital, beyond normal lifespan, and therefore a potential "god in waiting."

No godslayer, mortal or divine, automatically achieves the same divine rank as their victim, although a middling god who single-handedly takes down a greater god USUALLY gains power. Again, veneration of massed mortals plays a part, so the extent to which mortals know about the slaying (the public relations "selling job" best done by an existing and widespread priesthood) is a determining factor.

And lastly: yes, it's possible that Vecna finally has a small toehold on Toril and can grant spells there - - but it is FAR more likely that a deity already in the Realms (Myrkul's the most likely one, though it could be someone else trying to "horn in on" something that would otherwise fall to Myrkul because of his portfolio) is indeed impersonating him and granting spells in his name to his "poor, ignorant cleric."

So saith Ed.

Creator of most of the gods of the Realms and the "portfolio" system as a game mechanic (it existed in myths and legends long, long before there were any roleplaying games, of course).

love to all,
THO

April 19, 2007: Hello, all. Iakhovas, I sent your post off to Ed for his reply, being as you addressed him directly in it. Here's what he just sent back:

Iakhovas, the "trend" in the Realms you object to simply doesn't exist. Or to put it another way: the elements you find distasteful have been there from the beginning. The Realms is a big, hyper-detailed world, and I and others have put LOTS of things in it. From detailed insects, clothing dyes and poisons, to oaths and changing fashions and ever-evolving customs and fads.

When speaking about the Realms, I have always adopted the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC approach: to stand back and dispassionately discuss everything. In the threads here at Candlekeep, I do so in response to questions.

As a designer, I put EVERYTHING in, for one overriding reason: in any roleplaying game, DMs need to understand WHY NPCs think and act as they do, so they can extrapolate what a given NPC will do in any situation that play goes in (as no published game material can possibly have

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space enough to cover all possibilities, and some DMs will want to use NPCs as continuing characters in a campaign, and so will need "aims, life goals, and attitudes" information).

Sexual needs and attitudes can be a big part of why NPCs act as they do: many quests, slayings, feuds, and PC adventurer hirings are rooted in love, unrequited love, the desire to impress or attract attention from someone desired, or to make amends, and so on.

The editors always take all sorts of material out of the lore material I provide, usually for space reasons more than anything else. But in the same way as 3rd Edition designers are required to "show their math work" to the editor (when working out character stat blocks), I have to show WHY characters think as they do, act as they do, and have the aims they do. It's simply part of good roleplaying.

However, the sexual aspects of the Realms, except in the most overarching aspects (there was a conflict between Lancelot and Arthur over Guinevere because...), don't need to be in everyone's Realms roleplaying. At all. It's purely a matter of personal choice.

In this thread, though, through the good offices of The Hooded One, I provide answers to specific questions posed by scribes, limited by my field of expertise (ask me how to invest in the stock market? Sorry, not competent) and by NDAs. To limit my responses, or for you or anyone to try to limit the scope of questions asked, is to try to take away the choices of others.

And that dismays and disgusts ME. If you don't like the topic being asked about, or the answer, please just ignore it or don't read it. You are certainly under no obligation to include the lore I provide here in your campaign.

If you attend GenCon seminars, you will know that although I often delve into topics some judge "lewd," I do so always IN RESPONSE TO AUDIENCE QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS.

Some scribes want to know more, for whatever reasons. Sometimes in ways that puzzle me or go far beyond what I think is necessary for MY roleplaying (why does this god like this colour, or that herb or shoes or particular sort of vole?... As mortals, your characters can never know why; the god just does, that's all). Yet I try to answer everyone.

Your games may neither include nor need mention of homosexuality or bisexuality; that's fine. However, other scribes have interests of their own that carry the exact same weight of legitimacy as yours. You've recently asked a question about coinage in this thread; please be aware that I once had a brief and friendly argument with a TSR designer who said of my currency details, "Out with all that crXp! The game has gold pieces in the rules, and that should be good enough! Why all this totally unnecessary detail? It's all just space-wasting crXp! Give me more monsters!"

(And as an aside: the design of a newly-created monster [and I've created more monsters for the game than anyone else] should ALWAYS include sexual details, so the life cycle can be understood: does it give live birth, or lay eggs? What stats and powers do the hatchlings or young possess? Do they have a market value, or are they edible? What does the beast's lair, or egg nest, look like? Do they dwell in mated pairs, or mate and then separate [so are adventuring PCs who kill a female going to be hunted down by the lovelorn male, or did the female drive him away long ago]? This lore need not always appear in the published monster entry, but the company designers have to know it, so as to answer Sage Advice questions or to develop newer versions of the monster, later.)

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All gamers feel different wants and have different needs, and I try to cater to all. In this case, a scribe asked a specific question, asking for clarification about an earlier reply of mine. If that request had not been made, I would not have delved further into the topic, PRECISELY because it makes some scribes uncomfortable.

For the record - - as specifically stated in the very post of mine you quoted - - I also do not find that "most Eilistraeean clerics" are sexually prolific. I do find that a large number of them, like a majority of clerics of all faiths and genders, have no steady partners: they devote themselves to the god and the faith, and the fellowship of various other clergy, rather than to life with one partner. Nor did I say that "most" Eilistraeean clerics are lesbians; I simply pointed out their strong presence as a factor, in response to a specific question. In this case, sexual ACCEPTANCE (not necessarily practices onstage, in anyone's game) within Eilistraee's clergy is important for roleplaying: it allows everyone to understand what's going to be accepted, and what is not, and therefore how to roleplay characters who happen to be members of Eilistraee's clergy. It warns a DM that a given female cleric of Eilistraee is going to have a lot of other females who care what happens to her, and may well attack PCs or others who mess with her.

The "dancing naked" aspect you find ridiculous is actually there because, long ago, a TSR editor requested it be, so a TSR artist could paint the picture he wanted to paint (that in the end, did not get used, although I believe it was sold privately to someone who presumably likes to look at art of nude dancing drow women). As for those "voluptuous beautiful women swinging great or bastard swords in chainmail bikinis sans the freakish muscles that would usually come with it" you mention, yes, I do believe I've seen rather a lot of those sorts of paintings, on the covers of a considerable number of fantasy games and novels... :}

As a freelancer, at the time of the dancing naked request, my job was not to dispute with those I was working with; my job was to incorporate. The design that results is of course shaped by that inclusion, because my overarching goal is always to make the Realms seem realistic, so that its systems "work," or at least give the feel of doing so.

In the early days of TSR publishing the Realms, most matters sexual were taboo (a DRAGON staffer once vetoed an article of mine because he didn't want me to mention that in some versions of the Arthurian legend, Lancelot and Guinevere were "lovers;" that one word was too strong for him, but had to be there as the [only mention of the] reason for the schism between them, breakup of the Round Table, etc.).

More recently in the history of the published Realms, more and more sexual details have been published (though please note that explicit sexuality has been there from early on: one of Bob Salvatore's early drow novels, HOMELAND, ends with the female "valedictorian" of the graduating priestesses summoning and having sexual relations with a creature from the lower planes, which is much "stronger" than anything I've ever written). I'm guessing - - and this is merely my speculation, not anything I know of company policy - - that the boundaries are continually pushed in attempts to appeal to new potential audiences (e.g. lesbians, male homosexuals) by including elements they can identify with.

Again, this is merely a guess. I don't - - and have never - - controlled the direction, focus, and breadth of the published Realms. I don't even control what is printed and what gets cut in novels and game products that have my name on them (check the legal matter at the front of them, and you'll note that they're copyrighted by the company, not by me).

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What I do, and have always done, is provide more Realmslore to gamers, readers, and other fans of the Realms. I do it here at Candlekeep by answering questions, as fully as I can. So if someone asks about matters sexual in the Realms, I WILL discuss said matters.

However, I'm not rebuking or disagreeing with you. Of COURSE many people find sexual elements disagreeable, in a variety of ways, and whenever someone dislikes what they see in a Realms product, and says so, we take note. I will pass this reaction of yours on to the relevant folks at Wizards - - because this is a service industry, or should be: we want to provide what fans want. That's how sales go up, for the publisher: what's being published gets continually refined and re-aimed or re-configured, to appeal to the widest audience. Whose tastes are always evolving.

THO and I both like to flirt, but neither of us has, so far as I know, been promiscuous since shortly after the 1960s (ooh, hey: yes, Woodstock! No, not in the Realms :}). Yes, that means we're both "old" by the standards of many scribes. Yet we actually do think about a lot of other things besides sex. Really. Just ask us about other things, and we'll talk about other things. Er, mainly. :}

Okay?

So saith Ed.

I, however, LOVE to talk about sex. And not just talk...

Ahem. Complaint accepted, lakhovas; air cleared? Let us know, okay?

Ed will return with a Realmslore reply as usual, in six hours or so. AlorinDawn, that workshop idea of yours sounds great. Why don't you suggest it to Lisa Adams, of Pentacon?

love to all,
THO

April 20, 2007: Ah, PDK!

I've BEEN in some of those joints you refer to. A little too much "eons of cigarette smoke" for my tastes, but...

Ahem.

Hi again, scribes!

This time, I present the first half of Ed's swift reply to Blueblade's request for Realmslore: "I'm looking for some local tax collectors and police/Watch for Marsember; names and ranks of a handful of guys and gals who'd operate at street level, actually going into shops to say, "Hey, you haven't paid, so pay up.""

Ed replies:

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Ah, I love these sorts of queries. No heavy-duty stats, just the roleplaying stuff, okay? In general, consider these F4s at most (the Watch) and F1s with some sort of accountancy prestige class (the tax bailiffs). So here, from my DM notes, are a few handy characters.

Watch: As with Arabel, the other "oft-rebel city," most patrols are currently Purple Dragons, with one or two retired Purple Dragons (old but still hale locals who "know everyone in Marsember") and one or two young Purple Dragons in training. As a result, the Watch in Marsember now uses Purple Dragon ranks. The lionar and swordcaptain wouldn't be along on normal street patrols or bailiff visits, unless armed resistance was expected (if two patrols were mustered, the swordcaptain would probably accompany both as a commander; the lionar would be who everybody reports to (and angry citizens who want to complain would be brought to), and would only appear on the streets on a violent-confrontation-followup "restore the peace" visit, with more Watch patrol reinforcements, or coordinating a chase.

Here are a few names and descriptions:

Lionar:

Saraera Delhand (LN hf F4): short, thin (bony; when unclad, her ribs can be clearly counted), never seen in Marsember out of uniform; her blonde hair is almost white; quiet, thin-lipped, apt to sound bitter or sarcastic; is lonely and a stickler for rules, precise adherence to the law, and order; she'd rather educate citizens as to their precise obligations the first time, and arrest or fine only later (values order over heavy-handedness; most citizens rightly consider her "stern but fair"). Her guilty pleasures (practiced only in private) include eating chocolate, bathing in warmed milk, reading lurid "hot-bottom" (soft porn) romance chapbooks; loves to dance and wear fine gowns, but dare not allow herself to do so in Marsember (takes annual vacation to Suzail, and there dances in the more expensive clubs and at nobles' and Court events). Procuring the chocolate, milk, and chapbooks will be done when concealed in an ankle-length robe, with hood up, by night.

Swordcaptain: Beldran Velhikho (LN hm F4): a tall, ruggedly handsome, close-mouthed brawler who prefers to punish on the spot (often with a clout across the head or a boot up the backside, plus enforced "criminal provides restitution to victim," plus warning: Do it again, or try to steal it back when we leave, and you'll get worse the next time); favourite saying: "I break fingers, mind." Large head, larger shoulders, brown hair and eyes, jaw and nose have both been broken but look all right; large and hairy hands; patient (apt to be amused if punched or slapped, not swiftly angry); street-wise and often calms angry subordinates, playing "soft cop" with citizens to get their agreement or to trick them into admissions of guilt.

First Sword:

1. Raskran Telstone (LN half-em F3): stone-faced, hard-eyed (icy blue hue), fair-haired, slender and agile fop; has his uniforms tailored, always wears clouts of the finest make beneath, and sports hidden knives sheathed at his wrists and the back of his neck (in addition to the usual inside-left-boot and belt daggers most Purple Dragons carry); is secretly contemptuous of many of the "lowcods" uneducated, grasping poor of Marsember, whom he has called "thieving weasels" in unguarded moments, but is careful not to speak out about, these days; always suspicious and looking for the worst in people (and so is seldom disappointed or caught unawares by swindles or tricks or illicit angles); has worked hard to really get to know Marsember, and is considered a very shrewd officer as a result; respected (and trusted) but not liked by those who work under and over him; his secret vice is crossdressing, and he has eagerly taken several successful assignments in feminine disguise over the years; his hobby is watching (and betting

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on) mud-wrestling fights (between two nude or barely-clad females, sometimes blindfolded) put on in certain dockside taverns or cellar rooms in Marsember, but such gambling isn't against the rules and he never gambles more than he can afford to lose.

2. Kurlarra Stornsword (NG hf F3): fat, unlovely ("face like a barn door, if a cow had decided it was a barn door," as one colleague once unkindly but accurately put it), red-faced, large-limbed (big thighs and shoulders, large hands), stolid and very patient officer. Not bright, but very methodical, forgets nothing, and keeps copious and careful written records, often catching crooks or uncovering schemes by noticing discrepancies and following coin trails. Loved by those who work with her, because she's always patient, is never more impolite than rare flat refusals or moments of sarcasm, always does the right thing, and is quick to send reinforcements or sense when someone needs help and just silently "being there" without a lot of fanfare or pointing out shortcomings. Plods through life getting things done, but secretly dreams of being flirted with and taken dancing or out feasting by someone gallant, who will see past her homely looks and show her a little tenderness. Currently having a torrid secret affair with a crooked halfling fence of stolen goods (and is overlooking his business and "short" tax payments) because (behind barred as well as locked doors) he shows her tenderness, caressing her and giving her footrubs and backrubs.

Telsword:

1. Garlth Breakstag (LN hm F2): Balding, aging man with startlingly black busy eyebrows, who fancies himself dashing and gallant. Has a tiny sword-scar on his chin (which is usually blue with stubble), and strokes it often to draw attention to it as he smiles "winningly" at "the ladies and low lasses," cocking his head to one side to show his profile. Wears oversized codpieces, strikes poses, and likes to murmur about recalling this or that time he "regrettably" had to slay this or that monster. Despite this frankly ridiculous posing, Breakstag is a good, observant officer who never makes serious passes (though he won't remove his hands if a deceived lass lands in them, either), isn't embittered by rejection (to him, this is all entertainment; "just blowing a warhorn at the passing parade of life"), and keeps morale high among those who work with him in the Watch and the local citizens who regard him as free entertainment. He's amused at jokes played on him and jests at his expense, not angered, and more strangers trust him than almost any other Watch officer, and confide in him or surrender to him where they'd defy, lie to, or flee from, other members of the Watch. Breakstag is nearing retirement, and dreams of buying a small house in Suzail and setting up a brothel (he doesn't want to wallow in female flesh every night; instead, he wants to have a family of beautiful women around him whom he can cook and sew for, who will flirt with him, bring him their troubles, and parade around unclad in his presence). He expects to spend years "finding the right girls" and setting up his establishment - - and dare not breathe a word of his dream to anyone in the Watch.

2. Dornan Tarszil (NG hm F2): Tall, thin, awkward, loping; a blazingly fast runner when he needs to be, with a soft and almost feminine face, long brown hair, big blue eyes, and copious body hair everywhere. A nervous, second-guessing-himself Watch officer who says little because of his insecurity, but is turning into an effective lawkeeper because he checks things over several times (both his own work and corroborating the stories of witnesses and suspects). Restless, seldom able to keep still for long, tends to prop himself against handy walls or doorframes and lean on them, watching and listening (if working with other Watch members, likes them to do the talking while he "sees all"). Is seldom caught unawares because he's CONSTANTLY peering all around, looking behind himself, and wondering who might be approaching or overhearing (better check!). Notices EVERYTHING (this is the guy who spots half a footprint in mud half a block away, a tuft of hair or fabric caught on something high up or low down, and so on). Dreams of rising in rank and power, and being allowed to make laws and plan investments and the building of things in Marsember, so as to be "noticed" at Court and maybe one day being given a position at Court in

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Suzail, able to rub shoulders with nobles and important courtiers, and Do Important Things. He will NEVER break a rule or doing something imprudent, however, to try to further his dreams; rather, he tries to be the perfect Watch officer and just silently hopes recognition comes his way. (Even making what he sees as a minor error in judgement makes him feel ill.)

Blade:

1. Taera Hahlor (NG hf F1): plump, lush-figured, sleepy-eyed, and drawling, Hahlor ("HAL-lor") acts bored, cynical, and nonchalant - - but it's just that: an act, intended to lull citizens into thinking she doesn't notice much and cares even less. If there was chewing gum in the Realms, she'd chew it. As it is, she chews tobacco (unlit cigars if she can get them) constantly, leans against walls whenever possible, slouches, and strolls. Underneath, she misses nothing and cares deeply for her fellow Watch officers (she's the one most likely to notice an unfolding ambush or approaching trouble, and also the one who will spot when a fellow Watch officer is troubled, or overtired, or slightly tipsy, or in pain and trying to hide it. She is intensely loyal to the Watch, and will put that loyalty above upholding the law or keeping order or doing what's good for Marsember. She has in the past had numerous affairs with various Watch officers of both genders, and has the knack of remaining friends with ex-lovers and making peace between Watch officers who have disputes with each other; as a result, she is trusted and supported by all Watch officers familiar with her (which is why only high-ranking Purple Dragons newly arrived in Marsember would even think of finding fault with her sleepy-seeming, lazy-looking ways; everyone else knows better). Hahlor is the person who knows what a Watch officer needs, and quietly arrives at their elbow to provide it; she's the comforter of the grieving, the friend to those nauseated by their first wound or wounding, or seeing their first messy corpse. It's what she lives for. She's clumsy with her sword and not as swift or agile as she once was; with a polearm of any sort she's a trip-friends disaster.

2. Dorskar Haundur (NG hm F1): Dorskar is the stereotypical tall, strong, silent, big nose-bigger moustache grim-faced, stony-gray-eyes Watch officer; the "sentinel of stone who won't break, and has a grip like unyielding iron." Slow-witted but knows it, and is patient, trusts his fellow Watch officers and is happy to obey them diligently; doesn't feel cold or wet, and is endless patient. Citizens who struggle and hit him, he'll shrug and ignore, just holding onto them until told to treat them differently. Dorskar is NOT stupid, he's just slow in his thinking, and prefers to let those (whome he trusts) who think more quickly, tell him what to do. "Others give orders; me, I do things."

3. Saramistra Dunwynd (LN hf F1): Small, dark, pert, impish, and stunningly beautiful, with huge emerald green eyes, raven-black hair, exquisite curves, and a small, yielding "kiss me" mouth, Saramistra is probably the prettiest Watch officer AND Purple Dragon in all Cormyr, rolled into one. She knows it, and has been dealing with her looks since childhood; she's been raped several times (and dealt with it, reaching a state of calm "it happened, but was no fault of mine, and I have come to understand and forgive" inner acceptance), become a consummate actress (so she can speak and walk like a man or a macho male halfling when she wants to, or act like a helpless fluttering female or a lost-in-lust young noble or high-coin lass, and so on), and is ALWAYS acutely aware of the effect she's having on people around her (she's watching their faces, speech, and actions constantly, as much as possible without seeming to). If she thinks her looks will distract on a given patrol, she's been known to don a padded breastplate that makes her look fat rather than having a bosom, and cover most of her face with a wrap of bandages. She has also undertaken Watch missions "undercover" (sometimes "undercovers") in various disguises, and regards such escapades as her chief calling and entertainment. She secretly dreams of impressing a high-ranking courtier with her work (and perhaps her looks, but she'd prefer that it be her work), and being "discovered" as an asset to the Dragon Throne, to serve the Court in Suzail as a courtesan escorting and hosting visiting dignitaries or nobles coming to Court

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- - perhaps as a Highknight (in other words, she doesn't see such a "high life" as an end in itself, but as a way of gathering information for Cormyr, and serving the Realm as a spy and diplomat of sorts, and so becoming important and valued and "in the know").

4. Harsakh Jorlarn (LN hm F1): Blessed with a forgettable face whose expressions he controls with an iron-hard grip, Jorlarn has a "thin-line-of-whisker" moustache, thin reddish-brown hair, hazel eyes, and a calm, dignified ("English butler out of the movies") manner - - no matter what he might be feeling inwardly, or how out of breath he might be from chasing someone for blocks and then tackling them. He is careful to be correct and proper in his conduct, always follows rules, and is judged "distant but reliable" by his Watch colleagues. A poor swordsman of average build, with a distaste for threatening anyone or rough-housing, Jorlarn would probably be happier as a courtier, but has clawed his way up this far from dire orphaned poverty in the dregs of Marsember, and isn't going to let anyone or anything stand in the way of his keeping his position in the Watch (or perhaps rising higher in the Watch or among the Dragons). Where Taera Hahlor might well do murder to protect her fellow Watch officers, Harsakh Jorlarn would calmly do murder to protect his own standing (e.g. disposing of a witness to a bad mistake on his part). To him, Cormyr is worth fighting and dying for because it is a land where someone like him can achieve what he has achieved by Doing The Right Thing, and rising on merit; anything that threatens this, also threatens all that is right and worthy in Cormyr - - so he will deal with that threat so as to defend Cormyr, by extension the only beacon of hope in the Realms that life affords better things for the lowly.

5. Bronnar Elnauth (LN hm F1): A scarred, weatherbeaten-looking veteran who says little, hides behind a grim manner, and Does What Has To Be Done. He knows Marsember back to front, top to bottom, and inside out, and has been walking its shady ways for nigh half a century. He is deeply tired of Watch duty, but knows what's necessary in any situation almost instinctively - - and when most crimes are discovered, knows who's most likely to be responsible. As a result, he's very seldom caught unprepared (nor "flat-footed"), and is very effective in street brawls, preventing escapes, or pouncing on fugitives who think they've managed to slip away. He's fallen hopelessly in love with Taera Hahlor and in lust with Saramistra Dunwynd, and will put their safety ahead of his own, and supporting them ahead of the Watch, without hesitation. Of the two, he aches for Saramistra but feels somewhat ashamed at himself for doing so, and wants to retire and live with Taera but doesn't for the life of him know how to tell her his feelings (which he correctly thinks she senses but doesn't know what to do about, and has thus far avoided thinking about). He drinks heavily (when off-duty), but is one of those rare people who doesn't seem affected by drink at all (never "drunk," his judgement and coordination remain unaffected, and so on). He has quietly been investing in buildings all over Marsember for years, and his wealth (and influence as a landlord) would utterly astonish his Watch superiors and colleagues if they ever learned of it.

6. Norskel Saerntavor (LN hm F1): Young, "green," and very dedicated, and therefore constantly alert and careful to be attentive to his orders, the law, and his social duty as a Dragon and as a member of the Watch. Leaps to obey, is anxious to please his superiors, and tries to keep his mouth shut except to confirm commands sent to him, and to keep his face as expressionless as possible when on duty (he usually fails; almost always having an anxious look). Norskel is tall, broad-shouldered, and black-haired, with blue eyes, a rather chinless face that he tries to make up for by wearing "daggerpoint" sideburns that thrust forward along his jaw, and large, firmly-gripping hands. His voice is low and authoritative, but usually respectful. His secret vices are sweet confections and small, cuddly pets; he collects litters of kittens and lives with them until they become larger cats, whereupon he takes them to Jester's Green (or farther afield) and releases them to hunt in the wild, and starts looking for more kittens. Norskel wants to be a good officer, but will always prefer to follow the orders of a strong leader. He's longing to take to wife a capable, commanding woman who holds a superior rank in the Watch or Dragons, and settle

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down to be happy obeying her. He hasn't found anyone suitable yet, and isn't pining or desperate to do so; he simply has come to realize what he wants, and is starting to look for it.

So saith Ed.

Who'll send details of the tax collectors (a smaller handful of characters, I'm told) tomorrow.

love to all,
THO

A pleasure, Rinonalyrna Fathomlin! But Ed's not done yet!

(But wait! There's more!)

This time, I present the second half of Ed's swift reply to Blueblade's request for Realmslore: "I'm looking for some local tax collectors and police/Watch for Marsember; names and ranks of a handful of guys and gals who'd operate at street level, actually going into shops to say, "Hey, you haven't paid, so pay up.""

Ed replies:

Tax Bailiffs: In Marsember, these "trusties" (known as "graspers" or "the squeeze" by the general populace) only operate in public with a full Watch patrol as escort. The underbailiffs do collections and seizures, in streets and shops, the Watch arresting anyone who offers them violence. The Bailiff of the Rolls remains in his office, inside one of the wall-towers (working with various Crown clerks and scribes); the underbailiffs report back to him.

Bailiff of the Rolls: Orgarl Hardiman (LG hm F3/Exp3): Gruff, sarcastic, and cynical, fat old Hardiman is well-known in Marsember, and grudgingly respected for how he does his job about as much as he's disliked for what he does. He will always give the desperate another tenday to pay, and will patiently listen to their gripes and pleadings, stand them drinks, and suggest ways to pay or cut their costs by dealing with cheaper moneylenders or business partners. Orgarl never forgets a face or an amount owing, and spends much of his day sitting behind a heaped-with-papers desk (he knows EXACTLY where every last document is, in the heaps and elsewhere in his office), keeping meticulous records up to date. He's fussy, balding, large-headed, and shuffling, with bristling gray-white eyebrows, penetrating green eyes, a beaky nose, and triple chins. He's a devastating mimic when he wants to be, tends to speak sharply and caustically to those who disagree with him, and seems fearless, simply staring at anyone who threatens him. He is scrupulously honest (something no previous Bailiff of the Rolls in Marsember was thought to be), and welcomes War Wizard peerings into his mind, so they'll know that and trust in him.

Orgarl lives alone, sometimes visits a select few festhalls to pay the youngest-looking lasses to sit in his lap, kiss him, cuddle or embrace him, or stroke his hair (both of them fully clothed), and never anything more (it's not sex he's looking for, it's feeling wanted; he gets overly lonely). Yet he tends to be suspicious of women who want to befriend him (as he's been betrayed in love before, long ago but more than once). He's happy doing his job, and would be happy doing it until he died - - but also wouldn't mind being promoted to a Court position in Suzail, where he could "clean up and diligently tend" to more records.

Underbailiff: Geldrar Tronstur (LN hm F2/Exp1): Old, tall, weatherbeaten, and sharp-voiced, Geldrar is a veteran of much swordswinging action in the Dragons. Never a good weapon-

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wielder, he became sickened by the life of a warrior, and crippled by the cumulative pain of many old, ill-healed wounds. Now he limps grimly through life, "reduced" to being a bailiff but determined to do the job correctly and well. He's a "by the book," attentive man, who anticipates trouble and is usually ready for it. His well-muscled body is covered with white scars (although his face was spared), and he knows how to be very correct and discreet, giving him a certain attraction among the older widows of Marsember.

Geldrar has no ambitions, and intends to eventually retire to a small cottage in some small upcountry place and live out his last days pursuing his long-held dream: becoming a writer of "hot-bottom" (soft porn) romance chapbooks, the sort written for women and purportedly by women (so not under his own name, of course, though he doesn't intend to keep what he does secret, just enjoy shocking any fans who seek him out).

Underbailiff: Hornar Shieldson (LE hm F2): Sometimes called "Fangs" or "Master Softthreats" by his fellows, Hornar is the only truly evil "squeeze" in Marsember. Blond and burly, with long sideburns and reddish-brown eyes, he has been at his job for almost a score of years (he started very young) and is very good at it, always alert and usually able to sense falsehoods. He enjoys being menacing, threatening those who offer defiance or claim inability to pay, and doesn't mind beating the stuffing out of someone who takes a swing at him first. Inflicting pain and breaking bones gives him pleasure, but he does think laws should be strictly followed, and goes after the corrupt with zeal (his alignment does NOT mean he'll ever cheat the Crown or break rules, only that he'll not be kindly or forgiving whenever he isn't ordered to, and will take every opportunity to inflict pain and scare people [not just to win their obedience, but to see and smell their fear]).

As a result, he gets ordered to the fore in dealing with the nastiest non-payers, and so regards himself as the "best" in Marsember at collecting monies owed the Crown. He sees nothing wrong in earning a reputation for cruelty, believing it's "right" to do so, and saves much time and trouble by cowing the populace into obedience.

Hornar likes inflicting pain in his personal life, too. Never married, he frequents festhalls where he can bind and flog lasses, or force himself on them. However, he's not interested in maiming them or making them fear him; what excites him is their willingness to submit and "play along" with his behaviour (offering him whips or bindings to use on them, for example). Hornar likes being alone ("making his own way in life," as he puts it) and likes his job, but believes he should and will eventually be promoted to replace a retiring Orgarl Hardiman, because his "effectiveness" makes such a result "only right."

Underbailiff: Jarsorr Windsummer (NG hm F1): Young, handsome, blond and brown-eyed, this swift-tempered young Arabellan has often been described as "dashing." He can run blindingly fast, spends most evenings "wenching" his way around the taverns and clubs (successfully, and has the knack of keeping as friends most of the maids he beds), and is glib-tongued and persuasive. He seems to have a knack for "smelling" falsehoods and deceits, and is careful to conduct himself properly when in uniform.

By night, "Jarr" adopts open-fronted tunics, colourful sashes, and "drop-front" leather breeches with swashbuckling fashion-designed seaboots and a gleaming-hilted sword (that hilt is of intricately-fashioned silver; a rapier with a hand-basket of curling, sweeping wire) that he's only drawn thrice, in all his life. He'd not dream of being seen around the taverns in his duty uniform. He can be very charming and gallant, and truly enjoys the company of women of all ages and appearances, not just those willing to yield their charms to him - - which in turn makes him "good company" in the eyes of most tavernmasters and serving-wenches (the latter accept his occasional slaps and caresses cheerfully, as he never pinches and will accept "no" for an answer;

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and will even defend them against drunkards who won't, without thought of claiming a "reward" for doing so). Windsummer is restless, but not necessarily ambitious; he's searching for some direction in his life, but hasn't yet found it, and isn't prepared to do anything drastic in his seeking; he's just drifting along being a good underbailiff and not worrying how many years he spends doing so.

Underbailiff: Mulkyn Ansrarl (LN hm F1): A huge, burly, monster-shouldered man who looks more like a tall woodstove than a human, Mulkyn has a huge, toad-like head, warts, a low and gravelly voice, and a great tolerance for pain. His hands are larger than most human heads, and he is very strong; he has been known to tear hasps with locks and chains still attached, right out of stout wooden doors. He is calm, obedient to orders, and very calm and slow to lose his temper. Mulkyn obeys his orders, but is neither stupid nor slow to act, and can't be tricked into letting a miscreant past by clever talk pointing out gaps in the logic of his orders, or seeking to distract him; he will take hold of the miscreant and simply not let go. He always goes armed, with a visible belt-dagger, but another up his sleeve, and a slender mace down one of his boots. He is utterly fearless; threatening him with a spell-blast or undead attack won't sway him from obeying orders. He can duck, dart, and sprint much more swiftly than his looks lead most people to think. In short, he's the perfect underbailiff.

He's content in his job, never thinks of what the future might hold, and isn't ambitious. He has a secret weakness for sweets and buying and playing with small toys (miniature warriors, model ships, and the like), and lives alone in a very modest attic apartment. He seems utterly uninterested in sex, and deals with everyone not in the Dragons or the Watch as equals, not caring what their age, gender, or race is.

So saith Ed.

Who's now neck-deep in taxes, and doing much weary sighing.

love to all,
THO

On April 20, 2007 THO said: Uzzy,

I've known about this only since the official announcement, but Ed has known about it a LITTLE longer. He can't, however, speak freely about it, except to say that it has NOTHING to do with declining sales of the physical versions of the magazines. It was a Wizards decision not to renew the license, not a Paizo decision. So it's NOT because D&D is less popular.

I realize that I'm tossing a half-hearted tidbit, when all gamers deserve to know much more. Ed can't say more, so let me just offer my lament: I've been reading DRAGON regularly since the early 40s (in issues), and read Ed's copies back through The Strategic Review, and by Mystra, Wee Jas and Takhisis, I'll miss it. Electronic goodies are no substitute at all for a print magazine you can hold in your hands every month - - and you can't leave a webpage lying around at bustops and airports and public libraries for complete newbies to find and gasp at and join the hobby.

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So, we'll all just have to wait and see. Give Paizo a chance with Pathfinder, and give Wizards a chance with the website stuff. I wonder if Ed's lifetime subscription to DRAGON means he'll get free access to its website replacement? I'm betting not...

love,
THO

Dargoth, I don't know if we'll see the Teziir writeup in the last few issues of the physical DRAGON, and neither does Ed. It's a larger city (more map) than Crimmor, and would take even more space, so that would be a factor against printing it. On the other hand, the staff at Paizo has had it since July 2006 (the text, since early June, I think; it took Ed longer to do the maps and banners of businesses), so they may have commissioned illos and maps that they don't want to waste.

We'll just have to see.

love,
THO

On April 20, 2007 THO said: Great recommendations, Faraer.

I'd just like to echo three of Ed's earlier ones: THE FACE IN THE FROST by John Bellairs, TIGANA by Guy Gavriel Kay, and especially A SONG FOR ARBONNE (also by Kay). I asked Ed for some new recommendations, but he just groaned, pointed to the pile of over 400 books that have come from publishers in the last few days, trying to persuade him that their books are worthy of World Fantasy Awards, and shook his head. Then he turned the other way, and pointed at the pile of receipts and papers that are his taxes, and groaned again. Louder.

love to all,
THO

P.S. MerrikCale, if you don't like Ed's style when writing Realms books (and I hope you'll peek at SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE when it comes out, this fall, because Ed's style is shifting somewhat), you owe it to yourself to check out his DARK WARRIOR RISING from Tor Books (out this September) and his DARK LORD from Black Library/Solaris (Simon & Schuster distributes, in the USA), also due out in September; trot off to a public library if you don't want to spend coins on hardcovers you might not like. Ed's writing those in different styles, and they're GOOD.

On April 21, 2007 THO said: The World of Tiers were an inspiration to Roger, too; he once wrote that the Amber books were in part an exploration of another, more "fantasy" way to explore the same "different worlds power struggle" that PJF did in the World of Tiers books.

BTW, fans of Neil Gaiman should watch out for the movie version of his fantasy novel Stardust, due out this summer. A swords-n-airships romp, with Michelle Pfeiffer as the lead villainess (the witch Lamia; lots of spellhurling), Robert de Niro as an air-pirate captain, Peter O'Toole as the dying king, Ricky Gervais doing a comic turn as Ferdy the Fence, Clare Danes as the "fallen star" heroine, and so on. I've only seen an extended trailer thus far, but it looks like visual fun at the very least (there's a website, but I can't use a work computer to explore it, thanks to our multiple and very proactive firewalls). Ed saw the same trailer and said, "Popcorn-spiller for me!"

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Whenever I see those sorts of swordfights, I want to reach down one of my blades from the wall and join in!"

love,
THO

On April 20, 2007 THO said: Ed tells me the print version of the main Castlemourn book has finally reached MWP from the printers; MWP tells him it's "gorgeous," and he's eagerly awaiting his copies so he can confirm that for all scribes.

love,
THO

I know Ed's not certain about how often new Castlemourn products will be produced, but I know he was VERY pleased with the superb editing job Brian Gute did (seeking out inconsistencies and "gaps where more lore was needed"), and would love to work more with Brian. There are plans for a line of products, and Ed wrote a CM serial (fiction) for GAME TRADE magazine (four consecutive issues, concluded in Dec 2006). He might well do another one.

love,
THO

April 22, 2007: Hello again, all. This time, I present a brief answer from Ed to Faraer, re. this posted back in November: "I think I suggested this as a "Realmslore" topic, but if it's not on Ed's table-groaning list, and if it won't be covered much in Knights III, I'd love to know more about the Circle of Shadowdale, the Battledale Seven, druidic circles in general, Aubaerus the Ravenmaster... I think the druids have influenced much behind the scenes in the history of the Dales."

Ed replies:

The druids have indeed heavily influenced the unfolding history of the Dales, but almost always working as individuals, meeting one-on-one with individuals (the druids communicate among themselves, especially within the circles they belong to, as to what to do and how to do it, but their attempts to influence non-druids are almost always private "catch them alone" one-on-one meetings, because they believe - - quite rightly - - that establishing personal relationships is the most effective way to influence hardy, independent-minded Dalesfolk).

As as result, druids have been very effective in shaping Dale attitudes to living in harmony with the land, but have left almost no historical political traces for human sages to notice and write about.

Druids won't be covered much in Knights III, and a lot of relevant lore here is being saved for forthcoming projects, but I can say that with the elves returning in numbers to the former Cormanthan lands, the circles active in the Dragonreach have largely shifted north to Daggerdale and the Border Forest, or south to Deepingdale and Battledale, seeking to keep an expanding Sembia from felling and plowing forest at the rate they had begun to threaten to do. Such efforts

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are of course complicated by what's unfolding in Sembia right now (see Paul Kemp's current trilogy), and may well meet with limited success. Expect to see some druids retreat west into Cormyr, and start quietly set to work taming some of the non-sylvan-native evils that stealthily moved into Hullack Forest over the last century or so.

What evils? Ah, I see NDAs swinging shut, dark and menacing, all around me... I will say more on matters druidic when I can, but that "when" may be some time off, I'm afraid. Lots on my plate just now, what with two last minute editing scrambles, a full-length game book deadline looming, rush material for the Wizards website and DRAGON, taxes, outlines for three of the four novels I still have to write this year, and some long-promised short stories and novellas dancing in front of me demanding attention, too. Still, many writers would trade major organs to land the work I'm facing, so I can hardly complain. Er, more than this. :)

So saith Ed.

Who despite his mention of complaining, there, is one of the most PATIENT and long-suffering, truly professional writers I've ever met, in my years of toiling in the publishing trenches. His wife probably values all his dishwashing above that, though.

love to all,
THO

April 25, 2007: Hello, all. Ed apologies for falling briefly silent. Finishing his taxes coincided with a conflag about a future novel (someone else's) and last-minute editing questions on no less than THREE Realms-related projects, and SOMETHing had to give.

Taelohn, your temporal queries are extremely er, timely (no, I'm not trying to make a lame joke, I'm noting that Ed was dealing with just that matter yestereve, for reasons that can't yet be discussed. However, he'll be happy to answer your queries as soon as he's free to.

WalkerNinja, I'm afraid neither Ed nor I can answer your question about "the two Ds" ceasing print publication under the Paizo banner, right now. For one thing, we can't weigh its positives and negatives properly, yet. By now, one of the other secrets we knew has become public (the non-renewal of the Dragonlance license), but certain other things we're privy to, and watching for (which will be indicators of which way things are likely to turn out), haven't happened yet. Ed really doesn't think it's appropriate for him to say anything (other than to remind folks at Wizards that he's still officially a Creative Editor of DRAGON, after all these years, and he still has a "life subscription" to DRAGON and is still alive, though the life of the magazine might now be considered to be in question). Let me just say that Alaundo is right to have dark misgivings on these matters.

Jamallo Kreen, you're very welcome, and I'll reply to you on behalf of Ed, to this: "now tell us about who has killed which gods in your home campaign!" Answer: no one has killed a god (that we know about, at least). One party of PC adventurers (the Crazyed Venturers) fought Iyachtu Xvim, and some of us (PCs) have had personal dealings with Mystra and Azuth and Mielikki (in Florin's case, QUITE personal), but... no slayings. It's just not that sort of campaign.

Wenin, as far as I know, Candlekeep scribes have never yet asked a question on this thread and its annual predecessors that Ed and/or we players and/or TSR/WotC designers hasn't at least

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considered at some time beforehand. However, on at least a dozen occasions, questions have been asked for which Ed hadn't yet crafted any Realmslore, so he sat right down and wrote some, for replies here (no, we're not going to say which ones; that's part of bolstering the "illusion of shared reality"). And yes, I have it on good authority (his long-suffering wife, who gets to hear the snores) that Ed sleeps; sometimes for as long as five-and-a-bit hours a night. Garen Thal is right, though: he IS the hardest worker in fantasy writing and game designing I know, bar none. And yes, he believes there's no such thing as "too much detail." Individual gamers can (and should feel free to) ignore all the details they don't want, but if you're paying for Realms products and you want that detail, Ed feels there should be some way to give it to you, in a timely manner.

Speaking of which, Ed DOES have some Realmslore to impart, this time regarding this recent query from Kuje: "Ed, do any of the races know of, or use, circumcision? If you would, also answer if there are any races/nations/etc that operate on female genitalia.... I phrased that as gently as I could think of."

The Sage expressed his interest in hearing Ed's reply, and Eytan Bernstein then echoed: "I apologize in advance to the squeamish."

Believe it or not, I was searching for something like this earlier today. But when you type in circumcision and "the Realms" or "initiation rites" and the Realms (or any number of other permutations) in google, you get all sorts of strange results, none of which really shed any light on things. I was mainly interested in the sorts of initiation rites performed by different cultures. There's no reason to believe that such things are prevalent, but I would like to hear what Ed has to say.

On the same note, I have a faint recollection of reading about some sort of - how should I put it - sterilization ceremony in one of Elaine's Councilors and Kings novels. Is there any precedent for sterilization, eunuchs, castration, or similar processes, whether magical or surgical? See what kind of can we've opened up here?"

and Zandilar posted: "Heya, Heh... This is interesting stuff I have to say. I'd be interested in reading answers to these questions too."

However, I must say, in such a magic rich world I sincerely doubt that such procedures would be performed wholly surgically... Magic can achieve a lot of things, and it isn't beyond the realms of possibility that most small towns or even primitive tribes might have a cleric, adept, or shaman that can use 0 or 1st level divine spells. That means access to Cure Minor Wounds (useful for stopping bleeding), and Cure Light Wounds (for more substantial injuries, like during actual castration or sustained during an initiation rite) - if not an actual spell or minor magical ritual to circumcise, castrate, or even spay/neuter animals.

From a personal point of view, the circumcision of women is a horrific concept, and not just because I'm a woman. It's used for control. It kills most sexual sensations (by destroying the nerves in sensitive places), and thus is generally used (in combination with sewing them mostly closed) to ensure that women in those tribes/regions don't stray from their men. There is no other reason for it, it serves no other purpose (and it isn't uncommon for women to die as a direct or indirect result). The Realms being a much more gender equal place than Earth, I doubt female circumcision really has a place. (Though I can stand to be corrected, if there are exceptions or if I'm just plain wrong.)"

Dargoth then directed Eytan to Ed's earlier posts (archived by Kuje): "you should find some stuff on Princess Alusair of Cormyr which mentions magical sterilization"

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Ed now speaks:

Thanks, all. In the Realms, sterilization is usually accomplished magically (which has the benefit of usually being reversible, so you can let a young prince/princess or other heir/heirress "have fun" without causing unwanted bastards), or (in rural areas) by cutting out the male testes and then cauterizing the wound, sometimes as an clerical rite (either with magical or herbal pain-deadening, or not), and sometimes to create the equivalent of "eunuch harem guards" (BTW, these are as rare in the Realms as they were in real life, and as in real life, the penis is seldom removed except as a cruel punishment).

Certain priesthoods (Loviatar, for example) do use piercings, brandings, scarifications, and other ritual practices that embrace pain (salt put into wounds, for example), but aside from piercings, the female genitalia are left alone. A priestess of Loviatar wants to continue to have the ability to feel pain, not have sensation cut off forever (and her genitalia are likely to be whipped - - often with stinging nettles - - in rituals, or endure the wax of melting candles carried in a manner you can guess at, NOT be permanently scarred). There's no cultural basis in Faerûn for female circumcision.

The basis for all such behaviour in the Realms is religious or (more rarely) locally cultural, NOT racial.

Some priesthoods cut off foreskins or introduce beads under the skin all over the male member, or even pierce the member (to hold dangling talismans normally hidden except in holy inner temple rituals). These may be isolated sects, or only practiced in some temples, or among "secret societies" of zealots within a faith - - and in any event usually mark the achievement of a certain holy rank, or augmentations (yes, more talismans) as ranks increase.

Among the Netherese diaspora there were all sorts of "odd" beliefs (held or just suggested by the various archwizards) that have since become further twisted by time and misunderstandings, into purely local practices (often coming-of-age rituals, which can be as tame as vigils or forest chases, and as severe as ceremonial deflowerings, brandings, or circumcisions).

In short, there's nothing shameful or "disgusting" about tattoos, or brands (except obvious slave or "this person is a traitor" brands) or piercings (nipple, ear, labial, etc.) but they are more uncommon than common across Faerûn. Remember, in a polytheistic world, especially in locales (ports and capitals) where trade-travel is frequent, tolerance of "different ways" is high; the real-world small-town repression and disdain for "those who are different" is far rarer in the Realms. Having multiple races (not just humans with different skin colours) and "everybody knowing all the gods are real, not just one" will cause that, inevitably.

So, Eytan, if you need a priesthood (or a ruling noble family, or a secret society or cult) to have a circumcision ritual, feel free to add it. However, there has to be a reason why not every reader of Realms novels and game products doesn't already know about it. In other words, it's likely to be secretive (or at least done within a faith), and locally-based, not something that applies all across a country or continent. (I'm reminded of the old real-world joke about the village that only had one sharp knife, so the boys had to line up about half a year before they came of age...)

So saith Ed.

Who is trying to be helpful without being TOO explicit. He didn't tell you about the priestesses of Loviatar with the frontal triangle of chains joining their, er, prominent bits, or some of the other

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sights that certainly made Torm of the Knights open his eyes wide and make inevitable comments...

Ahem.

love to all,
THO

On April 25, 2007 THO said: We Knights visited the Unicorn Run (which Ed has described in various of the products already cited in this thread) twice. A breathtakingly beautiful forested stream valley. Ed DOES have the Stronghold of the Nine mapped as a dungeon, and delivered those amps to TSR back in 1986 (so they own them; whether or not they've gotten lost since is anyone's guess).

maelstrom58, would you like to post a question to Ed in his thread, to get specific lore answers from him?

love,
THO

On April 26, 2007 THO said: If you mean "adventuring" as in: drawing swords and fighting monsters, there's not much to tell.

On our visit, we found it a place of unearthly, tranquil beauty, with glowing, almost hovering unicorns trotting "on air" (hooves not quite touching the ground) amid the huge, moss-girt trees on both sides of the gently-flowing waters. When Florin mounted the bank to get closer, for a better look, dryads came out of all the trees around to challenge him, but then murmured a respectful greeting (seeming to "see" something none of us could, that marked him as Favored of Mielikki).

Torm, of course, scrambled up to get a better look at the dryads, and they promptly surrounded him, nude and lovely, and buried him in caresses that awed and then frightened him; he hurried back to join us with most of his garments torn off (to be greeted by much teasing by the rest of the Knights). Treants stalked us as we moved along the run, keeping "behind" the streamside trees; owlbears and stirges and forest predators shun the vicinity of the Run, and its sylan defenders gather against evil creatures, woodcutters, and creatures using fire; otherwise, it's more of a road into the wilder depths of the High Forest than it is an adventure site in itself. There ARE caves opening into it, bringing tiny springs to join the run, including the former Stronghold of the Nine - - and some of these are monster-haunted "dungeons."

Hope this helps,
love,
THO

On April 27, 2007 THO said: maelstrom58, what George just said is entirely correct. My character has never met Aumvor, and none of we Knights saw "hide nor hair of him" along the Run. However, both the Crazy Venturers and other Knights have encountered Aumvor, and he is indeed a coldly calm, patient foe who lies low until just the right moment.

If he can be "rattled" or enraged, my character has never seen nor heard secondhand of it.

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love,
THO

On April 26, 2007 THO said: Ed actually dealt with this matter years ago (the acquiring of lore and magic from tombs, not non-magical treasure). Have a look at the second and third Elminster novels, in particular the scene of El "planting" magic in tombs (in accordance with Mystra's commands) for later arcane spellcasters to find.

love,
THO

April 26, 2007: Hello again, all. This time I bring Ed's answer to Jamallo Kreen's query: "Ed, I'm running the Crusade against the Tuigan, and the reading of a book called Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton raises this question: how non-evil, non-chaotic armies supply themselves when travelling great distances in Faerun?"

Ed replies:

Buy food along the route, paying well. Take routes where mounts and beasts of burden can graze (remember, most land in the Realms is unfenced). Prepare beforehand by making or purchasing literally tons of rice and barley, flour, barrels of salt-cured meat or smoked meats packed in oil, sausage, handwheels of cheese, similarly-sized rolls of hardbread, and watery ale.

Everything from sausage onward in that list becomes "trail-gnaw" food for cold meals, eaten while walking. The moving army habitually sends out scouts, but also bands of woodcutters to get firewood, water-finders with buckets and wagons of casks, and archers (to find game).

At the heart of the army, surrounded by its armed warriors, are the wagons of provisions but also herds of purchased oxen, sheep, goats, and horses (some of whom can double as mounts or draft animals); some of these are butchered and roasted at every "more than a night" camp.

The marching army eats many stews of rice and barley flavored with gravies and "found" meat.

At every place they conquer, they seize food stores (and spices, and everyone's beasts, of the sorts listed above) as "spoils of war" (in the Realms, this practice is generally considered neither evil nor chaotic, even if the conquerors strip the larders so that surviving citizenry will face starvation in the winter ahead; rather, it's thought of as "just war," and the citizens had better start walking to lands where temples of the same faith are, who will feed them [and give them seeds, the TRUE treasure of most Faerûnian temples] in return for their labour, until they can return in spring to sew their lands again).

So saith Ed, the Clausewitz and Sun Tzu of the Realms.

love to all,
THO

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On April 26, 2007 THO said: BTW, all, Ed tells me he's VERY impressed with the work of divers scribes (many of them Candlekeep regulars) and editors regarding the Grand History book. Expect it to be SUPERB; Ed does.

love,
THO

April 27, 2007: Well met again, scribes of the Realms.

This time I bring you Ed's answer to AlorinDawn, re. this: "Recently my gnomish bard and his companions came upon a very ancient treasure hoard. The DM told us we found 25 8 inch tall carved wooden figures of elven heroes which my bard was able to deduce were from some period of the Crown Wars in near perfect shape. In addition we located a magically preserved scroll hoard which provided information on each figure and his/her place in elven history. We also found a small music box of intricate design from the same time period. Can you provide some idea of what value these items might bring if sold in Waterdeep?"

Thanks"

Ed replies:

As with all sales, prices depend on demand and scarcity. These items are PROBABLY unique, in "today's market," and therefore very scarce, and therefore valuable to someone who doesn't think of them merely as some whittled wooden toy figures. Any Waterdhavian shopkeeper seeking to buy them will of course pretend they aren't valuable, unless their eagerness to acquire is so strong as to overcome their (usually) well-honed acting skills. Sages and elves will place a higher value on them than non-sages and non-elves, so the most true answer is "whatever a particular buyer is willing to pay," and the most appropriate answer is a price range from almost nothing up to the highest price you could expect to get, which is to a very wealthy elf who would prefer not to steal or extort them (i.e. not Elaith).

And that "highest price" would probably be (and I am assuming these figures are non-magical and not in themselves items that entitle the owner to something else by virtue of possessing them; i.e. they are not title to ownership of a castle or lands or noble rank): either 16,000 gp per figurine if sold separately (that is, one figure and its scroll); or 9,000 gp per figurine without the scroll (the scrolls by themselves would only be 600 gp at most); or for the complete set of figures and scrolls, 700,000 gp. If there's no bidding war (in other words, private negotiations with a single buyer), that top price is going to be around 600,000 instead.

If these must be sold in a hurry, or not to the most eager buyer, the scrolls would fetch 400 gp at most, figurines without scrolls 900 gp, figurines with scrolls 1200 gp, and the complete set 22,000 gp.

So saith Ed.

A driving force behind inflation in at least two worlds. :}

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love to all,
THO

April 28, 2007: Hello, all. I bring you the words of Ed once more, re. Taelohn's post: "Ahoy, Ed & THO.

I was thinking about the recently-mentioned notion of Vecna extending his influence to Faerûn, as well as the Wizards Three, when this occurred to me... the "current" events in the Realms and in other settings (like Greyhawk) aren't always happening at the same time, are they?

Some time ago, I read an article called "A Temporal Chronology of the Primes" (<http://www.geonomicon.com/chronology/chronology.htm>) which used Ravenloft as a means of determining how the timelines of Greyhawk, Dragonlance, the Forgotten Realms, and Dark Sun would compare to one another (by matching up the date a given character entered Ravenloft using the Barovian calendar, with the date given for that same event using the character's home setting's calendar).

Using that timeline, some events that "occurred" at roughly the same time in the real world (like the War of the Lance and the Time of Troubles) end up occurring almost coterminously in-game as well... however, some settings have advanced more quickly than others since then (like Dragonlance "skipping ahead" a generation when they introduced the children of the Heroes of the Lance).

Using that timeline, Vecna's ascension (from a demigod to a true deity) wouldn't happen until sometime after 1396 DR. Even the defeat of the Circle of Eight at Vecna's hands wouldn't occur until 1378 DR... yet (as I'm sure you recall from your vantage point in the armour) Elminster and Mordenkainen discussed that very event during the first meeting of the Wizards Three (DRAGON #188).

Did their meetings take place in the future (relative to the published Realms)? Is there some time travel involved when traveling between worlds (perhaps Mystra shunts visitors "from the future" to the "current time")? Or is that timeline wrong (perhaps due to time flowing oddly in Ravenloft)?

I'm sorry if this is nitpicking; I'm just curious as to how you'd make events from different settings "fit in" with one another. While Wizards of the Coast may not be too keen on cross-setting stuff anymore (with the decline of Planescape and Spelljammer, and the introduction of the new Realms cosmology), I always enjoyed the Wizards Three articles.

(It's too bad they never met Raistlin, though.)"

Ed replies:

Oh, they met Raistlin several times. And some Raistlin impostors, too. ;}

Nor are the Wizards Three finished emptying my larder and wine cellar just yet. However, that fascinating Temporal Chronology piece, though a great spur to the imagination of DMs who read it, happens to be wrong in its datings, because (yes) time DOES flow unreliably in Ravenloft (it doesn't even move at the same rate from place to place among the domains and mists, let alone being consistent when compared to other places).

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I'm sure some Ravenloft authorities may disagree, but to them I reply: I was privy to an in-house TSR design meeting, back when Ravenloft was being launched as a setting (expanded from the original Castle Ravenloft module), at which this very element or characteristic was discussed and agreed upon. So, no matter what different hands Ravenloft may have passed through since, and different viewpoints on this particular matter that may or may not have been expressed or published or accepted as Ravenloft canon, my Realms agreement means that the original relationship decided-upon between Ravenloft and the Realms remains unchanged until there's an "inside-the-Realms explanation" for any change published. (I.e. not a real-world "Designer X decided this, and it supercedes earlier published products" reason, but a "All across Toril, due to the work of God Y or Fluffy Bunny Z on the Weave or Manshoon's left nostril or the risen sands of Anauroch, Great Change A happened" justification (however flimsy).

I, too, enjoyed the Wizards Three very much. Even as, with the passing years and my expanding girth, that suit of armour got to be a tighter and tighter fit. :)

So saith Ed.

Esteemed lurker inside suits of armour for decades, now.

love to all,
THO

April 29, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. On the table of lore this time: Ed's response to createvmind's post: "Does Faerun have Nor-Eastern storms? Has the Shade tampered weather extremes created any unusual type of weather effects of this magnitude anywhere? And more importantly have the druids who reside in regions affected thus and learned it was created unnaturally used their powers to try and re-balance the areas they have sworn to protect? Do druids now have a certain enmity for beings capable of causing such widespread or long term damage to nature and are figuring how to address this?"

Ed replies:

Druids ALWAYS dislike anyone except other druids meddling with the weather (and they tend to get angry at any fellow druids doing so whom they regard as "reckless" or "out of control," too).

By no means all or even many druids have learned or decided that the meddling of Shade is affecting weather, and of those who have, very few have conferred with other druids in attempts to reach a common viewpoint or reaction. Yet.

On an individual basis, many druids are using spells to try to influence local weather (as they quite often do, usually in the smallest and most subtle ways possible, such as adjusting rainfall or sunlight in a tiny spot, by shunting cloud cover around in the sky).

Yes, the spells cast by the spellcasters of Shade have caused violent storms, but thus far most of them have been north and east of Sossal (over the high-uninhabited interior of the Endless Ice Sea) and over the open ocean, well west and a little south of Fireshear (where few creatures and even fewer ships are ever to be found). So no general alarm, resentment, or even realization of their activities (or rather, the consequences of those activities) has arisen yet. (Hmm; kinda like global warming, for all those years.)

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So saith Ed.

Weathermaster of the Realms.

love to all,
THO

April 30, 2007: Superb answers, Garen. I'll run them by Ed, but I doubt we'll see anything more than minor amplifications. As for indications in ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER, Zandilar: a few short lines were in there, pre-editing. Why they went away is a question only Wizards' editors can answer (or folk now gone from Wizards), but I'll see if I can't tease Ed into revealing more. Your batting lashes will help.

Ahem. Well met again, fellow scribes of the Realms! This time, being as we're deep in the bosom of Cormyr on this page of the thread, I bring you the words of Ed regarding this query, from Blueblade: "How do the nobles of the rebellious, oft-conquered cities of Arabel and Marsember generally regard the nobles of the rest of Cormyr, and vice versa? I'm not asking for individual friendships, hatreds, and love-matches here, just general attitude/status? Any distinctions drawn, at all? Thanks!"

Ed replies:

Though attitudes vary widely among the nobles (thanks to individual differences in character and in what said individuals were taught or absorbed of their parents' attitudes, while growing up), in general: nobles under the age of 48 or so draw no distinctions based on city of origin. For one thing, most noble families have a "Suzail house" plus their traditional country seat, AND any number of other holdings, any one or more of which they may move to, or scatter to if they don't get along well, together. In other words, to the younger nobles, individual likes and dislikes, plus ongoing family feuds or trading alliances, matter far more than "where a family comes from," particularly when the family seems to come from a large handful of places.

Among older nobles, however, houses based in Arabel are fiercely proud, and resentful of being dismissed as what we might call "backcountry bumpkins" by nobles of Suzail (whom they in turn regard as "soft, silly, lazy city folk"). Houses in Marsember are also fiercely proud, and regard their own lineages as every bit as old and worthy as "upstarts" from Suzail who have "no business sneering at us!"

Whereas nobles from the heart of Cormyr may deride nobles from Arabel or Marsember as "crooked, lawbreaking rebels who break every law that doesn't please them, but fiercely insist on their rights under all the rest of the laws," and themselves dislike Suzail and its ways if they're from the countryside and usually resident in it.

In truth, not even folk of Marsember really like its rotting damp, and not even folk of Arabel like being in Arabel in the howling frigid heart of a winter blizzard.

As the years pass, the differences are fading with each new generation. The personal hatreds, feuds, and intermarryings, of course, are not. :}

So saith Ed.

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Creator of Cormyr and most of its noble families.

love to all,
THO

May 1, 2007: Hi again, everybody. I see you've been having fun while I was gone.

However, I come on sacred duty bent, bringing Realmslore to patient scribes everywhere. This time Ed of the Greenwood tackles a query from Hawkfeather: "Hello again, Ed (and, of course, THO). I've been reading (again) the 2nd edition sourcebook "The City of Ravens Bluff". The book says that dwarves (along with elves and humans) created a "steel whose bite was poison to orcs"; it is called orcslayer. I'd like to know more about it. What does it look like? How exactly does it affect orckind (half-orcs, mountain orcs and gray orcs)? It seems that this metal is not magical in nature (just very virulent), so I'm assuming that its effects are very different from the bane ability that can be enspelled on magical weapons. Is skin contact sufficient to harm an orc or is necessary to have blood contact (making bludgeoning weapons useless)? And, please, could you give us some clues about the process of making it and some of the necessary materials?

Thanks in advance!"

Ed replies:

Orcslayer is an alloy very like steel in hardness, magnetic attraction, temper, and weight. It cannot be made "stainless," and always looks "smoky" rather than brightly reflective, no matter how long and keenly it's polished. It sounds like steel when ringing off objects, and holds an edge like steel. The making of orcslayer is known to VERY few individuals in the Realms, because once word of its existence started to spread, many orcs (organized and aided by their shamans, who hired human mercenaries, including wizards) set about hunting down and killing everyone who possessed any of this metal, and everyone who knew how to make it.

Orcslayer is made like most steel, except that it has two additional "secret" ingredients: the rare Faerûnian forest herb known as thaeril (a small, dark green ground-growing plant that looks very much like about a dozen other plants, and is used in cooking by crushing its leaves into cooking-water to impart a tangy, peppery bite to anything cooked in that water), and powdered pyrites ("fool's gold").

These must be added in the steel-making process in precisely the right amounts (proportions to the rest of the raw materials), at exactly the right times (a different moment in the process for each ingredient), and at exactly the right temperature (knowledge of these three things are the true "secrets" of orcslayer). Otherwise, the resulting metal will shiver into worthless dust when it is struck with a hammer to shape it into a blade (or struck with any other sort of metal, at any time after the ingredients have been added).

Orcslayer melts at a slightly lower temperature than true steel, and once it starts to melt around the edges (folk in Faerûn refer to this as "cooked"), it loses its deadly-to-orcs properties forever.

Orcslayer can be fatal when brought into contact with the bloodstreams of all goblinkind (orcs, hobgoblins, goblins, and so on, as well as half-orcs). So unless an orc target has an open wound

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into which an orcslayer tool or bludgeoning weapon is thrust, such an item will do only "normal" weapon damage. Effective orcslayer weapons must be edged or pointed, having cutting or thrusting blades.

The special damage wrought by orcslayer weapons is chemical (poisonous), not magical. It can be halted or nullified by magic designed to foil poisons, and by eating natural antidotes (the roots, and earth around the roots, of certain bitter-tasting field and moor weeds similar to real-world endive and dandelions: tartak, orsrimmur, and hathul).

The special damage (in addition to normal weapon damage) of orcslayer is as follows:

full contact with the bloodstream of a fullblooded orc:
Injury DC 25; initial damage: 4d4 hp; secondary damage: unconscious

glancing or momentary contact with the bloodstream of a fullblooded orc:
Injury DC 20; initial damage 3d4 hp; secondary damage 1d4 Dex

full contact with the bloodstream of another sort of goblin or a half-orc:
Injury DC 18; initial damage 2d4 hp; secondary damage 1d4 Dex

glancing or momentary contact with the bloodstream of another sort of goblin or a half-orc:
Injury DC 16; initial damage 1d6 hp; secondary damage 1 Dex

Antidote eatings (ingesting or tongue contact or bloodstream contact with any amount of a true antidote) allow an additional saving throw to immediately remove all secondary damage effects suffered. Eating a volume of antidote greater than the size of both the afflicted victim's fists, touched together, will within a round "wipe out" 2d4 hp of the initial damage suffered (this restoration can't impart "extra" hp; it can only bring back a victim to their hp total at the time they suffered the wound that gave them orcslayer damage).

As a result of the persistent and aggressive orc hunting, very few individuals who know how to make orcslayer are still alive, and almost no one will admit to having any orcslayer weapons or knowing anything at all about it, beyond the name. Most orcslayer weapons are carefully hidden away (there are no known spells that can specifically detect orcslayer metal).

So saith Ed.

The future looks rather grim for orcslayer traders, doesn't it?

Hmm. I'm sure Torm will smell an opportunity to (ahem) make a killing...

love to all,
THO

May 2, 2007: Well said, Garen. VERY well said.

Hi again, all.

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To createvmind and Hawkfeather, Ed says: You're very welcome.

To Garen Thal, he says: Stellar work as always. Beautifully done. Yes, I'll augment and amplify the moment I have time. Just got hit with two copyedits in succession, a light augmentation-rewrite, a need to provide two novel outlines, and the same let's-finish-Paizo-DRAGON-stuff-whirlwind you're familiar with, so "time" may be a week or so away. However, I am still doggedly answering Realmslore queries.

He is indeed, and accordingly: last July, atlas689 asked this: "Dear THO and Ed,

It is stated many times in the realms that alchemy is the only art that is yet not fully discovered, does Ed have any plans of having this art being finally discovered as it would change much in the Realms, also to what extent has the art been developed as from my understanding very little has been discovered, Sweet water and light laughter till next we meet!

-Atlas"

Ed replies:

Oh, I'd not say that alchemy is the only art not yet fully discovered in the Realms. Most of the arts are still developing (and thus, by definition, not fully discovered).

Alchemists (and charlatans who pretend to be alchemists) are everywhere in Faerûn, concocting medicines, dyes, inks, anti-rust treatments, lotions, love potions, make-your-specific-body-part-grow-or-stiffen ointments, perfumes, smell and stain removers, and so on.

Some of these work, some don't, some are dangerously poisonous, and all are incompletely understood (except for a few substances made and used for centuries by the elves, gnomes, halflings, and dwarves).

I don't have any plans for alchemy to overnight "get fully discovered," no.

I DO have plans for a slow but continuous advancement in what's known, to provide maximum play opportunities in both my home campaign and for DMs and players using the published Realms, yes.

Alchemy is going to "be around" for centuries to come, not as dominant and effective as modern real-world chemistry, and not (as it was in the medieval world) preoccupied with a search for the Philosopher's Stone or anything else that will turn substances to gold. Alchemy in the Realms is concerned with everything, from stuff you drink or rub on to make you slim or remove your warts, to stuff you eat to make sure you'll get pregnant (or won't get pregnant) tonight, to stuff you slap on manacles or jail-door locks to make them crumble to rust, to stuff you paint on manacles and jail-door locks to make them stay unaffected when some of that other stuff gets slapped on them.

There are ongoing searches for new poisons, and antidotes, and coins to be made by folk who have them (such as the festhall dancer in Calimport famous for performing nude with many deadly-poisonous scorpions and snakes that bite or sting her repeatedly, to her evident pleasure rather than pain, and doing her no harm - - and the sneak-thieves who, equipped with the same alchemical quaffs as the dancer, freely steal valuables from venomous-serpent and scorpion-guarded coffers).

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In short, alchemy is a "living," growing field that should offer many interesting play opportunities for interested DMs and players in the Realms. In fact, if THO isn't careful in the next little while, she - - but no, that would be telling...

So saith Ed.

That's all right, dear. As always, I vastly prefer the showing to the telling.

love to all,
THO

On May 2, 2007 THO said: Hi again. Just a quick note to pass on some jots'n'tittles from Ed: yes, Myrmeen was definitely pregnant at the end of ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER. Yes, she's older than you think. And yes, there are NDAs lurking here, particularly around Krystin. Sorry. However, Ed WILL answer you as best he can. The moment he has fifteen minutes at the keyboard to call his own (he just did an unexpected lore-rescue which he can't tell me anything about, with his LAST fifteen minutes, and now insists on eating supper).

Insatiable, these men...

love,
THO

May 3, 2007: Hello again, all. Back in November, createvmind posted: "Hello Ed, While I wait on troll reply I shall shift slightly north to the Lizard Marsh and poke about there seeking anything that the lizard men could possibly trade to humans, or better yet humans would want within the marsh and could trade peacefully for. From FRCS it seems there may have recently been a lizard man of some potential, would their gods dogma cause them to simply continue trying to prey on caravans or would they possibly be making strides in other non-violent relations.

My NPC has found a possible doompit within the (I assume, hilly plains), between Trollbark Forest and Lizard Marsh, seeks to establish a haven which may potentially grow, wants to stay obviously closer to the Marsh and set up relations with lizard folk from a position of strength but not seeking to dominate lizard -men. Wishes the marsh to be somewhat of a buffer while providing water- wells? several miles from Marsh he believes he can dig down and find good water. These are various relating to my story and any feedback is helpful to anything a adventurer would come across thats not on map anywhere in that area and all the way to the coast.

Thanks as always"

Ed now replies:

Humans in the area would crave lots of marsh plants for cooking and alchemical uses, plus eels and some of the savory clam-like swamp mollusks for their dining tables. And, yes, lizardfolk will trade (warily) with other races, if not threatened and if they can do such trading in ways that don't require leaving the vicinity of the marsh (they feel very vulnerable away from easy reach of the waters), and don't require a lot of speech and long bargaining. Lizard folk are NOT unthinkingly,

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unobservantly stupid; within their home area, they know the land and natural cycles very well, and tend to be cunning. Lizardfolk can set snares, flush out prey (working in well-organized hunting bands), are stealthy foragers, and often prepare "hideouts" in overgrown wilderness areas, to keep themselves hidden from the eyes of humans and others who may offer them harm. They are particularly learned in what swamp plants can be crushed and smeared on themselves and on undergrowth they must pass through, to entirely baffle anything trying to track or identify them by scent.

Finding fresh, clean drinkable water near a marsh isn't always easy. It has to do with groundwater flows, not necessarily with distance. However, if one doesn't mind drinking brownish, muck-tasting but perfectly healthy water, there are herbs that can be dropped into containers of water to "kill the squiggles" and make the water safe to drink, and also some forest plants that can be boiled, and the resulting "juice" added to marsh water to precipitate all the floating brown sediment out of the water AND alter its taste to something less strong. Other tisanes (teas) of rose petals and other floral petals can then be added to the water to make it quite pleasant to taste (selling "sweet" waters in villages along trade-routes is a widespread, sustaining industry across the Realms, because folk who know how to do it, who can freely gather the necessary plants, can do it with only pots, a fire, something to stir it with, and vessels to hold the result.

If your NPC treats the lizard folk well and fairly, showing their religious observances respect and avoiding making them overly suspicious of possible treachery (if the NPC has allies working with him/her, he/she should let the lizard folk see them approach; they will turn hostile if they think they are being surrounded, or one group are doing them ill while another distracts them), he/she should be able to develop a truce, then a working trading relationship, and eventually trust and closer alliances. He/she should avoid doing anything that might be viewed as trying to harm the marsh, cut it back, clear a way through it, or make it smaller, and should not act in a hostile manner if he/she finds the lizard folk watching him/her continuously or closely; it is their "way" to keep watch over neighbours. Just in case.

So saith Ed.

Who once roleplayed two tall, dignified, nigh-silent lizard folk all evening, and drove Torm nuts. Whenever he tried to sneak away or steal something, he'd find their snouts right in his way, as they watched him like hawks. Making the deep-throat rumbling that we were later told was lizard folk chuckling.

Yes, they silently watched when we made love. Chuckled then, too.

love to all,
THO

May 4, 2007: Hello again, fellow scribes!

A year and a few days ago, Dargoth posted: "I've got another question, this time with regard to the Floshin Elven family, with regard to their family tree (Most of my info gleaned from the Daggerford entry of the North).

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Elorfindar had a Sun Elf wife (Now deceased) who gave him 4 children: Elorshin (Male Cleric of Tyr), Shalendra (Female Cavalier), Filvendor (Male Wizard/Rogue/Fighter) and Darfin (Male Fighter/Wizard)

Out of the 4 children only Filvendor has had children (that we know of): Kelson Darkreader (with a Human Woman) and Filarion (with a Moon Elf female).

We also have Kira "Floshin" who is Elorfindar's great granddaughter. The North sourcebook doesn't say who her parents and grandparents are, though, only that she has Sun and Moon Elf blood in her.

Can you expand on the information given in The North, have any of Elorfindar's other sons and daughter had children? How old are the members of the family? (The North only provides an age for Kelson)

Thanks in advance

PS I ask because one of my players in my Daggerford/Waterdeep campaign wants to run a Moon Elf so I've decided to make him part of the Floshin family"

Ed replies:

The Floshins weren't my creation, so I had to do a lot of digging with other writers and editors, to try to answer you - - only to ultimately come up empty. (That's the reason for the long delay, and I'm sorry that it quite likely comes far too late for your campaign use. Unfortunately, you happened to pick something I had to confer with others about.) So as I came up with nothing, what follows IS my creation:

Sir Elorfindar Floshin (NG male gold elf F12/Wiz15) has had four wives and scores of lovers (most of them human, a few half-elven, and a handful of moon elven - - though none from among his household; he considers such behaviour unseemly and an inevitable cause of discord). He took lovers only after the death of his beloved Shalamrae, a CG gold elf Wiz12 who was "the love of his life" and died tragically in 1186 DR, struck to ashes in a lightning storm. Throughout all of his unions, Elorfindar has never had a lover while married.

After Shalamrae, he took three human wives, all from the human nobility of Waterdeep:

Moaril Lanngolyn (married 1206 DR, died 1236 DR; blown apart in a magical explosion involving an enchanted Lanngolyn family heirloom necklace): no children.

Khryskrarra Manthar (married 1242 DR, died 1277 DR in childbirth; a malformed female who was stillborn; Elorfindar paid a temple for her raising, but it failed): three children:

1. Rilkra Floshin (1244 DR - 1279 DR); female, adventuress, had her mother's ankle-length, flowing black hair, took as partners three females in succession (each was killed while adventuring); died childless, devoured by monsters whilst adventuring.

2. Orandel "the Bard of Daggerford" Floshin (1248 DR - 1299 DR); a handsome, wenching musician of impish humor, great good looks, and questionable morals; castrated and slain by an outraged husband who promptly fled the area, never to be seen again. Orandel had no children, though not for lack of trying.

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3. Alsandra Floshin (1250 DR - 1314 DR; devoured by wolves during a fierce winter blizzard); a plain, smart cabinet-maker and carver, who married locally and happily thrice, outliving two of her husbands, but had no children [she was probably barren]. Her husbands were all human: Andrar Tarhilt (honest, kindly carpenter; married Alsandra in 1287 DR, died 1289 DR when a wagon of lamp oil overturned atop him and caught fire); Boruldyn Rathgeld (a darkly handsome textiles trader and shopkeeper; married Alsandra 1299 DR and died in 1304 DR, lost at sea when the merchant caravel "Dar's Fortune" foundered in a storm); Maskarl Deldreir (witty but rather ugly alchemist; maker and seller of ointments, physics, and perfumes; married Alsandra in 1306 DR, left the Daggerford area for Amn after her death, and died in Athkatla of a fever in 1328 DR).

Tannatha Raventree (married 1296 DR, died 1329 DR, vaporized in a magical duel between two feuding human adventurer-mages who just happened to encounter each other and do battle in her garden; one wizard was also blasted to nothingness, and the other teleported away): two children:

1. Darnath "Florraven" (1297 DR - 1347 DR); male, a dashing, energetic trader in Amn, who died of a fever after having been weakened by three poisonings arranged by different rival traders. Darnath was a fierce competitor who made many foes and lived hard; he may well have unknown and unacknowledged descendants in cities up and down the Sword Coast. He married a wealthy young widow of Athkatla, Tanthla Lorridar, in 1341 DR; she died of a fever in 1355 DR. They had one daughter, Asmrrarra, born in 1342 DR, who was headstrong and had a wild temper, used Lorridar as her surname, fought fiercely with her mother and everyone else, and departed for "the Sea of Fallen Stars and true freedom" in 1354 DR, never to be seen again (her fate is unknown).

2. Esmaera Floshin (1306 DR - ?); a quiet, nature-loving wanderer and weaver who "caught a sudden fire of restlessness" and joined the Harpers, departing the Sword Coast lands with some traveling Harper agents, bound for parts unknown. Her fate is not known, but Elorfindar doubts she's still alive (she was briefly in Berdusk, was sent on a mission, and never returned; the mission is still unaccomplished).

Elorfindar has had some sixty lovers since Tannatha's death, most of them brief liaisons that didn't last two summers.

He is currently believed to have two lovers, who know of each other and are friends: Pelmarra Tulshoond, a buxom, motherly 46-year-old Calishite female human Exp6 weaver and embroiderer, who now lives with him but retains ownership of her own clothing-for-females business in Daggerford; and Cyrassla ("SIGH-rass-lah") Eluandrar, a 446-year old female moon elf Ranger9/Wiz4, a much-traveled, hard-bitten and acrobatic Harper agent who makes Elorfindar "feel young again, like the green leaves of spring, and wild to leap and chase and, yes, ride her hard - - whereas Pelmarra is my comforting daily companion, at my side and steadfast, a hostess and a lifemate."

So saith Ed.

Who went straight on to detail Elorfindar's four children and THEIR offspring, which for reasons of post length, now, and knowing I'll not receive any Realmslore from him tomorrow (he remains very busy, and sometimes "real life" steps in and hurls aside all of our plans), I've chopped to save until tomorrow.

Until then,
love to all,
THO

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May 5, 2007: Well met again, all.

AlorinDawn, I believe Ed has already answered that (wood wins over coal, but there's camel-dung-patties in desert regions, and some other fuels). I'll check (unless, of course, Kuje or The Sage or dearest Woolly beat me to it [bat lashes, shimmy, purr, bat lashes again]).

In the meantime, I present the second part of Ed's reply to Dargoth regarding the ages and relationships of the Floshin elven family of Daggerford. This time, Ed deals with the younger generations:

Elorfindar's four fullblood children, from his six-century-long union with Shalamrae, are all still alive and now reside in the Daggerford area. They are:

Darfin Longwalker Floshin (LG male gold elf F7/Wiz6): eldest child (heir) of Elorfindar and Shalamrae. A serious, quiet, "duty first" sort, Darfin was born in 876 DR, and has never had a wife nor children. In the adventuring days of his youth, he had several lovers (all gold elf females), but has lived alone for centuries. He is a wary guardian of his father's estate and the lands all around - - not just patrolling and military guardianship, but constant scrutiny of the cycles of living things, the health of the verdant land, and how folk of Daggerford and the farms around can best live in harmony with it (which has often brought him into minor conflict with humans over the size of their herds, burning brush to clear land, improper irrigation, and the like).

Elorshin Floshin (NG male gold elf Cleric of Tyr 6/Wiz7): second child of Elorfindar and Shalamrae, and from his earliest days "different" (a restless wanderer, more interested in the affairs of humans than of elves). Now dedicated wholly to Tyr and "seeing justice rule all things," Elorshin was born in 976 DR and spent much of his youth exploring human cities all over Faerûn. He took many lovers, most of them half-elves and humans (a handful of males during youthful experimentation, but all the others female), during this time, and may well have had offspring, but knows of none. He has the widest knowledge of Faerûn of anyone in the Daggerford area, and so is apt to be the most tolerant, far-seeing, and "fair" in his views of all local folk.

Shalendra "Dare-all" Floshin (LG female gold elf F7 Cavalier): third child of Elorfindar and Shalamrae, born in 1099 DR and from her earliest days fascinated by human nobility, chivalry, and the honor of elves; she took to adventuring, until she met and married (in 1199 DR) Maeriloumel Torandrar, a gold elf warrior much her elder, who'd retired from adventuring and dwelt in the High Forest verges north of Secomber.

They had a son, Alorei Torandrar (named for Maeriloumel's grandsire) in 1229 DR, but Maeriloumel was slain (transformed into a beast and then blasted apart and burned) while fighting evil human adventurer-mages near his home in the spring of 1244 DR.

Alorei, maddened by grief, set off into the High Forest determined to hunt down and destroy his father's killers. He soon ran into worse foes, and lost an arm. It and most of his gear was soon found by other elves, who brought them back to Shalendra. Grieving, she abandoned the Torandrar forest home and lost herself in the bustle of Waterdeep, and the strivings, splendors, and ambitions of humans for a century, ere returning to the Daggerford area.

In the meantime, the maimed Alorei met and was nursed back to health by Nynendra Mrauthae, a moon elf of a poor family dwelling in the forests of the Delimbiyr valley. They wed in 1265 DR and had two daughters, Kiratha in 1279 DR and Rilathra in 1282 DR.

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Alorel has never recovered from his father's slaying, and has become bitter and brooding, given to killing rages and to suddenly storming off on long quests to seek the humans who slew his father (so far as is known, he has never found them - - but he has made a lot of enemies and killed a lot of other human wizards, down the years). Alorel often beat his family and left them for dead, and Kiratha fled from him in the summer of 1349 DR. He promptly set about hunting her down, found her, and seemed on the verge of slaying her - - but her mother Nynendra, who'd stealthily followed him, confronted Alorel and fought him, allowing Kiratha to escape. Alorel defeated Nynendra, leaving her for dead, but had in turn been sorely wounded by her, and wandered off into the High Forest screaming that he would "Avenge Maeriloumel this time!" (He has not been seen since).

Unbeknownst to her family, Rilathra, the silent and darkly beautiful second daughter of Alorel and Nynendra, had stealthily followed her mother. She rescued the wounded Nynendra as soon as Alorel was out of sight, nursed her back to health, and the two of them then departed the Sword Coast lands, heading east for Hullack Forest in Cormyr, or beyond. Word of their fates and whereabouts has not come to Daggerford.

Kiratha, or "Kira" as she now prefers to be known, knew of her heritage from her parents. Heartbroken at what she believed was the death of her mother at the hands of her mad father, she wandered the Sword Coast lands for a time, falling in with human caravans as a guard (initially because the guards thereof were smitten with her looks and wanted her to share their beds) and exploring some of the human-dominated cities. There she found a new life, joining a few adventuring bands and assisting some human wizards before she tired of the dishonesty, violence, and grasping ambitions of most adventurers - - and came to Daggerford (as a LG female elf Wiz5) seeking her kin.

Filvendor (CG male gold elf F3/Rogue4/Wiz4): fourth child of Elorfindar and Shalamrae, born in 1129 DR and the most tolerant and easy-going of the four. For a time, he seemed bent on traveling even more widely than his elder brother Elorshin, but kept falling in love and interrupting his lackadaisical adventuring ways to settle down and raise a family.

His first bride (the "human woodsman's daughter" referred to in THE NORTH) was Ylasmrae Darktreader (1276 DR - 1320 DR); Filvendor married her in 1299 DR, much against Elorfindar's wishes. They had only one child, Kelson, and styled him with his mother's surname in a (futile) effort to please Elorfindar.

This is the Kelson Darktreader (NG half-elf male Ranger7); his age is now whatever it works out to be with the dating in your campaign, given that he is 73 years old at the time THE NORTH is set. He remains master of the hunt for the Duke of Daggerford (unless events dictate otherwise in your campaign), and is THE expert on local sylvan terrain and its flora and fauna details, increasingly consulted (and valued) by Darfin.

Elorfindar likes Kelson, and behaves warmly towards him, but doesn't know how to become closer to him - - and Kelson (not wanting to anger his father, and unable to properly 'read' Filvendor's thoughts and feelings in the matter) doesn't know how to become closer to Elorfindar. (For his part, Filvendor was deeply hurt by his father's treatment of both of his wives, yet wants to patch things up with his father - - but isn't sure if his father's warmth towards Kelson is an attempt to bond with his grandson and then withdraw from having anything to do with Filvendor.)

Ylasmrae Darktreader was crippled by a series of internal afflictions (seizures, wasting diseases, and constantly breaking bones, that kept recurring despite being "utterly banished" repeatedly by magical healings), and had become a pitiful shell, a still-beautiful near-skeleton wracked by

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constant physical suffering, almost a decade before she died. In her later years, she still craved lovemaking with Filvendor and wanted to share herself with him, yet screamed with pain whenever they made love, no matter how gentle and careful he was (and her obvious pain made him very reluctant to even embrace her) and took to gagging herself to try not to alarm the neighbours.

Filvendor spent most of the riches he'd amassed from his adventuring on trying to magically restore Ylasmrae to life and health, but repeated efforts failed. After a year, he turned his back on his wife's tomb and took up with a moon elf chambermaid of his father's household, the beautiful and spirited Elsarassa Cerinlar (who had wanted to become Elorfindar's lover, and had been hurt by his kind but firm rejections).

Filvendor and Elsarassa married in 1322 DR, when Elsarassa's pregnancy became obvious (very much to Elorfindar's displeasure). Their son, Filarion "Filvendorson" (so named by Filvendor to spite his father) was born in the last few days of that year.

Elsarassa Cerinlar (1126 DR - 1349 DR) was a passionate, lusty, energetic extrovert, fun-loving and pranksome in a kindly, whimsical way. She loved dancing and new clothes and flirting and playacting - - and Daggerford was altogether much of a sleepy backwater for her. Most of the human males in the vicinity were smitten with her; a few (and the majority of the human females) were disgusted with her airs and ways and openly public lovemaking with Filvendor. Few wept much when she was apparently torn apart and devoured by "monster trees" of some sort; many rumors swept Daggerford about this or that hired wizard (or even Elorfindar or someone working for him) luring her into the fatal trap, or augmenting or emboldening the monstrous flora.

Filvendor was heartbroken for the second time, and spurned Elorfindar's attempts to comfort and support him. He adopted his father's habits of taking many elven, half-elven, and human lovers, both locally and in Waterdeep, and withdrew behind a mask of politeness, spending much of his time physically in Daggerford but acting towards his kin almost as a polite stranger. This pose has thawed over the years, and Filvendor is now on polite terms with his siblings, but he and his father still refuse to look at each other directly, across a gulf of awkward silence. From time to time one of them tentatively reaches out, only to be met with such a warily polite response as to misinterpret it as coldly insincere.

As for Filvendor's second son, Filarion Filvendorson (CN male elf Rogue11): from his earliest days, Filarion was an energetic, restless, wandering (throughout the eastern Heartlands and the coastal lands all around the Sea of Fallen Stars), curious, sly trickster, charismatic and engaging but of pliable morals. He had a lazy career as a sometime adventurer, but recently "retired" from that (or so he says) to settle back in Daggerford. Many locals believe he's lying low to escape the notice of powerful foes, and living off huge amounts of purloined wealth. (Their suspicions are correct.)

Filarion has found peace in Daggerford from his restless wanderlust, if nothing else, though he and Kelson hate each other: Filarion regards Kelson as a sneak who, not even being a "proper elf," must have fed Elorfindar a steady pack of lies to poison Elorfindar's mind against Filvendor. In turn, Kelson regards Filarion as an evil swindler who has turned Filvendor against himself (Kelson) and Elorfindar, and is seeking to set the entire family at each other's throats, so actual bloodshed will erupt - - and he can glide in and seize any wealth belonging to the casualties. Neither of them is bothering to find out the truth about the other; they treat each other with cold, careful, silken-tongued politeness, and watch each other warily, suspecting the worst motives in anything the other does.

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So saith Ed.

My, what a happy family. And a good indication of the depth Ed builds in, when he gets his hand on characters that for lack of page space and plot importance in the Daggerford book of THE NORTH, were very briefly portrayed the first time around.

Another juicy little scrap of Realmslore to add to everyone's files.

love to all,
THO

On May 5, 2007 THO said: Well, I finally got my hands on a print copy of Ed's core CASTLEMOURN book. So, here we go...

It is visually gorgeous. The art is good to outstanding, the typeface readable, and the content playable.

Ed has done it again. The man just has this knack of creating worlds that come alive.

Just like the Realms, this setting feels alive and real. And it could be part of a continent on the far side of Toril or your own campaign world. Just sail thence, or step through a gate/portal/estemel, and you're there.

The cities feel real, the countries feel real, and I just itch to get adventuring in them. Oh, I wish it would be with Ed as a DM, though.

And for gamers who hate "too many gods," Ed shows that he can do a superb job with only a few. Nice.

Anyone else have this yet? Reactions?

love,
THO

May 6, 2007: Hi, all. Ed's offering of Realmslore this time is a response to Dargoth's recent post: "I was wondering if Ed or the lovely Hooded one might have any knowledge on the topic of this scrolls subject matter: http://forum.candlekeep.com/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=9299."

This thread is ongoing, of course, but when I toddled along to check it out and pass it on to Ed, I found this question from Dargoth: "I have 2 players one who is born into waterdeeps nobility and another who may marry into one of the families both have in the past mentioned that they might pursue a ritual that allows them to gain various amount of dragon blood or take PrCs that make the character physically more dragonlike.

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Now in Elaine Cunninghams novel Dreams spheres we find out that Waterdeeps nobility are quite racist when it comes to non humans marrying into their families (and in at least one instance theyve killed a non human whose married into the nobility)

We also know that several of Waterdeeps noble familys have non human blood in them

House Gost and Sultlue have Yuan ti blood

House Gralhund has tieflings

House Tesper and Thongolir have half steel dragons

So are Waterdeeps Nobles racist against all non human races marrying into the Nobility or just elves?"

Eric Boyd responded: "My guess is all other races, not just elves, but I'd have to check the wording in City of Splendors [2e] and The Dream Spheres.

For the houses you mention, the individuals other "parentage" are either hidden (although possibly well-known secrets) or open by not acknowledged a part of the family.

Note, if I had known about Dragon Magic when writing the book, I might have made a steel-variant of silverbrow humans for Houses Tesper and Thongolir."

To this unfolding matter, Ed replies:

In all matters regarding attitudes, Realms novelists and game designers speak in generalities. A particular attitude may be held by a guild, a ruling court, a clergy, the citizenry of a place, or the nobility of a place, to name just a few groups, but that doesn't mean each and every individual of that group thinks of a particular matter in precisely the same way, or even agrees with the general attitude at all. After all, no non-human could ever have married into the Waterdhavian nobility if there hadn't been a noble who wanted to marry them. Even members of the same family who agree that "no pointy-eared freak will ever be one of us!" might disagree completely as to what to do to prevent that, or how to respond to remedy it if it happened; killing an elf who married into the family might shock and sicken some family members, but give grim satisfaction to others.

What prevails in Waterdeep is an ancient prejudice on the part of the founding humans to not let elves (in particular), dwarves, gnomes, halflings, orcs, or any other race "take over here in the Deep, because this is OUR city; they have theirs, but we founded this one to be OURS." Few 'pureblood' (i.e. descended from the founders, not arrivals since) Waterdhavian humans alive today would agree with this prejudice, or even believe that it exists if it was pointed out to them, but it underlies the 'general' desire of the city's nobles to "keep non-humans out" (of their own ranks, not of residency in the city or friendships or trade dealings). The merchant and working classes do NOT hold this prejudice, and never have (beyond the racism of individuals, sometimes extended to become the public view of a guild when the guildmaster was such a racist). Moreover, most Waterdhavian nobles distinguish between having non-human lovers (mistresses, et al) and actual marriage, do accept half-elves even when they do not want to accept elves (and half-elfen family members when they didn't accept the elf parent as a family member), AND overlook and ignore non-human family members who don't reside in Waterdeep (and who, when visiting Waterdeep, stay in rented lodgings or family-owned modest city properties, rather than taking rooms in the family mansions - - please note that there's nothing wrong with them visiting

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and feasting at the family mansion). In other words, if you as a Waterdhavian human nobleman marry an elf and she stays in the family lands in Amn or a palatial family mansion in Athkatla, no one cares - - unless or until family deaths make it seem imminent or likely that she may wind up as head of the family. Then some violence or at least covert pressure might arise, for her to name someone else as heir and agree to continue living 'on the sidelines.'

In other words, "what happens outside our walls, stays outside our walls." The nobles aren't concerned with facts (except when inheritance is concerned), they're concerned with public perception: in Waterdeep, each noble family wants to be seen by other noble families (the opinions of others, of course, don't matter) as "pure." Some noble family members, of older generations in particular, tend to be quite intolerant, and others (particularly adventurers who traveled widely in Faerûn and saw "other places and other ways" in plenty) really don't care, and either go along with non-human prejudice so as to keep some accord within their family, or refuse to get involved in deeds and words that speak out against non-human family members (or would-be family members). Others who do hold this prejudice but don't want to besmirch their family name even more by any behaviour of their own, usually also refuse to get involved: they ignore, won't speak to, and avoid non-human family members, pretending they don't exist (even when seated face to face, they will deliberately deal through intermediaries, such as servants, as if speaking to translators).

Many Waterdhavian families have, or have had, non-human members in the past, or quietly do today. Many more do, but don't know it (because the "undercover" non-humans are doppelgangers or other shapechangers, who keep their identities secret; in some cases where a select few family members have learned such secrets, they have helped to keep the secrets rather than confronting and "outing" and creating trouble). Increasing numbers of individual Waterdhavian nobles, especially younger and more worldly (well-traveled) ones, tend not to feel strongly about non-humans marrying into the nobility (irritation or distaste would be their strongest reaction, not violence or hatred). Yet a sage or objective observer dwelling in the city would still believe "the nobles hate, and won't accept in their families, elves and dwarves and all the rest; no non-humans as lords and ladies of Waterdeep."

So saith Ed.

Creator of Waterdeep, who breathed life into it for years before gamers ever saw it.

love to all,
THO

May 7, 2007: Hi again, scribes. This time Ed responds to a query from last August, from Torkwaret: "Greetings Master Greenwood,

Since you already revealed so much about this mysterious persona which Ander was for many, many years, would you also be so kind as to answer my inevitable question - how would you describe Ander level wise, especially in comparison to such powers as Aumvor the Undying, Szass Tam or Khelben ??

Thanks"

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Faraer commented: "Ed doesn't think in terms of levels, just approximate 'she overmatches him or is on a par in terms of this'. NPCs only get levels if they're going to conflict with PCs, and those levels depend on PC levels and the needs of the campaign. This is why you can't argue Realms from game stats, because the game stats are both approximate and arbitrarily precise."

Torkwaret then responded: "Fine with me as well Faraer

Comparing him with Aumvor, Larloch, Khelben or Telamont would be, in fact, much better than assigning him any levels, especially if it's from Ed's point of view"

And GothicDan then posted: "Of course, Ed didn't create Aumvor or Telamont (Telamont being a remnant of the dire Netheril supplement, and later expanded in the equally-as-disappointing Return of the Archwizards Trilogy). And even "comparison"-wise, Ed seems to think that each NPC has strengths and weaknesses that can't be accurately reflected in the rules.... Larloch may be the most powerful in Necromancy and Gate magic, for instance, but perhaps not as powerful in another form...

Of course, we'll just have to wait and see what Ed says. :)"

Well, wait no longer. Heeeeeere's Ed:

Faraer is quite correct. It's hard for the game rules to accurately reflect everything that makes one wizard more formidable than another, but the LAST thing I want to do is add more rules to try (vainly) to fix that.

So let's try to compare Ander with Larloch, Szass Tam, and Khelben before the events of BLACKSTAFF (there are outstanding NDAs regarding Aumvor and Telamont, but they can be thought of, for the purposes of this discussion, as being a little less powerful than the three entities I am comparing to Ander). Despite the fact that other writers and designers are using the surviving characters of this "comparison trio" almost constantly, I (as their creator who never stops detailing them) can speak about them with authority.

Ander has more levels than Szass Tam and Khelben, but fewer than Larloch. Of the "comparison trio," in a one-on-one combat (no legions of allies for his foe) Ander could most easily defeat Szass Tam. He could "take" Khelben if Khelben were ever cut off from the aid of other Chosen and Mystra and Azuth and Mystra's other divine servants. Larloch would probably mop the floor with Ander, every time.

Ander has far less influence than any of the trio (not just due to his lack of public reputation, but he has almost no servitors, or neighbours who know enough of him to be scared into obedience by him). In short, he can persuade, order about, or control far fewer people than the other three. He is a low-profile loner, who prefers to keep to himself and pass unnoticed.

Ander has less combat experience than any of the trio, and - - unlike all of them - - no modern (and therefore valid) experience with intrigues and negotiations.

Ander commands more powerful spells than all of the others except Larloch, and is no fool: he is a shrewd judge of others, and very alert (he will notice stealthy readying of weapons, magic items, and spells, shifts in position of groups of foes to give them all "clear fields of fire" against him, and so on). His relative lack of combat experience means he knows less about the unintended effects of hostile spells "running into each other" and unusual uses of spells in fighting

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situations; it does NOT mean he doesn't know the nature and precise properties of his spells as thoroughly as it's possible for a mortal to do, who can't naturally "see" the Weave and practice working with its naked energies.

Although the Shadow Weave is new to him, his thinking (which is VERY fast) and habitual acute observation of all magic at work around him has already enabled him to understand how to respond to the Shadow Weave used against him.

A DM running Ander should use him as a vehicle for importing spells from non-WotC products, "tinkered-with" homebrew spells, and magical constructions that specialize in two things: deflecting spells cast at Ander onto another target (not necessarily back at the source), and invisibly carrying up to seven already-cast, "hanging" spells Ander has prepared, that he can unleash (up to four per round, although doing so is a full-round action, denying him normal spellcasting; if he casts a spell AND unleashes a "hanging" spell, that's a full-round multiple attack on his part).

Ander is not a trickster, and is not aggressive; combat is something he resorts to reluctantly, not something he automatically initiates against any creature he doesn't like the look or behaviour of.

Translocation magics are his specialty; he wears several self-crafted magic items that combine the magical effects of blink and mirror image, that he can cast spells (and unleash hanging spells) without penalty while using, because he's so practiced in such fighting. He also makes much use of projected images (of himself), especially when meeting beings he's suspicious of (in other words, those who try to clobber him may well be clobbering nothing, and merely warning him of their true intentions).

So saith Ed, creator of Ander, Khelben, Szass Tam, Larloch, and a long, long list of other spellhurling folks. Who is so tired beyond tired of "who would win a duel?" questions (and don't worry, Torkwaret; Ed doesn't consider this query of yours to be one of those), but despite that has a hand in a little surprise coming up for DL and FR gamers who like innocent fun.

love to all,
THO

On May 7, 2007 THO said: Off your query goes to Ed, Adrix. In the meantime, consider this a highly unofficial answer, from my memories of Realmsplay sessions with Ed as DM: pressed date and fig cakes, dried sausages (akin to those "hot pepperoni" dessicated sausage things sold in convenience stores in the real world of today), quince-and-crushed-insects sticks (in the Vilhon, Shaar, Var, and Estagund), "handwheels" (palm-sized torii [or "toruses," if you prefer] of sealed-in-wax cheeses (of various flavours, some of them with crushed olives rolled into the cheese as it's made)).

Those are some of the trail snacks. As for "bought from shop windows" hot snacks in cities, Ed has covered those here: all manner of savoury tarts and pies, plus those handwheels of cheese, some of them laced with zzar or various other sherries or brandies. We ate some in Calimport once that contained rats in spiced gravy; very nice until we discovered what they were.

love,
THO

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May 9, 2007: Hello again, all. Back in April of 2006, scribe "boards" posted this for Ed's response: "To the master of the Greenwood.

First let me say that I am supremely grateful that you reply (and what replies they are) but I would like to add another to your evergrowing list of questions.

First, about elves, they're generally described as being more slender than humans. Do you see this as being because they have narrower bones and ribcages than humans but have a decent amount of muscle. Or is their skeleton the same size as ours but with less flesh i.e. like a fashion model.

And second, seeing as you spoke about Artemis in your last post, are there any good aligned god/goddesses of hunting that a human can worship. Milieki and Silvanus both seem more about preservation of nature, and Malar is evil so they dont seem like someone that a pioneer out trying to catch a deer for his family to eat would be praying to.

Thanks for your time."

Ed replies:

Hey, I like "talking Realms" with so many scribes who love the world I created. I love detailing it in response to questions, too, so keep them coming. The one problem is how overworked I am, and therefore how long I take to get around to replying (hence your slightly-over-a-year wait, for which I'm sorry - - but there's only one of me, and I just can't squeeze any more hours out of my days!)

Regarding your first question:

In general, elves have lighter, smaller-in-cross-section, more flexible and resilient bones than humans, with, yes, smaller ribcages. Their musculature varies as much as it does within humans (i.e. there are "body builder" types and there are "wasted waifs"), but elves very rarely have as much body fat as humans, so what muscles they do have are far more 'on display' (rippling, etc.). I repeat: I am speaking in generalities here, and individuals may vary. However, it's wrong to think of elves as emaciated; most look "long-limbed and thin," but have curves (as in, "flesh on their bones") rather than looking like something out of a real-world concentration camp. To human eyes, they look beautiful or handsome, not ill or "at death's door."

As for your second question:

There's nothing to stop a human from worshipping a hunting deity of another race (elves, for instance), although it would be unusual unless their upbringing included frequent ongoing contact with other worshippers of the non-human deity in question (and the reverse is of course also true; non-humans venerating a human deity. "Gods-fearing" individuals often pray to everyone relevant to something they're trying to do, just to cover all eventualities and gain themselves the most divine favour possible.)

As far as human deities go, Mielikki is the primary one a subsistence hunter would look to, praying to her for success in the hunt, and protection from more fearsome beasts of the forest. In return, he would take only what was needful, and slay no forest creature needlessly or in a

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wantonly cruel fashion. (And he WOULD also pray to Malar, so that forest predator-beasts "on the hunt" would hopefully choose something else as prey, not him.)

It is important to keep the mindset of folk of Faerûn in mind when thinking about their attitudes towards deities: everyone in the Realms, except the insane, "believes in" ALL the gods, and considers them all powerful divine creatures. Only fanatics and dedicated clergy choose a single deity to worship; the vast majority of individuals worship in two ways: for and against. "For" success, and causes they believe in, and divine favour - - and "against" the wrath of gods (to appease them). For instance, a sailor might well pray to successful voyaging (Valkur) and navigation (Shaundakul), and against storms (Talos) and the fury of the sea (Umberlee). So there's nothing at all unusual about your hunter wanting to feed his family to pray to both Mielikki and Malar (appeasement), and perhaps also Silvanus (appeasement) or Eldath (appeasement) or Lurue (appeasement) or Nobanion (appeasement) or even a local beast cult, if there is one.

So saith Ed.

Who of course is the REAL "God" of the Realms, or at least its Creator. As a certain player (who shall remain nameless; no, it wasn't me) once sarcastically asked, watching Ed projectile vomit after far too many drinks one night in his youth: "So, how's the mighty tummy of the mightier creator of the vast and not-so-forgotten realms this evening?"

love to all,
THO

May 12, 2007: Hello again, scribes. Sorry for the short silence; it may fall again for a few days, as Ed scrambles (around family commitments) to get back on schedule. Rest assured that his silences mean more lovely Realmslore for us all will appear eventually.

To AlorinDawn: I quite agree. Ed IS simply amazing. He disagrees with that assessment (that oh-so-Canadian modesty!), but yesterday I happened to be visiting him for a day while he spoke to students at a VERY prestigious old private school, then dropped in on the ladies at his favourite bookstore and dredged up some book details from his memory to help another patron who wanted a book on making one's own plugs (fishing lures), got home and whipped up a quick short story for a charity book, and then in the evening designed a bookmark for a local ratepayers' group - - and heard similar opinions of Ed from ALL of them. Pretty good for a fat, aging guy with an untidy beard.

I think the nicest thing I heard all day was from a senior in Port Hope whom Ed saw by chance and greeted with a hug and some nice words. She told me: "He always makes me laugh. He doesn't even know my name, but he cares about me enough to make me laugh."

Yes, that's our Ed.

So, on to Words from our Ed. This time he responds to this post, from Rinonalryna Fathomlin: "Hello Hooded One--could you pass on to Ed that I finally got around to reading Cormyr: A Novel, and I very much enjoyed it? I thought the historical portions of book meshed wonderfully with the story taking place in 1369 DR, and needless to say I know more about the history of Cormyr than ever, now, from just those little tidbits. :) I think I was most struck by Tanalasta at the end of the book. During most of the book I was disappointed in her, because in spite of having some good

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strengths (like being intelligent) she cried a lot and tore up pillows; I had to agree with Vangey that grief is no excuse not to do anything when a whole realm is at stake. Yet at the end of the book, she seems more empowered and makes the decision to cultivate her own strengths and not be overly reliant on others. Those are the kind of transformations I always enjoy seeing--and considering that Tanalasta was, at the time, a 36 year old woman, one could see that ending scene as a sort of rebirth for her.

There were a few things I was hoping to see more of: Alusair and Filfaeril. :) And Emthra and Rhauligan, and some more common folk. But then, it was already quite the large book, and I'll get another Cormyr fix later this summer. I did love the way Vangey was portrayed, and I do feel like I "know" him better. So once again, thanks for the enjoyment--I'd thank Jeff Grubb too, but he's not here."

Asgetrion then posted: "Rino, I actually have used those very inspiring historical parts for hand-outs (torn parchments, diary pages, historical tomes etc.) in my campaign. My players very *especially* impressed with the details of the battle against the Witch-Lords (e.g. when the elven cavalry arrives on the field).

I listened to the album 'El Greco' (by Vangelis) as I was reading this book, and the music fit the mood of the novel so well, that I still play it on the background whenever we play in Cormyr.

Milady THO, will you also pass on to Ed my great admiration of this marvelous book, too? In my opinion it is the *best* FR novel ever written, and in general one of best fantasy novels I've read so far!"

Ed replies:

Gosh. Best Realms novel ever written? One of the best fantasy novels? I wish I agreed. I DO think it worked (we set out to achieve what we wanted to, which was to "do a Michener" in the Realms, meaning a multigenerational novel in the style of the late James Michener, that would really "show all of you Cormyr"), and I believe it's a solid, readable, enduring novel. Some readers love the result of our experiment, others prefer simpler-in-format books that don't jump back and forth in time. It is THE essential Cormyr novel.

I also think it's a good book largely because Jeff Grubb (a deservedly-veteran game designer and often-overlooked or -undervalued fiction writer; his collaborations with his wife, Kate Novak, really shine) did a great job. He "got" the mood and flavour of Cormyr, so there were no awkward conflicts of content between his writing and mine. With veteran Bill Larson as our editor (who told us, "What you handed me wasn't nearly as bad as I'd been led to expect." :}), Jeff wrote the back-in-time sequences, and I did the modern ones (exception: Jeff wrote all the Wyvernspur moments, chose the villains, and plotted the Abraxus matter). As we finished each batch (three or so), we'd hand them to each other to rewrite, so as to give me the chance to "drop in Realmslore" and Jeff the chance to rescue my picaresque style into straight-ahead storytelling. The "back-in-time" segments are really a series of little short stories, of course, and I'm very pleased with how Jeff brought some of my favourite characters (like Duar) to life.

I'm glad you liked the growth of Tanalasta; I tried to very briefly revisit her in SWORDS OF EVENINGSTAR (and Alusair in SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE), because I did neglect her a bit (thanks to wordcount problems) in CORMYR: A NOVEL. We told you she was the quiet, studious, rather priggish take-self-too-seriously royal heir, but we didn't quite do enough to SHOW you that, before her romance started to change her. In doing so, we lost a lot of the impact that her "starting to really grow up" should have had (Troy Denning got a chance to show us more, in

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BEYOND THE HIGH ROAD and DEATH OF THE DRAGON). That's one of the weaker bits of the book. So is our almost complete neglect of Azoun and Filfaeril as a couple (for a little bit of a remedy, see my Realmslore web columns for Wizards this past year, plus an all-too-brief scene at the end of SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE), and our neglect of the rustics like Emthara and Rhauligan. There was no space to do better in the book, in part because we tackled something too large in scope to fit between any one set of covers, and in part because I was still WAY too wordy a writer, then (an affliction I haven't entirely been cured of, mind you :)). I'm not sure if I'll ever have the chance to do justice to some of those characters, but ELMINSTER'S DAUGHTER and my story in REALMS OF SHADOW were a few stabs at trying to redress the neglect.

Which brings me to an idea that I've been kicking around for a while. I don't know if I'll ever get the chance to do this, but if I could (somehow and somewhen), what are the "scenes you'd like to see" if I wrote some Realms short stories covering them? Moments or confrontations or events we already know about or can infer have happened by reading published Realmslore, that don't primarily involve characters created by others, or "heavily adopted" by others (meaning: I'd rather not trammel Elaine's hands by doing more Elaith moments, or Steven's by using Khelben overmuch)? Which characters (of mine, including background NPCs or "bit part" characters) would you like to see more of?

To all scribes who read this, please post your desires in this thread. This is NOT a promise I can or will make, that you'll "definitely" see new fiction from me addressing, somewhere. However, I would like to know whom you feel we've neglected, or events and scenes you'd like to see told in more depth, or for the first time. I carry a giant, rather confused mental tapestry of the Realms in my head, all the time, and sometimes forget what has been put into print and what's just sitting in my head; it would be nice to have some of the holes in the print version pointed out to me again.

So saith Ed.

Aha, scribes, here's your chance!!! (Will there ever be another "Best of Eddie" anthology, I wonder? With, just imagining now, some never-before-seen tales in it that answer scribes' requests?)

love to all,
THO

May 13, 2007: Hi again, all. Great replies and questions, scribes; please keep them coming! (Sage, NEVER hesitate to add to your pile of unanswered questions. The more the merrier, and none of us know when our askings might spark Ed into something really stunning and new...)

This time Ed responds to Blueblade's query: "Morning, Ed and THO. Time for another (heh heh) Cormyr question: are there hiring fairs, farmers' markets, horsesellers, and so on outside the city gates? Or is that not allowed?

If it is allowed, are there certain dates only? And is any semi-permanent presence (e.g. tenting in the same spot for a season) okay? And (larger question) what's the protocol for roadside camping throughout the realm? Can I stay in one spot by the side of the road and sell things?

Thanks!"

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Ed replies:

No you can't (stay in one roadside spot and sell things), unless you buy the land and put up a building to sell from (and also, if you wish, dwell in). Expect steady scrutiny from Purple Dragon patrols.

Yes, you can sell goods whenever you stop traveling and camp, but unless you have a good reason (e.g. broken wagon wheel, REAL beast-of-burden emergency, not just "the oxen pulled up lame"), those same Purple Dragon patrols will expect you to move on, every day. (Those who disagree and plead strenuously will be mind-scryed from afar by War Wizards to ascertain whether they're telling truth or just making excuses for tarrying.) Some peddlers travel VERY slowly, because they're on foot and heavily loaded, or have only a few mules (and are heavily loaded), but they do keep moving. Or else.

(Or else what? Hauled to the nearest magister, usual sentence confiscation of some goods or levy of cash fine, plus "decree of direction," which may be anything from "do this unpaid labour for a few days, while we house and feed you" to "convince us of your true plans, here and now, in the realm" [with War Wizard mind-scrying applied, of course] to "get out of Cormyr just as fast as you can, starting NOW!")

As for your tenting by the gates question:

Every spring, on a different ten-day-stretch each year (the date cried locally around the realm by heralds and Purple Dragons) there are horse fairs held outside the gates of Suzail and of Arabel. Over the years, a few "other stalls" have crept in (first equine accessories such as tack and blankets, then conveyances drawn by horses, and in recent years food tents and all manner of small-goods sales), though the local Purple Dragons work firmly to keep the numbers of these down. Such events are still prohibited in Marsember (it was tried one year, but alchemists from Westgate specializing in poisons and drugs to disable foes showed up, as well as hand-crossbow vendors from Sembia).

Otherwise, no merchants are allowed "around" (nearby) city gates, either inside or outside (beggars, snatch-thieves, and cryers for inns ["Come to the Red Flower, saer! Best meals, clean beds, clean ladies to share them with!"] have several times in the past become an absolute nuisance, offending visitors and impeding the flow of carts and wagons by darting out in front of them, crowding into and then deliberately blocking the path of pedestrians, and so on).

Well away from the gates of Suzail, at the north end of Jester's Green, merchants are allowed to set up tents in summer. The maximum stay is a tenday, enforced by Purple Dragons who keep a VERY close eye on who's there and what their goods are (the Crown doesn't want poisons sold, armies covertly assembling near Suzail, slavers operating to receive drugged kidnap victims, doppelgangers or other perils "getting to" citizens by posing as lovely lady prostitutes, and so on).

"Tent city" merchants are NOT allowed near Arabel or Marsember. They are allowed at Waymoot and Wheloon, in specifically-maintained and patrolled "paddock" areas owned and heavily patrolled by the Crown. War Wizards scry these areas diligently and often, as the Crown (rightly) fears spies or "swordswinging agents" of Sembia, Thay, Zhentil Keep, Westgate, and various rebel interests will gather in such areas if they aren't vigilant. Just last summer a handsome young man claiming to be "the son of Gondegal" was murmuring his identity and requesting support from folk in the northeastern part of the kingdom. Twice he vanished (with magical aid, it's believed) when Crown agents closed in on him.

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So saith Ed, handing interested DMs a little adventure hook at the end, there.

I, of course, LOVE hooks in MY little adventures. Mmm-hmm. And chains, and...

love to all,
THO

On May 14, 2007 THO said: Hi. Ed tells me he always buys copies of the new Realms books, and multiples of those he wants to "evangelize" to hook people on writers new to them, so they'll become fans - - and that includes this one of yours, Elaine.

However, he also told me Wizards sends him care packages "when they remember to" (which is apparently about twice a year, these days, and misses out on a lot of titles in the line; for some reason, except for his author's copies of the book you co-wrote, they have NEVER sent him a single copy of any book by either you or Bob Salvatore).

So if he wants to make sure he gets a copy of anything, he has to buy it. And that definitely includes this title of yours.

For one thing, his ordering it spurs the local independent bookstore where he places all his orders to order another five or six copies as well as his - - they've being do so for years, because they know if Ed special-orders something new (as opposed to something out-of-print and truly esoteric), it will sell off their shelves. Intentionally or not, he's built Paul Kemp and Richard Lee Byers into solid sellers in Cobourg (admittedly a tiny market in rural Ontario, Canada) in just this manner.

Ed also gives "teasers" of what particular titles he thinks kids will like, when he does author visits to the local schools. I know he pushes some of your books on such occasions, because both genders of high school students love the Danilo and Arilyn repartee/sparring.

love,
THO

May 14, 2007: Hello again, everyone. This time Ed responds to this recent query from Charles Phipps: "Hey Ed, it's been a long time since I've asked a question. As usual, our bumbling heroes are curious about another element of Cormyr life as they settle into the courtly life. I believe their official titles are "Royal Consorts" which Vangy discovered never required there only to be one. Of course. My question, is basically related to the fact that there's two young offspring running around the court in the Lady Lord of Arabel's new child and Little Azoun. I'm also thinking of introducing Caladnei's child, even though we couldn't say who the father is amongst the PCs or otherwise.

To cut to the chase....

Do God parents exist in the Realms? What would be the expected duties of our PCs if they were named so for our young pair of Royal Relations?"

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Ed replies:

Yes, godparents exist in the Realms, though they're not called "god parents" or anything similar ("gray mentors" is a common Heartlands term; "shieldfolk" is more commonly used in Inner Sea coastal areas). In Cormyr, they are known as "high guardians," and are responsible for sponsoring the child in the following situations: paying for clothes and food (if parents can't provide), seeing to schooling (if parents can't), gifting the child with armour (if they want it), and rearing them [or paying someone else for rearing them] (if something "happens" to the parents). So at heart they're sponsors (many high guardians pay for weddings and even burials of "their" children, when the time comes). Sometimes they give birthday gifts, and sometimes the children they "stand for" are expected to perform (except for children who excel at fencing, horsemanship, or some other athletic pursuit they've been trained for, "perform" here means: sing, play music, or recite an original or well-known memorized oration) for them.

In all cases of disagreement over handling of the child between parents and high guardians, the parents automatically have deciding say, unless the local authorities (magister, local Purple Dragon commander, or the Court) say otherwise (which they do when parents are insane or publicly acting to punish, harshly control, or harm the child [witnesses to such behaviour exist, in number and testimony that suggests habitual cruelty, not a lone occurrence of rage]).

Note that poor folks don't have "high guardians." This practice is for the wealthy (particularly socially-climbing "wannabe nobles") and the noble.

However, in Cormyr, no royalty (by birth, marriage, or Court status) or "high officer of Court (e.g. Royal Magician, Court Wizard, Chamberlain, etc.) would be allowed to stand as high guardians for other royalty; it's seen as a conflict of interest (if Guardian X has influence over Young Royal Y, he could twist Young Royal Y's beliefs so as to form a faction, or covertly enspell Young Royal Y, or slay or geld Young Royal Y, and so affect the succession).

I'm not saying such meddlings are likely to succeed, given the general suspicion at Court and the vigilance of the War Wizards and everyone else; I'm saying the Royal Magicians long ago set things up to avoid all possibility of such things happening - - or other Cormyreans having any justifiable cause to BELIEVE such things could be happening.

In like manner, Cormyrean royalty aren't allowed to stand as high guardians for Cormyrean nobles (it can be seen as exercising undue influence over the noble so as to secure personal loyalty or a covert 'binding,' or a chance to use the noble as a hostage to force their family to act or not act in some manner).

So in Cormyr, nobles can be high guardians for other nobles, but royalty can only be high guardians for non-nobles (highly unlikely, but done in rare occasions in gratitude for "special service" such as saving the life of a royal; Woodcutter X saves a young prince or princess, who then stands as high guardian to Woodcutter X's child), or nobles of other realms.

Now, nothing in this post should be taken as forbidding UNOFFICIAL, informal (publicly known at Court or otherwise) mentoring or sponsoring, even if such treatment is done lavishly for years. Those sort of relationships often occur at Court. (Be aware that either a formal high guardian or an informal mentor is going to be watched covertly by War Wizards and Highknights, these days, to prevent the exploitation of the younglings they're standing for, doomed or inappropriate romances kindling, and so on.)

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So saith Ed.

Interesting campaign implications, Charles; a "no but yes" for your PCs.

Kuje, Ed sent the Spin A Yarn in before the end of 2006, and it's been up on the WotC website for some time. Really.

love to all,
THO

May 19, 2007: Hello again, all. Ed has been horribly busy these last few days, but surfaced long enough to hurl one answer my way, for us all...

Zandilar recently posted (among other queries that Ed will deal with on other occasions): "The term "consort" in the Realms. The word, IMHO, is terribly vague, and has so many different meanings as to be almost useless except when the context is crystal clear. My question is: What is the most commonly accepted definition of the word in Abeir-Toril? What context is it usually used in? For example, FRCS describes Vaerana Hawklin as being Yanseldara's consort - does this mean that Vaerana is formally married to Yanseldara? Does it mean she's some kind of acknowledged lover/mistress? Or does it simply mean she's a friend/companion/associate? Most often, I've seen the term used in the context of a ruler's official partner/spouse, which would imply in the case I mentioned, that Vaerana is formally married to Yanseldara. (I may have asked this question before, but my memory is flakey at the moment and my search-fu is considerably weakened while I'm away from my own computer. That'll teach me for not putting "important" documents on my laptop when I'm uncertain of when I'll be back at my desktop computer!)"

Faraer weighed in on this matter, and Ed now replies:

In the Realms, we usually use "consort" in two ways: official consorts and unofficial consorts.

Unofficial means a sexual or at least "constant companion, dwelling together" relationship that is publicly known about, but is NOT a formal union.

Official means a formal union (marriage in faith or under civil law) of a noble, person of rank, or royalty that specifically does not imply that the "consort" can inherit the status of the person they are attached to (and in some cases, their heirs can't, either).

To cite a relevant real-world example, the British crown has long had the concept of morganatic marriages (offspring cannot ascend to the throne), and the current Prince Philip is a prince in his own right (of the royal family of Greece), but cannot claim the throne should his wife (the Queen, who IS Queen in her own right) predecease him. So he is "Prince Consort," in the same way that Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, was styled Prince Consort rather than "king." Vaerana stands in the same relationship to Yanseldara: they are married (and, yes, lovers), but Yanseldara is the rightful ruler and Vaerana has no claim to her position, should Yanseldara perish.

Zandilar, you are quite correct to say that the word 'consort' has "so many different meanings as to be almost useless except when the context is crystal clear." Sometimes in the past published Realmslore has been carelessly vague, sometimes editors have unintentionally introduced vagueness while rewriting for brevity, and sometimes we have been deliberately vague (for

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various reasons). I'll TRY not to be in future, but cannot promise (sorry), because I have no final control.

So saith Ed.

Who is hip-deep in Realms-related projects (watch for that last print issue of DRAGON), but trying to stay in touch here at the Keep.

love to all,
THO

May 21, 2007: Hail and well met, fellow scribes. Ed responds to Jamallo Kreen re. this: "Ed, would "consort" then be the answer to my query about what those who are bedded, but not wedded, are called. In 1358, would Laeral have been described as Khelben's "consort" in polite circles? What about impolite circles?"

Which is itself a followup to JK's earlier post: "Well met! Ed, tell us, if you will, what the polite forms of address are in various lands for those who are openly bedded, but not wedded. For instance (and I use feminine forms solely because European languages are geared towards considering a female participant in a love {or sex} relationship as subordinate to a male): how does one introduce one's acknowledged mistress if one is known to be married to another person? How does one refer to one's live-in bed-partner and/or "significant other" if there's no likelihood that a marriage will ever occur (think Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell, happily unmarried for about three decades now, or Laeral and Khelben after the Crown of Horns business)? How does one address a social superior (or equal's) concubine (or anyone else who's more than a chit for the night and less than a claimant to community property)? Also important to Mistress Manners is: how are these various combinations addressed and referenced as a couple when they are not being presented separately? "The Lord and Lady Mages of Waterdeep" is pretty obvious, as would be "The Lord Mage Khelben and the Lady Mage Laeral," but there is surely some phraseology more polite than, "Her Royal Majesty, the Simbul of Aglarond ... and boy toy."

Ed, inquiringly polite minds want to know!"

Ed now replies:

A great variety of everchanging nomenclature is employed across the Realms for such individuals, of course (far too many for me to cover in this thread), but here's the general approach: "lady" (especially when the person spoken of is NOT a titled "Lady") can mean "sweetheart" or "long-beloved wife" or "fiancé" or "mistress") and is ALWAYS considered polite unless delivered in a sneering tone of voice or coupled with impolite phrases (examples: "hog-rutting lady" or "she'll be any beast's lady for as long as it wants her"). So a formal introduction at Court or a feast or other formal social occasion would follow the lines of: "Amarathe, lady to Guildmaster Horold Draer" or "Magister Ulkryn Darkcastle and his lady, Aundra Othlormae" (note that it's entirely up to Aundra whether her surname is given or not, and always remember that many folk in the Realms don't have surnames). When speaking to Amarathe or Aundra, you would say "Lady" if you wanted to be polite. If Guildmaster Draer was callous (or lucky!) enough to escort BOTH Amarathe and his wife, Oloena Draer to the same function, they would be introduced as "Guildmaster Horold Draer, his lady Oloena Draer, and his lady companion Amarathe." If Amarathe was the lover of BOTH of the Draers, and all three of them wanted this

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publicly recognized, they would be introduced as "Guildmaster Horold Draer, his lady Oloena Draer, and their lady companion Amarathe." This would be true of a servant announcing guests at a door, a courtier preparing a document or performing introductions, a herald speaking, and so on.

"Mistress" is a neutral, polite term, like saying "man" or "woman" or "shopkeeper" or "citizen." Yes, "consort" is sometimes used as a polite equivalent, but it implies long-term dwelling together ("behaving as a married couple") or even an announced tie (engagement, contract, or inheritance agreement, plus those situations where one person wants to produce an heir and finds an agreeable other person to provide either the sperm or the womb, but where that other person understands and legally undertakes that they will NOT have any inheritance rights, or control over the offspring). A shopkeeper who wanted to fawn over Amarathe might call her "Lady Amarathe," but if he wanted to be stern with her (perhaps she handles and breaks wares but never buys, or is about to knock something over, or is tardy in paying) he might say briskly, "Mistress Amarathe!" (Note: he's NOT trying to be rude by doing so.)

Remember, there's no Victorian-style Judeo-Christian morality in the Realms; it's not a "bad thing" to be a mistress - - or, in most places, a prostitute. (There is such a thing as being 'bad at it,' or needlessly 'wanton' or unclean, but that's a different matter, however much insult-hurling goodwives or gossips may want to paint it otherwise.)

So in polite circles, in Waterdeep, Laeral would be termed Khelben's "lady" rather than "wife" (but more often, because she's "Lady Mage" in her own right and well-loved by the populace, either "Laeral," "Lady Laeral" or "the Lady Mage of Waterdeep"). Most Waterdhavians would say, "I overheard Lady Laeral yestereve" or "Lady Laeral told me."

In less polite circles, Laeral is referred to as everything from the neutral but informal "bedmate" to "plough-furrow" on down through "willing holes" and "waiting mouth" to far less printable and more explicit terms. :}

So saith Ed.

Who warmed me up a bit at the end, there. What he says about being formally introduced is quite true; I recall a Realmsplay session at which two Knights of Myth Drannor were revealed when a tapestry fell during a feast, both nude and making love energetically, and the servant glided forward to calmly introduce them by name, and the term: "evident companions of the moment to each other."

love to all (and frequently!),
THO

May 22, 2007: Hi again, all. This time I bring you the words of Ed in response to Phoebus, re. this: "What do you see Merith Strongbow doing in a campaign that takes into account the events detailed in the "Last Mythal Trilogy"? Can you see Merith having much of a role in the newly rebuilt Myth Drannor?" (Kuje posted: "I smell a strong smell of NDA on this one. :)") and discussion then ensued on what an NDA actually smells like.

("A man's gotta ask!" indeed.)

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Ed replies:

Indeed, to the NDA (and no, Kuje, NDAs actually smell like oiled cast iron, slammed down REAL close to the nose :)).

What I can say, without going into overmuch detail, is: Merith was one of the many who harried Sarya's marching armies with arrows, from the trees, whittling them down-and later raced north to prevent the ogres, orcs, fiind, hobgoblins, and bugbears of the northern Moonsea from pouring south to take advantage of the strife (with the connivance of Zhentil Keep) and overwhelm the other cities of the Moonsea.

So saith Ed.

Who is as usual busily cooking up new Realms goodies for us all.

love to everyone,
THO

May 23, 2007: Hello again, scribes. I bring you Ed's response to Zandilar's query on behalf of those on (gasp) the OTHER forums: "Heya, Passing along a question from those other forums... some regulars would like to know what the difference between the title Coronal and King/Queen are. They would also like to know anything you can tell us about what other royal/noble titles that are held by the elven people.

Thanks!"

Ed replies:

I'm afraid I can't delve deeply into other elven noble and royal titles, thanks to NDAs (most of my lore on the subject was submitted to TSR, now WotC, years ago, and thus belongs to them; it can't be published except by them). However, I can answer the narrower aspect of this question, to whit: in the Realms, the terms King, Queen, Prince and Princess all have elven linguistic roots, and are still used by elves of many communities. A few ancient elven titles were revived in Cormanthyr in reverence to the "lost glories" of elder elven realms. These include:

Coronal (literal meaning 'wise elder' but really meaning: chief justice, mayor, and later emperor) pronounced: "core-OH-nul"] [plural form: coronals]

Lusabrar (literal meaning 'sword of the people' but really meaning: war-leader; that is: A war-leader or commander rather than THE war-leader or commander-in-chief, because there would usually be multiple lusabren) [pronounced: "luhss-AB-rar"] [plural form: lusbaren]

Mraerital (literal meaning 'vigilance of the people' but really meaning envoy, herald, and observer; watching, witnessing [including formal agreements], and gathering intelligence openly, never stealthy spying) [pronounced: "mur-AIR-it-all"] [plural form: Mraeritar]

So saith Ed.

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Creator of Myth Drannor, these titles, and indeed Ye Whole Balle of Waxe.

love to all,
THO

On May 23, 2007 THO said: I discussed just this with Ed, and he told me he's been far too busy with major WotC projects (as you know, from the sudden disappearance of "Realmslore," "Waterdeep News," and "Border Kingdoms" entries) to talk to anyone at Wizards about this... yet.

However, he certainly intends to talk to folks at Wizards; for one thing, there's that entire city of Teziir article to get into the hands of Realms gamers somehow, if there's no room for it in the last few print issues of DRAGON.

So, stay tuned...

love,
THO

May 24, 2007: Hello again, all. This time Ed responds to Mandras, re. this query: "Hello Ed, Could You help me out with a minor detail about Sword Coast area:

What does the banner and trail signs of Baldur's Gate Merchant's Guild look like? I have not been able to find these in any official material.

Best Regards, Mandras"

Ed replies:

Many trading costers and caravan companies operate through Baldur's Gate, but aren't guilded in the city, and many of the merchants of the Gate aren't guilded. The Merchants' League has an elaborate coat of arms but is NOT a guild, and has flown an everchanging assortment of banners over the years (usually changing to mark a new discovery); the banner currently in use is a long pennant displaying three simple horizontal stripes: two metallic ones with a scarlet one between them.

Baldur's Gate has no single "Merchant's Guild" (though it once did), but rather has a history of unstable (short-lived, merging and collapsing, not very powerful) guilds (and there's evidence that the local temple of Gond and various city leaders work to keep things that way, wanting to avoid a local situation of powerful, well-established guilds). There are currently nine local guilds.

The most powerful is the "Dark Guild" (of thieves, assassins, smugglers, and fences; see FRA for more details), that has no banner and no trail signs, but uses mud to mark city walls with a recognition symbol (meet here, this is the place to "hit," look for a message here) consisting of an X with a barbed fish-hook running straight down from the center of the X, twice the length of the X-strokes, and then curving down, around, and up to the left.

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The Gate is also home to (listed in descending order of wealth, size, and prominence) the Harborhands' Guild, the Shipwrights Guild, the Wheelwrights' Guild, the Seafarers' Guild, the Mercantile Guild, the Weaponsmiths' Guild, the Leatherers' Guild, and the Falconers' Guild.

Harborhands' Guild: a large and busy guild of hard-working, "hand me no foolishness" dockside and warehouse loaders and unloaders (much wealth, can sometimes be roused to political interference or just to trash the home or shop of someone who's seen as actively evil towards others in the city); banner: blue field, triangle of black stacked chests cradled in two cupped, brown hands; trail sign: three identical stacked chests, in a triangle (one centered atop two).

Shipwrights Guild: a small, wealthy, quiet association of ship-builders and "refitters" (repairers) and sailmakers (who for years have employed spies to watch over all manner of city dealings, so as to quietly invest in a great range of things; the true rival of the Dark Guild, who have several times fought the Dark Guild to a truce behind the scenes by hiring outlander adventurers, especially wizards and poisoners, to "beat the Darks at their own dirty games," and as a result are respected and largely left alone by the Darks today); banner: triangle of white (sail) on a blue field (sea), brown hulls superimposed on shield: bowsprit-to-left side view of hull, with cross-section or "head-on" second hull astern of first; trail sign: stylized ship (hull with bowsprit to the left, bellying arc of sail "floating" above it (no mast or rigging shown, bulge of sail is to the left).

Wheelwrights' Guild: busy fellowship of makers and repairers of wagons, carts, and capstan and pulley wheels for cranes, ships, and mills (little political will or common clout, more of an excuse to gather to drink, gossip, and complain than anything else); banner: light brown, side-on wooden wagon wheel of heavy construction and six spokes, on a white field; trail sign: wheel (circle of six spokes).

Seafarers' Guild: registry of sailors, with rankings related to experience and training, and pay rates to match (established by merchant fleet owners and private ship captains to keep pirates off crews, and is now a front for the Dark Guild, who also wants to keep pirates off crews and thus out of influence in Baldur's Gate); banner: blue field, diagonal strand of light brown rope, upper left to lower right, grasped in middle by dark brown right hand (back to viewer, fingers and thumb hidden, arm beyond wrist not shown); trail sign: triangle (sail) crossed by diagonal upper-left-to-lower-right line (rope).

Mercantile Guild: successor to the "Merchant's Guild," this is a loose association of shopkeepers who meet to determine common sizes, weights, and measures, accepted local nomenclature (what is "fresh"? what does "custom-crafted" really mean?), and measures (like the local law to 'move on' after a time) to keep street-cart vendors from competing equally with shopkeepers without paying the same fees and taxes; banner: brown ship on calm blue sea, with bowsprit to the left and hull heaped high with gold; trail sign: circle of ten coins around capital letters "BG."

Weaponsmiths' Guild: small, tradition-bound guild of local makers of armor, bladed weapons, and wooden handles for all manner of weapons and tools, primarily concerned with establishing and enforcing standards and labelling "inferior outland goods" as such (almost exclusively human male membership, who hold many hard-drinking meetings at their hall); banner: dark gray face-on warriors' helm on a light gray field; trail sign: plain shield outline with "BG" written inside it (in capital letters).

Leatherers' Guild: makers of boots, saddles, and more recently gloves, belts, scabbards, and harness for all manner of draft beasts and mounts (large and fractious fellowship of "upstart" non-human and female members challenging a few haughty old families who want to remain in control; there's much arguing over tanning, proper leathers and design); banner: scarlet field with

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stylized brown side-on saddle (capital letter "D" with straight back uppermost, curve at bottom, entire shape "filled in") crossed by a vertical line of three gold coins; trail sign: outline of tall boot, toe to left, with "BG" written across top in capital letters.

Falconers' Guild: despite its name and heraldry, this guild really represents not just the four falcon sellers/breeders/trainers in the city, but also all manner of adventurers, hireswords, sages, wizards for hire, and alchemists (and spends much of its time fighting the influence of the local temple of Gond); banner: blue field, with red chevron (point to the left) on it, and on that a black falcon's head, side-on with beak to the left and one gold, black-pupilled eye staring out at viewer; trail sign: "V" of spread falcon's wings, with capital-letters "BG" written where they meet.

So saith Ed.

Who is still struggling to get some of his many, many projects finished.

And an apology to all scribes: I may have misled you regarding the Spin A Yarn 06 story. Ed certainly sent it off back in October, but never received any word that it had been received (nor a bounceback of his e-mail). Exhibiting remarkable foolishness, I trusted the WotC website search function to check for it (nothing in Nov or Dec, but a hit in January), and never surfed to the actual page, to read its electronic version (I read the original when visiting Ed). Now it doesn't even show up in the search strings, so I guess it was a mislabeled flag - - or it DID get put up, but has since been lost.

Hmm. Stay tuned.

love to all,
THO

On May 24, 2007 THO said: Skeptic, your question: "Projects already announced (like KoMD trilogy, Grand history of the realms, Undermountain, etc.) or other projects?" is quite understandable, but it's also one of those "Ed can't answer for NDA reasons" queries. Which stance, of course, is really an answer in its own right.

love,
THO

May 25, 2007: Hello, all. This time I bring a lore reply from the Master of the Realms to scribe Jamallo Kreen, regarding this post: "Ahem. A series of questions, Ed, if you don't mind: will you please describe for us the process of wine-making in Faerun and in the Utter East from grapes to drinking jack (or tankard or mug or -- rarely -- glass)? Wine bottles are repeatedly mentioned in Realms fiction, and I think corks have also been mentioned, but putting wine into bottles and then corking the bottles is a very advanced and sophisticated (if simple) technology, yet it exists in Faerun, doesn't it? What about in the Shou empire? Are there certain regions which are known internationally for producing fine wines? Are "vintage years" ever declared and marked on the bottles, or is the year always marked -- or never? Is wine aged in wooden casks, and if so, do some areas still use amphorae? Do wine bottles have standardized paper (or parchment or whatever) labels, unique to a particular grower or reegion or shipper? If wines are labelled, are

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wines from some regions or of some varieties more highly prized than others? When grape wine is transported by ship or by caravan, perhaps across hundreds of miles in varying weather conditions, how is it shipped? (In a game mechanical context, in the Conan RPG book on piracy, loot is classified according as various forms of "cargo," and in most cases a cargo common in one region is considered "uncommon" and thus ten times more valuable in some other region. Does that translate well to the Realms, i.e. if a pirate in the Dragon Reach nets a cargo of local Cormyrean wine, is he going to have a more valuable wine if he sells it in Chessenta, or is he just going to have a hold full of vinegar?)

In "civilized" cuisines, is it commonly recognized that some wines, or types of wine, go better with some foods than with others? (I insert an aside here, in light of this week's episode of "Desperate Housewives," and considering what is coming out of Maztica nowadays: a celebrated wine expert once compiled a list of foods with suggested wines to accompany the food, and the list included this entry: "Chocolate -- No wine goes with it.") To venture a bit aside, since some brandies most definitely "go" with "chocolate," is the distillation of wine into spiritous liquors practiced in Faerun, or are the various liquors sipped by the gossips of Cormyr something less than eighty proof? Aurora sells distillation equipment in her catalog's wizard's section, but has anyone ever thought to distill wine, and if so, when did that momentous breakthrough first occur? If alcohol is distilled, is it recognized as an external wound cleaner and an antiseptic (a "blood purifier," perhaps), or does it remain an alchemical curiosity?"

Ed replies:

A large series of questions, indeed. :}

I've covered most of these queries elsewhere in many places over many years, so I'm going to give a fast, "light" version of specific replies here; the important thing to remember is that wine-making is just as varied and sophisticated in the Realms as it is in the real-world (minus all the most modern plastic and metal apparatus), okay?

In general, wine is grown locally on poor soils (clay, hillsides, etc.) just as in the real world, grapes are gathered and pressed (by treading barefoot on them in vats), then poured through loose-weave cloth screens to get rid of most of the skins, then doctored with honey (for sugar), blending, etc. and left to ferment in wooden casks, and later (usually after harvest, as winter draws in) "aired" into pans for further blending or treatment, and transfer into smaller travelling casks and containers (such as, yes, amphorae and other clay vessels, glass bottles, "handkegs," and so on). Wine is usually drunk by the mug (wooden or ceramic) in poor rural areas, flagon (metal cup), jack (horn or horn-shaped metal or ceramic container, the latter sorts often fashioned with "feet" to let it stand upright), or tallglass (drinking-vessel made of blown glass).

Yes, bottles are corked, or stuffed with whittled wooden corks; either sort is then sealed with wax, and sometimes then "oversealed" with pitch.

So yes, all of this goes on in the Realms. I disagree that this is a "very advanced and sophisticated technology." Modern real-world practitioners and especially "wine snobs" have made it so, but they're really refining or arguing over the details of very simple processes that have been done for centuries, and can be done by anyone (albeit with many "exploding bottle" and "tainted wine" disasters until one learns what to do and not to do); reeds will serve as tubing, wine won't go bad if it's not kept too long (and most wine in the Realms is drunk "raw" or within the same summer and autumn as it's made), and so on. Hey, if my Dad could make wine (with me helping, as a child) and my aunts help on the farm doing it when they were four, five, and six years old, respectively, in an era before thermometers, electricity, the ability to make vacuums,

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and so on (as a "light sideline chore that can be entrusted to children," it can't be THAT sophisticated, right? And before anyone dismisses that with a comment that "the wine must have been utter swill," I respond: occasionally, but usually it was as good or better than most of the fine wines I've sampled all over the world or have in my own cellar. [And believe me, I can play the "piquant and amusingly presumptuous, but with a nutty nose and a disarmingly candid bouquet of dried lavender; my refined palate detects just a hint of crisp winter mornings and a bottom of well-ripened peach" game with the best of them.]

Now with all of that said, plunging back into the Realms: the Shou empire goes in for sweeter and strong fortified drinks (the fruit, berry, and honey equivalents of zzar and mead); what many of us real-world types would term "liqueurs." In the Heartlands, lots of "clarry" (blended wine dregs) and "winter wine" (in winter, bring out the wine to let it freeze, in containers that won't shatter, then rake out the ice, so as to remove water and make the result stronger in alcohol) is drunk, but there are areas of upland Tethyr, Turmish, and the Tashalar known for producing fine vintages. These are indeed more highly regarded (and highly priced) than other wines, but the accent is more on prizing individual vintners whose output you come to like (and the Realms has no appellations controllees or the equivalent, passing rules about labelling or what can go in to wines).

Some producers mark years on the bases of bottles, more for "use first against spoilage" reasons than for anything else, though certain vintages are regarded as superior to others - - but although the wealthy do amass wine cellars, vintages are seldom large enough to last long (a twenty-year-old wine is more a memory than something sold for large sums, and everyone in the Realms regards wine as something for drinking and enjoying, not investing in [as a collector, over time] or rhapsodizing over).

So there are no "standardized" labels and agreed-upon definitions, though most wine is marked with a wax "vintner's mark" (like signet-ring impression) and there will be chalk marks of the realm of origin and usually of the year. If the wine is considered special by the producer or the seller, it may get a fancy, stuck-on-with-wax paper label proclaiming it to be "Belarar's Boldest" or whatever.

Most wine that is transported long distances is carried by ship or wagon, in casks of various sizes, from the handkeg to large one-to-a-wagon casks (and some palaces and city guild warehouses have gigantic, immobile vats into which smaller containers are emptied, for later local tapping). Again, some areas have prized wines (something that changes with wars, storms, and fashions) that are more valuable elsewhere because of scarcity and perceived quality (or snob appeal, as in "anyone of TRUE quality among the nobility of Waterdeep is ONLY drinking thus-and-so this season! Be just as grand as they are by laying down coin for some yourself!"). In general, to answer your specific example, local Cormyrean wine might fetch a few sp/cask more if sold in Chessenta, but no more than that [both lands produce abundant and generally good local wine, but nothing widely considered outstanding across Faerûn], and it will be a hold full of vinegar if it's kept too long at sea in hot weather, or dumped on one of the Pirate Isles for a season in an attempt to sell it at the tail end of winter, when cellars are running low and good "fresh" drink is scarce, UNLESS that storage is in a cave, or buried in peat out of the sun, or otherwise controlled in temperature and humidity to acceptable ranges.

Yes, many Faerûnian cuisines recommend certain sorts of wine for cooking (drizzles, sauces, marinades, and soup ingredients) as well as accompaniments to food. (And re. the wine expert's list tale you cite: balderdash. There are in fact books covering which wines go best with which chocolates!) Following that aside: there are indeed distilled liquors in Faerûn, and most of the said drinkables consumed in Cormyr and Waterdeep are decidedly strong (though there are also

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mild, low-alcohol, very sweet "dessert" sorts for hot days and light repasts). When distillation started is lost in the mists of time; it may well have been practiced by one of the races that came to Faerûn in early eras. The Realms enjoys the full range of distilled spirits as drinkables, and they and "pure" alcohols are indeed widely used as external wound cleaners and antiseptics (the Faerûnian term is "purges" or "taint-purges"). I can't recall if a scene I wrote years ago, of a sword-wound being "sluiced clean" with drink, was edited out before print, or not - - but I do recall writing it. :)

So saith Ed.

Who did indeed have a formidable cellar (I believe it's mostly been drunk or given away now, as both he and his wife take medications that alcohol doesn't play well with, these days), and lives near several superb wineries.

love to all,
THO

May 26, 2007: Hi again, everyone! This time I bring you Ed's response to Zandilar and Jamallo Kreen's followups to his earlier answers to their earlier questions. First, Zandilar queried: "Quick little follow up here... What is the correct term for the male equivalent to "mistress"? Master doesn't seem right to me, since the term inherently implies superiority (I'll bite my tongue on any further comment on why that is so, suffice it to say it's fairly obvious).

Thanks again for the answers, by the way!"

Then Jamallo Kreen posted: "The question remains, though, as to what a male who was the bedmate (but not husband) and the possible social inferior of a woman would be called? I'd think that in Cormyr and Waterdeep (especially) folk would be unwilling to introduce some bloke as "Lord Antsinpants" only because he's intimate with a woman who may very well have a title of her own. (As in my earlier post, "Her Royal Majesty, the Simbul of Aglarond ... and boy toy.") Do please enlighten us further, Master of the Green Wood, and dear Lady Herald."

Ed replies:

Heralds use "consort" as the polite, formal, upper-class term for a male bedmate of at least a season's standing (Lady X and said guy have been together for an entire summer or winter, and it's now a day or more into the following season).

Otherwise, the term "gallant" is used (regardless of the social standing of the male). Gallant is also preferred when "said guy" is legally married to someone else in the same realm, or when "said guy" and "Lady X" both have OTHER frequent companions. A herald or well-trained servant would use "gallant" whenever an escort is someone he hasn't seen before (so even if it's just for this evening, or just for this social event). Remember, there's no disapproval attached to this, so Lady X can attend a highsunfeast (luncheon) with one gallant, an afternoon "entertainment" with another, evenfeast with a third, and a revel with a fourth, and NO ONE will think her "loose" or promiscuous (unless she goes out of her way to publicly act in a lewd manner, and of course at most revels such behavior is expected and excused), because unless she and her gallant publicly couple at an event, it is NOT assumed that they will necessarily be bedding each other; many

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noble friends "take" each other to events just as friends (some husbands are jealous of this, but most are not, and expect it to occur).

The one exception to the "gallant" terminology is when the "said guy" is of the female's immediate family line (i.e. closer than cousins). This sort of courtesy escort (no matter how amorous the couple may act towards each other) is referred to as a "shield." A herald uncertain of the status of a male escort will simply refer to him as a "companion."

So a Waterdhavian herald might declaim, "the Lady Naryel Margaster and gallant" (if he doesn't know the male's name), or "the Lady Naryel Margaster and her gallant, Guildmaster Malutt Mauksoun," or (if the male has been squiring her around for a year, and her husband has died or been missing from some years) "the Lady Naryel Margaster and her consort, Guildmaster Guildmaster Malutt Mauksoun," or (if the male is her son or uncle) "the Lady Naryel Margaster and her shield, Lord Marthus Margaster." If the Lady Naryel is enjoying the companionship of a man who doesn't happen to have any title of his own (for example, a mere prentice in the Guild of Fine Carvers rather than the master of the guild), his name will simply be announced after the word "gallant." It is customary for heralds to readily accept and announce pseudonyms, even when they know the name is false.

So saith Ed.

Who I hope has now thoroughly nailed down this topic.

love to all, gallants and otherwise,
THO

May 27, 2007: Hello again, all. This time around Ed responds to a query, from Jamallo Kreen, to whit: "Well met! I've been reading The Further Adventures of Beowulf this week, and I have a question about the wintery scenes at the beginning of "B and the Wraith": when writing it, Ed, were you influenced by Algernon Blackwood's "Wendigo"? You both seem to have captured (what I imagine is) the true feel of a northern, wintery clime, whether Canada or Scandinavia."

Ed replies:

No, although I'm familiar with Blackwood and even more familiar with the various Canadian aboriginal "horror of the wilds" tales he drew on (from, hey, growing up Canadian, knowing a lot of native people, and sitting around a lot of campfires in my youth hearing all the scary tales). When writing those scenes (which I had to edit down severely, BTW) I was influenced by my own numerous Boy Scout experiences of tramping through dark, unknown Canadian woods by night, in snowstorms. A thin crust of ice atop deep, fluffy, wallowing snow... or the soft, gentle, deceptively deadly warmth of downy flakes of beautiful, endlessly-falling snow swirling amid the dark treetrunks... ask THO sometime about walking nude (except for boots) in the winter snow, from warm cabin to another where someone she wanted to seduce was sleeping... :}

So saith Ed.

Yes, I remember that occasion well. No, Ed was not the "someone," but he did see me, through a window. There's something invigorating about making love in the snow, IF YOU BRING A

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BLANKET TO LIE ON. Otherwise, body heat melts snow and rapidly leaves you wet and steaming, and rapidly thereafter wet and hypothermically shivering...

love to all,
THO

May 28, 2007: Hi again, all. This time Ed tackles a bevy of short and somewhat related queries.

First, from Penknight: "Oh, I forgot to ask something that I have recently been wondering... are there plans for a 3.5 version of Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue to be released?"

Ed replies:

I am not now and never have been a salaried employee of either TSR or Wizards of the Coast, so I'm seldom privy to upcoming planned products (though I'm supposed to know all about future Realms releases; evidently some staffers know I'm supposed to be informed and others don't). However, to the best of my knowledge, I don't believe an "Aurora's" is planned for 3.5 (the evidence Kuje cited about certain items that would probably be in it already appearing in other 3rd edition sourcebooks is support for this). However, I could get a surprise on this one, perhaps even tomorrow. :}

So saith Ed.

To his last line, I'd add, "but don't hold your breath," if I'd been answering you.

On to AlorinDawn's wider question: "Do you feel that WoTC will continue to strongly support the Realms? Do you know if the sales of Realms publications are increasing decreasing, or staying the course? While I know you can only guess, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the matter. Thanks"

Ed replies:

You've understood my situation perfectly: I can literally only guess. We have all seen how quickly conditions can change (witness the Paizo magazines and the DL license), and it's a truism of life that the changes will never cease. From its inception, fantasy roleplaying gaming has been no exception to that; so expect there to be more changes in the future, and you shouldn't be disappointed.

NDA's of course prevent me from speaking in specifics, but I can say that it's highly likely that there will be future Realms products, because I've been working on some of them. :}

So saith Ed again.

Who now turns to this, from Skeptic: "Could Ed suggest an "From the archives" series to WoTC for the new Digital Initiative?"

Ed replies:

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I can, will, and have. We'll all just have to wait and see what the result is.

So saith Ed once more, keeping it short and sweet (because he really doesn't have anything more to impart, yet).

And lastly, to createvmind's latest query, Ed replies:

Correct. ONE Spiritual Weapon spell active at a time, per caster, maximum. Oh, you can prepare multiples, and you can cast multiples, but the moment the second one "takes effect," the effect is a collapse of all of the caster's Spiritual Weapons and a backlash effect on the caster's soul. Result: probable unconsciousness (DM to adjudicate saving throw and DC to avoid), and unable to use any divine magic spells (or "reach" the deity when praying, including for more spells) for some time. The rash caster has bruised their soul, and temporarily can't handle attempts to use the bond. "Blackouts" if they try (including curative magics, although beneficial magics cast on them BY OTHERS will work).

And there you have it, scribes. Back with more Realmslore next time. And to Purple Dragon Knight, about the snow and the blanket: of course. All of my experiences are real.

love to all,
THO

May 29, 2007: Hi again, scribes. This time Ed responds to createvmind's query: "Hello All, I have a rather simple question I think, how many pages of writing does one get out of a jar of ink, do you have any exotic inks you could speak with cost possibly, I know you mentioned something about squid ink before I think. Trying to determine when my dear PC will run out of ink since he's always writing things down yet never buying more ink."

Ed replies:

My various PAGES FROM THE MAGES articles in DRAGON (and the later 2nd edition sourcebook of the same name, plus VOLO'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MAGICAL) detailed spell ink formulae for many magical (as in, suitable for writing down spells) inks. In the Realms, squid or octopus ink is one of the "base" ingredients for "better" inks, usually with the blood of some sort of mammal as a "fixative" to bond other ingredients into the ink and make it stable in hue and lasting on the page. Vegetable dyes are another base for inks, but they tend to yield inks that fade more readily, don't "keep" as long in the bottle, and lighten in hue (as well as fading away) on the page, as well as being susceptible to smudging if the page gets damp, even years after the writing (or printing) is done.

The facetious answer to your main question is: "Well, it depends on how big the bottle is!" and the ancillary factors are: How long is it left unstoppered at a time (to dry out)? and: What sort of writing is done with it? Does a page have a sentence or two on it, or is it COVERED in closely-written ink characters?

However, let's assume the writer is careful about stoppering the bottle when not actually writing, uses good sharp quills (so, thin but clear lines, not lots of big ink blots) and writes a "hand" of average size (16 to 20 point, in modern computer font jargon). Let's also assume the "classic" glass ink bottle (flat bottom, round, tapering sides, meant to fit in a wooden inkwell in a desk, but

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provide a tube or "stem" for the quill to be tapped or scraped against, and large enough to fill an average man's palm).

Okay, now I can answer the question: about 40 pages of fairly closely-written text. As few as 30 if there are lots of large, dark "titles," ink illustrations, and so on; as many as 55 if a third of the pages contain lots of white space and therefore fewer lines of text. If the PC is writing down spells, one to a page (or pages, but never more than one spell sharing a page) for magical stability, and the spells are less than third level (in other words, short and without a lot of symbols), 30 pages per bottle. Third to sixth level spells, 25 pages per bottle. Higher level spells, 20 pages per bottle. (Note that "illuminated" text, gold leaf, adorned pages, "swash" calligraphy script, and the like will all "drink" ink, and lower final page-count).

There are "tall bottles" of ink used by professional scribes (picture a modern glass tumbler, made of very thick glass, or those airtight glass cylinders-with-caps-held-on-with-wires found in some bulk food stores, sold for storing pasta) that hold about thrice what an inkwell does. They will yield about 100 pages per bottle.

Certain inks can be "stretched" by adding ingredients (soot, black polish, squid ink, and so on) to a partial bottle of ink, so long as a pinch of certain ground substances, or drops of blood, are added as a "fix" (blending agent).

So saith Ed.

Who in the "home" Realms campaign kept all of us Knights busy for years glomming on to stuff in our travels and adventures, to see if it could later be used in making spell inks. Don't get him started, createvmind! He LOVES creating exotic spell ink formulae!

love to all,
THO

May 30, 2007: Hello again, all. This time Ed answers Jorkens, re. this query: "On the subject of the Nelanther pirates. I just got to thinking; in the 2ed. Campaign setting the pirates were described as consisting mainly of humanoids, whilst later the Nelanther pirates became a human organisation. I am curious as to what where the original pirates in Ed's campaign?"

Ed replies:

My original pirates were a wild mix of "monster-like" outcast human, orc, and half-orc crossbreeds (like the Davy Jones character in the PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN movies, his "hammerhead shark" mate, and so on; human-like crossbreeds who wouldn't likely be tolerated in most human Sword Coast settlements). The isles were where all manner of outcasts and misfits migrated to, to escape persecution. They were also where Tethyrian outlaws, and losers in various family and political feuds in Tethyr and even Amn hid themselves away.

In the strife surrounding and following the Ten Black Days of Eleint, many Tethyrians were displaced, and fled for their lives. Great numbers of them reached the Nelanther Isles where they slaughtered a lot of the existing pirates, and eventually became pirates themselves. Later, the monster conquests in Murann created a smaller wave of fleeing humans, many of whom also

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ended up in the Nelanther. So the humanoid to human shift isn't a rules edition discrepancy; it's a shift in composition of pirate ranks, over time.

So saith Ed.

Creator of the Nelanther Isles and the Realms around them, who can "talk like a pirate" with the best hearties and swashbucklers. I look better than he does, though, when stripped down to just the hat and the floppy boots.

love to all,
THO

On May 30, 2007 THO said: Hello again, gentles!

To AlorinDawn: I'm sorry, but I'll be on assignment elsewhere at that time. Nice try, though.

Perhaps some day. If you're VERY good. And the Fort Wayne (or wherever we are) authorities are looking the other way. Most places in Canada embrace the no G-string rule...

Ahem.

As for Realmslore: Jamallo Kreen, Ed meant what he said: squid or octopus "inks" are a base for better inks (meaning: consistent hue, lasting color and darkness on the page, lack of uncontrollable spreading on coarse writing surfaces) everywhere. You are correct, though, to associate giant squid or octopus with spell-writing inks (although there are alternatives, such as the blood of certain monsters). As I said to createvmind, don't get Ed started! Please!

(Yes, I'm down on my knees, begging.)

love,
THO

June 1, 2007: Well met again, fellow scribes. This time Ed responds to this query from createvmind: "Ed I have a player who is a cleric and is trying to use the spell Read Magic to try and read a wizards spellbook, tell me if I'm close on this please. I don't think this is possible just cause one uses the spell, but if I'm wrong then please assist here. This is obviously less about the "rules and mechanics" than it is about just roleplay and immersing oneself in a world as opposed to just finding ways to metagame information.

1- I assume all wizards write spells in their own cryptic fashion so such a thing like a simple read magic would not tell anyone other than another wizard what the spell might be.

So the text for a fireball spell by this particular mage would read...

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I pluck at the Art about me seeking the precise mote of power,
With breath of the volcano to call forth it's incandescent might
and dung of (other term for bat) to send my power forth

I shape my will to burn my enemies before me.

Think it probably contains more, just off the top of my head, but a non-wizard wouldn't know this meant FIREBALL even with Read Magic.

2- I also assume that the wording and choice of color pertaining to certain symbols written in a spellbook would be a method in which the scribe would know when to raise change his inflection or tone or what somatic movement is required at that precise point. So how would you deal with this in gameplay if the person asked you what spells they now "understand" by using read magic and not being an arcane caster, all of course in Faerun.

Thanks"

Ed replies:

I have no idea what the current "official" game ruling on this is, but I do know how the first head of the RPGA adjudicated it for the tournaments of the day, and what the 2nd edition "official decision" was, at least for the Realms, because I had input into that decision.

Any non-arcane-spellcaster employing Read Magic can literally do that: read what's written on the page. That does NOT mean they can cast the spell, or even necessarily understand its precise effects or nuances of use. A sorcerer using Read Magic on a wizard's spellbook could indeed "learn" the spell for later casting (in other words, they could [by act of mental will] choose that spell they now "know" to "come to them" for later use), but they would still have to master its specifics by trial and error (if I can fly a plane, it doesn't mean I can fly ALL planes just by sitting in the cockpit and getting going; with many of them, I might not even know how to turn the engines on!). Note that anyone trying to use a spell of a higher level than they can master is highly likely to screw up UNLESS it's a divine spell placed in their mind by the deity or a divine servant, just for this use ("I give you the power to rend those gates, and let the army in!").

So a cleric using Read Magic on a wizard's spell would almost certainly end up knowing what the spell does (in general, not specific detail). An experienced cleric, who has seen fireballs cast by wizards and perhaps used other fire magics herself, would know that this spell was a battle spell that unleashed fire, probably explosively, and perhaps with spherical areas of effect, AND THEN COULD WELL GUESS it was a fireball (though it could be a flaming sphere, or a meteor swarm). Some wizards were taught to title their spells, or open the written spell with an explanatory preamble: "Being a magic to unleash fire upon ye foes, in the form of" and if the cleric has one of these in hand, the cleric can certainly read and understand that.

However, a cleric knows how to pray for magic, and written divine spells are just that: prayers. The cleric COULD pray to their god with the wizard's fireball spell open in front of them and plead to be granted that magic, and the deity MIGHT hear and heed (giving them a clerical equivalent of a fireball, with specifics as you the DM choose, and "wiping away" the written wizard's spell in the process). I would base the chances of this happening on their level, their diligence of service to the deity (not their adventuring buddies or even their temple, but in the eyes of the deity), the specific purpose they request the magic for (do they just want a cool new weapon in their arsenal, or do they want it once, right now, to defeat a specific foe?), and whether or not they understand

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what spell they are asking for (did they use the Read Magic to learn this is a fireball, or are they just guessing it is, because they saw the wizard open the spellbook to "about this spread of pages" while memorizing a spell that turned out to be a fireball?).

The cleric could not use Read Magic to read a wizard spell, and then calmly cast it just as if they were a wizard. They COULD "fake it well," because they can see the symbols (if any) to be drawn, read the incantation to be uttered (if any), and read the instructions for the sequence of actions that unleashes the magic, and the gestures that are to be made. So they could PRETEND to cast the spell well enough to fool any non-wizard.

Some wizards use cryptic shorthand phrases and insert "garbage" symbols and lines of false incantation so that only they can use a spell they have written, but this practice has become steadily rarer over the centuries, because it so often backfires (you're wounded and under attack, but your loyal apprentice can't help you because they snatch up your spellbook and can't successfully cast the spells - - or you end up in jail or worse because someone in authority used or purchased one of your spells, and it didn't work or went dangerously awry, because you or they forgot to ignore each and every spurious bit, and insert the missing words in the right place, and so on).

It's become so much easier to use Explosive Runes or an equivalent, that won't trigger when you read the pages but will if anyone else does, and not have your spellbook filled with glitches that could trip you up.

Many wizards do use "code phrases" and colored notations to indicate tone and inflection of voice, and even where the incanter should breathe in a sentence or passage. Correct pronunciations are often "written in" in contrasting colors, and so on. Not "knowing the code" when casting spells from a spellbook won't always cause "nothing to happen" when a spell is cast, but more often will cause the spell to "go wrong" in effects. Which would also leave an unauthorized wizard in the difficulties of long trial-and-error experiments with the book until they cracked the code - - and leave that PC cleric possibly unable to "fake" casting the spell (as I mentioned above) convincingly, and CERTAINLY prevent them from reading it wholly or correctly.

In other words, by properly using Read Magic, a cleric could "understand" the general nature and power level of arcane spells written in a wizard's spellbook, but unless their deity personally wanted them to be able to use any of those spells, that's as far as their use of them could go. They would "know" what magic they had to sell, barter, or give to a wizard, but be unable to use it themselves.

So saith Ed.

Who covered this ground pretty thoroughly years ago with various TSR designers of the time.

love to all,
THO

On June 1, 2007 THO said: Fair enough, lakhovas. I'll try to keep it clinical.

Kyrene, a G-string can mean a literal string tuned to "G" on a stringed musical instrument (hence, AIR ON A G STRING), and it can also mean (as I meant it) a VERY abbreviated undergarment

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(like a "thong" bathing suit bottom or underwear) that strippers (dancers who disrobe in "adult" clubs and other establishments) are required to "keep on" in some jurisdictions (many American states). Several Canadian provinces (notably Ontario and Quebec) do not require the wearing of such garments, and so receive some tourist visits from Americans seeking unfettered gazing.

(lakhovas, how'd I do?)

love,
THO

P.S. Kyrene: but of course. No looking askance from me.

On June 1, 2007 THO said: Just received an e-mail from Ed in which he told me he's just "putting the last finishing touches" on TWO still-top-secret projects for your future reading pleasure... and he received his contributor's copies today of ASTOUNDING HERO TALES, a pulp action adventure short story anthology edited by Jim Lowder and published in trade paperback by Hero Games (it contains a long-lost Lester Dent story, TWO Hugh Cave stories, stories by Robin Laws, Darrell Schweitzer and of course Ed - - and more!). Boy, Ed's a busy boy this year...

love to all,
THO

On June 1, 2007 THO said: I am forbidden to answer this one directly, but I will help in some small way by answering some of Dhomal's queries, sporadically.

First: Ed wasn't talking about the Ring of Winter. And yes, that p45 entry was (if Ed has been informed correctly) spotted by Jim Lowder who then wrote a novel about the Ring.

The page 8 note cannot be what Ed was referring to, as he didn't write it. Jeff Grubb or editor Karen Boomgaarden most likely did.

The page 43 note was either a Freudian slip or a deliberate joke by someone at TSR, changing Ed's original text ("Westgate") into "Watergate" (that well-known American political scandal in the Nixon administration, actually the name of an apartment/office towers complex in Washington, D.C.).

There. That's a start.

love,
THO

June 2, 2007: Hi again, everyone. This time I present the words of Ed in response to AlorinDawn's posts: "Ed & THO, I know you have likely been asked about the topic of longevity magics in within the 3.5 edition rules. If I am asking something that has already been covered (the

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search method seems a tad broad when I look for things, maybe I'm missing something) maybe one of my fellow scribes could direct me to the thread. That being said, here is my query.

How available would say a potion of longevity or an elixir of youth be now that we have a far more refined way of magic item creation? I know you still play 2nd edition, but hope you may have some insight to share on the subject. While I understand Mr. Schend authored Blackstaff and that Malchor is a powerful wizard, it seems that the use of longevity magic is common enough amongst those able to afford/create it by the scene in Blackstaff and the age of many of the NPCs in the realms of advanced age.

Thanks"

and:

"Ed & THO, While I understand you still play 2nd edition, I'll refocus my longevity magic inquiry and hope you can provide some guidance. With the rules as they stand in 3.5 edition, how would you handle the making of longevity potions in order for them to maintain the appropriate level of scarcity? I'm considering making it a requirement to take a separate feat (Create longevity magics), which would require an instructor to obtain, or an appropriate amount of coin spent in research. Thanks."

Wooly Rupert then commented: "I'm not Ed... But I'd not require a feat to do it. I'd require some seriously exotic components, some seriously complicated steps for making the potion, and then say that those who do know the correct procedure are very few, and not willing to share. For added fun, you could make a high chance of failure, even if the steps are all followed correctly (perhaps one of the main ingredients is quite unstable, and/or has a limited shelf life).

I've never actually DM'ed... But I do favor using flavor over rules, and I don't like making feats just for one activity that won't happen all that oft (because making longevity potions is not useful or desired for most situations)."

and Jamallo Kreen added: "Not only do I fully concur, but I would suggest using the Volo's Guide to All Things Magical tables for Halaster's potion (or at least one of the others) to determine what the effect of such a potion would be on a user. I would imagine that the effects of a Potion of Longevity made nowadays would be highly tailored to one person's metabolism and so each batch would react differently with different folk.

AlorinDawn, don't forget that there is a canonical precedent for what happens to someone who is propped up by various potions who then enters a dead magic zone. Centuries-old twenty-something level arcanist in a dead magic zone? Drops like a rock!"

Ed replies:

Well asked and well said, all. AlorinDawn, to answer your first query: I'd say potions of longevity, elixirs of youth, and similar magical means of extending normal lifespan would be rare, highly-sought-after treasures. Real ones are likely to be well guarded ("in depth," including false potions [probably poisons] nearby for would-be thieves to be led to, instead), and NEVER offered for sale in shops (alchemists and powerful wizards may peddle a single potion, discreetly, to a wealthy buyer approached on a one-to-one basis, usually passing off the potion as "discovered among the treasures of Archwizard X after his unfortunate demise at the hands of Y").

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That does not mean longevity magic is unknown to the very wealthy, who often hire wizards to help them cheat death, or among powerful mages who try to devise their own life-extending or -renewing magics. You are right in supposing that at a certain power level its pursuit (and the results, however efficacious or otherwise) becomes common.

Wooly and Jamallo both pointed out the limitations and drawbacks I would certainly apply as a DM. I would also side with Wooly in not going the "make it a feat" route, because I'm a roleplaying DM: I think this quest for immortality or at least vigor should be a process played out over time, NOT something one could ever find an instructor for, or "take" upon level advancement. I would handle it with subtle variances in body chemistry, so a would-be instructor would have to say: "What works for you may not work for me, and be warned: experiments that don't work AGE you, so if a night of tinkering and gulping might bring you tottering to the edge of your grave!"

In general, in the Realms, I have always run things like this: very few individuals know how to make these magics, and like those who had to discover how for themselves, they jealously keep this secret for themselves, sharing the potions only with those they fall in love with and want to have as companions "forever." Everyone else has to discover the process anew for themselves, either by finding it written down in an ancient tomb or cache (warning: there are plenty of "wrong" formulae out there!), or by finding the potions as treasure. Such potions were once far more common than they are today (someone in the failing days of Netheril was making and selling lots of them), because magic was once more widespread and better understood than it is now. People have been drinking them, but there are still a lot of them out there, hidden in dungeons not yet fully plundered.

So saith Ed.

We Knights gained a FEW such potions in a decade (real time) of adventuring, and kept them as our best-hidden, most valuable treasure.

love to all,
THO

June 3, 2007: Oooh, yes, I WAS. Tell you the tale another time soon, though. I'm on duty tonight, and racing to fit this in...

Hello again, all. This time I bring you the words of Ed in response to Penknight's query: "Hello again! Just recently, my gaming group and I were talking about styles of dress and mannerisms in the Realms, when the topic of perfumes and colognes came up. I am running an NPC aasimar female paladin from Cormyr, (the daughter of my old 2nd Edition character that I have mentioned before), and I was asked by one of my group about what type of perfume she wore. I quickly answered with "Moonfire" (which I said was made by the followers of Selûne), forgetting that it was a magic item from Magic of Faerun. (I thought it sounded like an appropriate name, as well as a mysterious, exotic one).

I was sort of curious if you could tell me a bit about the different colognes and perfumes that are popular in the Realms, especially in Waterdeep, Cormyr, and Mulhorand. Thank you for your valuable time, sir and Lady THO."

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The Sage helpfully posted: "While Ed will likely have more... Penknight, I will direct you to the small selection of bath oils, perfumes, and other personal supplies, which are likely to found in most popular bathhouses across the Realms, referenced in Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue. Ed's also briefly mentioned a few himself in previous replies as I recall, so you may want to search through the compiled files as well.

Also, see "The Deadliest Perfume" from DRAGON #121, which has details about lotus blossoms and their usage as a perfume source in Kara-Tur."

Ed replies:

This is a huge topic, so I'll just do the "light" approach here.

First, the word "cologne" is unknown in the Realms. Men and women use "scents" or "perfumes" (though the latter term increasingly in usage tends to mean stronger smells that can be used on objects, or misted for spray into the air of an area, to provide a lasting smell to mask less pleasant odors).

Most scents are derived from natural substances (from plant saps and distillates to beast ichor and organs), combined with each other (and sometimes herbs or spices) in secret ways.

The combinations (smells) are secret, and so are the processes, because it's not easy to create scents that don't stain (garments and flesh), and are stable, remaining in combination for long, without "going off" [rotting into disgusting sticky messes] or separating from their base liquid, which is usually alcohol distilled from vegetable sources. (The source for most Waterdhavian vegetable alcohols is Goldenfields.)

Guilds try to control scent-making in Waterdeep and Cormyr, but Waterdeep is so full of independent alchemists (and charlatans pretending to be alchemists), as well as importers from the busy perfumers of Calimshan and the Tashalar, and elves, gnomes, halflings, and dwarves who make, use, and prefer their own traditional scents, that any guild control over scent-making is a mere fiction. Almost every shopkeeper has "a bottle of something" to sell you, as do most festhalls ("Like how our girls smell? Take some of that smell home with you!") and even freelance prostitutes.

However, there are some large-scale producers, and some fairly well known formulae (so that many producers make very similar scents), and some of the most widely-available and best-known scents include:

Bluestars: blue translucent liquid with gold flecks, strong "medicine" smell until applied to the body (all known humans and humanoids; on orcs it smells like fresh-baked bread), whereupon it turns transparent and smells like fresh before-storm winds (and instantly and lastingly banishes body odors and strong food-related smells such as curry and garlic); effects last for about a day. Bluestars is purportedly made from forest dew that has mirrored starlight, virgins' tears, and a distillate of alicorn (unicorn horn), but in fact contains none of these and is derived from the powdered shells of a certain sort of snail, a particular clay, and the saps of three weeds. Cost per 1-pint flask: 220 gp. (high price due to odor-banishing properties and purported but false efficiency as a ward against poisons)

Darkdew: A scent that has been associated with "dangerous females" for nigh a century, this opaque black oily ointment is said to come from the Underdark, and have something to do with

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both the blood of monsters and the sweat of aroused she-drow (but in truth is a combination of three plant oils, six herbs, and a distillate of slugs). It turns transparent upon touch with the skin, and imparts a musky smell to the wearer for most of a day that most folk (from fey to goblin) find arousing. Some humans, half-elves, and elves can orgasm merely from smelling darkdew, and purchase it for their own private use, or for lovemaking with a partner where both parties wear it (darkdew tastes like black, bitter, unsugared licorice). Cost per 1-pint flask: 176 gp.

Harlyr: The cheapest widely-known perfume in Waterdeep, harlyr (pronounced "Har-LEER") is a rose-red translucent liquid that feels slightly oily or gummy, and smells of nothing at all. When applied to the body (all known humans and humanoids, except half-orcs, orcs, goblins, and hobgoblins, upon which it makes a black stain that smells like scorched urine), it turns transparent, sinks into the skin, and for a short time (we might say 3 hours or so) smells strongly of a clear and pleasant fragrance like freshly-opened roses. Correctly known to be made of nut oil, alcohol, and the sap of three abundant, nondescript field flowers. Cost per 1-pint flask: 4 sp.

Jassal: Subtle but capable of wafting for long distances "wild and fashionable" scent that looks like a blue-green translucent alcoholic drink, and smells like ripe cherries. On the body, it turns transparent, goes on with a chill (the alcohol evaporating), and imparts that same cherry smell for a goodly time (about 6 hours). It is widely believed to be made from cherries, alcohol, and some secret ingredient - - and in fact is made from alcohol and the distilled roots of thistles, nettles, and three small flowering weeds. Priestesses of Loviatar long ago discovered that if a body drenched in jassal is whipped, the skin briefly feels intense "on fire" pain, but heals itself of all scratches, weals, bruises, and other small wounds - - so the church now uses jassal in many rituals. Jassal-coated flesh makes loud cracking sounds, and emits an intense cherry smell, even if the initial smell has faded almost to nothing. Cost per 1-pint flask: 140 gp.

Sunrise: A yellow-orange translucent liquid that smells like fresh-grated lemons. On the body it turns transparent, and instantly imparts a minty "fresh" smell with a citrus tang, that lasts for a goodly time (about 6 hours). It is widely believed to be made from alcohol, various citrus fruits, and "a secret ingredient," but in fact is alcohol in which particular sorts of mussels, oysters, and snails have been boiled, plus a few drops of the juice of a particular sort of melon, and more than a few drops of rabbit urine. Cost per 1-pint flask: 20 gp.

Tanlarl: A reddish-brown, oily ointment that turns transparent (and stops feeling oily) upon contact with the skin (warning: the smell is a very strong aphrodisiac to orcs and half-orcs, who may be moved to caressing males they would otherwise shun in favor of females). It smells of faint woodsmoke before body contact, and on some bodies of either gender and any race has no smell at all, but on most female bodies smells mildewy, and on most male bodies smells warm, leathery, and very arousing to females. It is widely believed to be made from the body secretions of rare monsters, but is in fact derived from vegetable oils, the livers of oxen, and certain herbs. Cost per 1-pint flask: 12 gp.

1 gp to about 16 gp is the per-flask price range for most scents, by the way (with "reeking" Dock Ward "bad equivalents" available for 4 sp to 3 gp per flask.

Oh, and "Moonfire" sounds just fine to me. :}

So saith Ed.

Perfumer to the Realms. Think I'll go find me some of this darkdew stuff...

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love to all,
THO

June 4, 2007: Hello again, all.

Penknight, Ed and I would both be delighted to hear all about Moonfire. Er, fire away!

In terms of Realmslore, this time I bring everyone Ed's response to scribe Kyrene, re. this: "Ed and/or THO and/or others, Having researched the area of Triboar a bit, am I right in assuming a possible entrance to the Underdark exists in the general area? The North p. 78 seems to suggest that Ilrin Sharadin the renowned guide and tracker has dealings with the drow, while Nurvureem, "The Dark Lady", "does recall a time when she hated sunlight and lurked in caves that come to the surface somewhere near Triboar, exploring the surface world in tentative forays that occurred only in fog, stormgloom, or the darkness of night."

If that is the case, what would be the purpose of any drow party/individuals having Ilrin, a "puny human", as their "surfacer" contact? Surely a single person cannot buy surface equipment/goods in large enough quantities to act as a front. Or would he more likely be a go-between, organising trades with less than scrupulous merchants, but where the deal -- akin to a shady drug buy I suppose -- is performed close to/in the "caves that come to the surface"? Thanks in advance for your replies."

Ed replies:

Yes, there are several surface-Underdark connections in the wilderlands near Triboar, and one of them is large enough for the passage of wagons (there's a cavern JUST underground where goods can be transferred between surface conveyances and Underdark pack lizard trains). The other connections are tiny, winding tunnels that agile drow can traverse, that are usually choked at the top with small stones that have fallen into the crack and wedged there (a lone drow can "dig their way to the sun," but it may take as much as a quarter-day).

Ilrin does indeed act as a go-between for the drow, arranging meetings for deals in that cavern, which Ilrin calls his "cellar" and the drow call "Alruen" after a drow warrior who slaughtered many trolls there, centuries ago.

Ilrin is a good actor, knows the surface-world traders active in the area very well, and is careful not to swindle the drow and not to make enemies in Triboar or among the traveling traders; the drow have come to trust him and rely on him (he has made himself far too useful to be killed), and his patience and prudence have earned him a very good living. He has taken to buying buildings in Silverymoon (and, recently, in Neverwinter), and living off the rents, so as to keep his fees to the drow and the traders VERY low. Many surface traders frankly never want to meet the drow, and Ilrin acts for them in taking their goods to Alruen to make the trades (the traders give him asking prices and settle-for-no-less minimums, and he speaks for them).

So saith Ed.

Who (of course) knows the Realms better than anyone else.

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love to all,
THO

June 5, 2007: Hello again, all. This time I'm taking the throne to rake up some partial answers to Mumadar Ibn Huzal's question from the end of May in 2005, and AlorinDawn's similar recent query.

Here (from page 42 of the 2005 thread) is Mumadar Ibn Huzal's post: "A rather mundane question for Ed: What do the Realmsians use to heat their buildings - especially in the cities?"

The map showing trade goods etc in FRCS shows coal production - but only in Cormyr. And I cannot recall this as being a major industry in the Forest Kingdom. Nor have I seen much in the sense of coal mines - other than a few appearances in dwarven holds and the mine in the Baldur's Gate game in the Cloak Wood.

Wood is an obvious answer, but would require quite some trade and stockpiling in the fuel material for cities, especially those at more northern latitudes (Waterdeep, Silverymoon etc.) Again, I cannot recall having come across references of these types of trade for instance in novels or products dealing with for instance Waterdeep."

Recently, AlorinDawn posted this query: "Ed & THO, I hope I'm not asking something that you have already answered. Do most folks in Waterdeep heat with wood or coal? Thanks"

At that time I answered "I believe Ed has already answered that (wood wins over coal, but there's camel-dung-patties in desert regions, and some other fuels)." and promised to check Ed's replies.

I've finally found time enough to do so, so here are some relevant words of Ed from these Ask Eddie threads, down the years:

* From p44 of the 2004 thread, Ed describing the Sword Coast coastal fishing community of Ulgoth's Beard: "All of the salts dwell in dirt-floored, windowless stone cottages with roofs of growing turf (planted with herbs and edibles). Most such dwellings have an entry room that doubles as a dining and living room (and in winter, as a kitchen), and opens into two or three inner rooms that are given over to use as bedchambers and storage (including pantries). The hearth is central, and stones are heated in cold weather to be placed in beds and cold corners, and so warm the dwelling as much as possible. Fisherfolk refer to these humble cottages as their "dens." In summer, they gather peat and wood (some of which they "slowburn" in clay-choked fires, into charcoal) for use in winter cooking, gather berries from thickets in the "breaks" along the cliffs, and smoke and salt fish. Most homes in the Beard have outside chimney-ovens for all summer cooking, and racks on which the fisherfolk lay out their nets for drying and mending, and (under fine bird-nets) filleted fish for curing."

* From page 74 of the 2004 thread, Ed describing the southern Moonsea shore at the time Northkeep was flourishing:
"the land was thick woods swiftly being cut down for firewood and reduced to rutted mud rather than being cultivated and looked after."

* From page 8 of the 2005 Ask Ed thread, Ed describing Ardeepforest:
"human woodcutters, charcoal-burners and hunters despoil Ardeep daily"

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* From page 41 of the 2005 Ask Ed thread, Ed describing city "tallhouses" (as found in Semiba, Waterdeep, etc.): "In all cases, each tenant will have their own chamberpots and kitchen facilities, or be forced to use a communal outdoor brick oven and/or privies at the end of the back garden. (In the case of tenants who occupy entire floors, cooking tends to be on a back balcony to minimize fire risks and cooking smells, except perhaps in the coldest winter weather, when warmth is desired.)"

Think small iron-cauldron wood stoves with iron legs, resting on layers of stones and used to heat surrounding 'walls' of stacked stones that can be carried to beds or other rooms to radiate warmth, with said stoves all having metal-cylinder chimneys led through the rooms horizontally (for warmth and to yield a hanging place to dry damp clothing) to windows where shutters can be opened to let out the smoke."

* From page 3 of the 2006 Ask Ed thread, Ed describing farms:

As for farm size: in the Heartlands, there is no meaningful "average" farming family to discuss. Most families till six acres or less, though they may own or claim far more, because woodlots are a vital part of their farming (source of firewood, poles by coppicing, etc.), and so is 'wild' grazing land ("meadows").

And now, Ed adds:

Although desert areas in the Realms use dried camel-dung patties as fire-fuel, the cold northern areas use equivalents (the dung of local pack-beasts), some areas of grasslands (such as the Shaar) use cut sheaves or "stooks" of dried grasses (straw), and some coastal areas use fish or whale oils, firewood is by far the most plentiful and widely-used fuel in most of the Realms.

Lands such as Cormyr, Chessenta, Tethyr, Turmish, and the Dales use coppicing on country estates (cutting limbs from living trees with care not to kill the tree, so it will regrow fuel for cutting again in a decade or less; see real-world rural England in the recent past for examples; coppiced trees have a distinct "look") to harvest high wood yields, and much wood destined for cities is "pre-burned" in fires built in huts to "cut" the wind, and smothered with turf so as to smoulder, down into charcoal. The charcoal is then separated and "smothered out;" when cold, it is transported to cities in metal boxes, for sale.

Charcoal burns hotter and faster than wood, with less smoke (cutting down on blinding, choking smoke clouds in crowded cities), and can be scented with various liquids (see my earlier post on scents) to give off pleasant odours.

And there you have it. The definitive 'fuel in the Realms' answer from Ed.

love to all,
THO

June 6, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. Harken this time to the words of Ed regarding this query from createvmind: "Hello again, As a slight add-on to my most recent question, Ed how would you describe the effects to a player suffering Wisdom or Intelligence damage for first time and the difference between the two, and do you visualize Charisma damage as more than just damage to

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one's appearance? If a person suffers Wis and Int damage will one effect mask the other so the person may be unaware of how badly they are affected?

This is more in regards to non-spellcasting classes, as spellcasting classes obviously become aware rather quickly due to their spells being affected. Thanks"

Ed replies:

The effects of such damage on a character depend on the severity and possible combinations of the damage they suffer, but in general:

Wisdom damage affects memory; the ability to see consequences (from drawing on previous experience); memorized skills (ever seen a carpenter who's been swinging a hammer all his life suddenly stop and stare at it like he's never seen it before?); and judgement (does what this person is saying sound likely? can I trust this person? He's an orc dripping blood from his teeth but those teeth are smiling...).

Intelligence damage affects problem-solving; the ability to figure out necessary sequences of future events; the ability to keep track of multiple foes, moving targets or people; the ability to separate out (and concentrate on) one conversation from another; and foresight.

Charisma damage is most often damage to appearance (it's amazing how horrific a beautiful woman looks when her nose is bitten off to expose a "bony hole"), but can include foul odours, a change in manner from friendly or decisive to deranged or leering or furtive, and so on; all of these things (and more, notably "a certain something," meaning the intangible way in which a person gets noticed, respected, or "catches the eye") affect how people are perceived and can influence others, and that's what Charisma measures.

Combinations of Wis and Int damage often rob the victim of the ability to comprehend how badly they've been affected, though they usually "know something's wrong." Yes, they may be very badly affected but fail to realize it because they no longer can (e.g. the agile, acrobatic thief who doesn't realize how badly her balance is affected, and staggers across a quite wide ledge to fall off a cliff).

So saith Ed.

Myself, I think Torm has almost no Wisdom at all; only his lightning-swift Intelligence has kept him alive, all these years. Ed says that character stats don't bear that out, but I believe the way he's been played does.

love to all,
THO

June 7, 2007: Hello again, all. Divers responses this time...

Kyrene, you're very welcome.

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Penknight, Ed and I both feel that your Moonfire is "right on" for the Realms, and we will adopt it into Realmsplay in the home Realms campaign forthwith. Nicely done!

Purple Dragon Knight, Toronto has always been a hotbed of gaming, SCA activity (U of T and York in particular), and sf fandom (anchored by annual Ad Astra and Toronto Trek cons) but I'm afraid Ed and I are both out of date re. "good Canadian Cons out and about the GTA." There's a long-running con called Pandemonium that tends to be fractious and has even had competing cons of the same name run by factions, an excellent but small downtown Peterborough (yes, Peterborough!) annual con called Phantasm, and "trade show dealing" at the SF Expo/Anime Expo/Comic Expo/I can't recall the official name of this "big mash" event near or on the Labour Day weekend, down in the Convention Centre nigh the CN Tower and the Domed stadium; it has no gaming sessions, but a huge and chaotic "selling floor" of comics, costumes, gaming, and et cetera booths akin to GenCon's exhibit hall. Ryerson has a gaming club that put together a recent designers' symposium with Ed, Robin Laws, etc., who might be able to tell you more about conventions; Ed and I are both out of touch with the old gaming stores (all gone) and their conventions, though Greg Peevers of the RPGA, resident in Toronto, runs frequent Greyhawk-set official RPGA events at what are presumably frequent conventions! I'd try to contact him and the Ryerson group (there's a Student Centre on the south side of Gould Street, where the old Journalism building used to be, just east of "Lake Devo," that seems to be meeting-room-central and have contact info for all the student clubs). I understand how you feel about the "must work rush work rush put in more unpaid overtime get ahead GET AHEAD" lifestyle now prevalent in the GTA; it's one of the reasons Ed moved out into the country almost two decades ago, though he dearly loved the Don Mills parkland haunts of his childhood, and the whole Bakka/Silver Snail sf fandom scene. (Way out the other direction, in Guelph, there's another university gaming club, too... and much closer, in Hamilton every spring, Rose Kriedmann and her husband run the Great Canadian Baycon, which is indeed "great.")

And to AlorinDawn's query: "Ed & THO, Greetings. I was just wondering which herd beast is more commonly kept in the Realms for meat. The standard cow or Rothe? In addition where in the Realms are Alpaca and or Lammas commonly kept? Thanks"

Ed now makes reply:

The most popular "meat" animals (as opposed to pigeons, grouse, wild turkeys, chickens, and other meat birds, which are wing-clipped and reared in large penned-in flocks in many places) in Faerûn are, in descending order of popularity:

1. sheep
2. goats
3. rothé in the North, but cows south of the northern border of Amn, and including Cormyr, the Dales, Sembia and the Vast (and south of those places). Alpaca- and llama-like creatures are kept in northern Rashemen and points east of there, plus sprinklings all over cold, mountainous regions throughout the Realms.
4. hogs and boar.

The popularity of sheep and goats is due to their relative hardiness, small and manageable size (it's easier to lift them out of chasms, carry injured ones, shut them inside a structure with a human family of nights when wolves or other predators are prowling, and so on), and ability to forage on rougher terrain than cows (goats in particular will eat almost anything; like hogs, they can be used as a garbage disposal).

So saith Ed, wise sage of Realms agriculture.

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love to all,
THO

June 8, 2007: Hello again, fellow scribes. This time I bring you Ed's answer to Blueblade's query: "Dear Ed and Lady THO, I was wondering if there was anything Ed could let slipXXX er, tell us at this time about the forthcoming THE ANNOTATED ELMINSTER (beyond the obvious bit about it containing the text of the first three Elminster novels). Anything? Free bookmarks, scratch-and-sniff centerfolds, dancing girls?"

Ed makes reply:

It will contain the text of all three novels (meaning, I suspect, that the original editions will go out of print), plus extensive (over 20,000 words total, but you'll have to decide if I used 20,000 good ones :) commentary by yours truly on all three. However, I'm afraid I can't say more at this time. Other than to say I've written those words and handed them in.

So saith Ed, busiest of keyboard-pounding beavers.

AlorinDawn, I've just sent your Val Valusek query on to Ed. I know Ed knows her, because he has more than a few of her smaller line drawings hung on his walls (Volo's Guide and Tolkien scenes), and I know he bought them from her personally.

love to all,
THO

On June 8, 2007 THO said: As far as I know (and Ed knows!!!!) it just contains the first three. If the fourth one got squeezed in, it'd be a truly wrist-breaking book - - and Ed better get cracking on more annotations!

love,
THO

On June 8, 2007 THO said: Yes, "FRA" is longtime Realms designer-speak for FORGOTTEN REALMS ADVENTURES (just as "FR0" means what most folk at Candlekeep call the Old Gray Box). TSR was big on SHORT acronyms.

I know that hardcover doesn't have much in the way of details, but it does have "more" (and, of course, had even more before it got edited down, though as I recall, Ed was pretty good about writing to length on that one; when he started, TSR encouraged him to write however much he wanted, and just chopped the excess off and used it in later products written by others. FR5, for instance, is mainly "Ed overflow").

love,
THO

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The logo for Candlekeep, featuring the word "Candlekeep" in a stylized, yellow, outlined font with a slight shadow effect.

On June 9, 2007 THO said: Hi, all. I'll take the saddle this time, to answer (as promised a handcount of days ago) scribe Calrond re. this: "I came across something I found that Ed had written (I'm fairly certain) at least 3 years ago. It's an article called "Alustriel of Silverymoon, Queen of 'Courtly Love'".

<http://www.geocities.com/timesquare/castle/2566/ed-alustriel.htm>

At the end of the article, Ed describes a gaming session where the PCs had to look for Alustriel in a bathhouse-style room filled with naked people making love, and he mentions the looks on the players' faces at that point.

My question is if you were a part of that gaming session, Hooded Lady, and if so, can you add anything to the story? (Why did the players need to find Alustriel? What happened when they found her?) My curiosity has been piqued."

Right. Here we go...

Yes, Ed wrote that some time ago; I'd say comfortably more than three years, by now. To put it briefly:

In the home Realms campaign, we Knights were in Everlund, trying to track down some Zhent spies and plots. We found a dying Harper (Zhent work), and were tasked by her to race to Silverymoon to swiftly get a brief, urgent message to Alustriel. As it concerned possible treachery in the Palace in Silverymoon (it was a warning to her of possible Zhent agents and their intended attack on someone), we were warned to deliver it to her ears alone, hopefully after we'd managed to get into her presence without too many courtiers seeing us. Ha-ha, and so forth; we knew by the twinkle in Ed's eye that THAT wasn't going to happen.

So it was "blunder in and try our best, at top speed" time. We prevailed upon a Harper we knew to get us into the city and then the Palace disguised and through secret passages, but when we reached his trusted contact, we found her missing, with a note left atop her discarded clothes: "Sorry, unexpected visit Storm Silverhand, wild revel called. Upper Bower, no clothing, Silverhair night."

The Harper groaned at that last, and went to find a certain apprentice mage to cast the spell necessary to turn the hair hue of all females among us silver, so we (like every other female in the Upper Bower, which proved to be a large but low-ceilinged, candlelit hall with a warm pool, lots of lounging cushions with drinkables and what I can only describe as chocolate icing for eating with the fingers and mouth out of its bowl or off proffered flesh) would resemble the two Sisters. We stripped, hiding a few needle-daggers in our hair (two of us also customarily wore choker ribbons about our throats that have dagger-sheaths at the back, so a sheathed dagger hangs down below the nape of our necks, concealed by our hair), and hastened to the revel.

We were afraid everyone would stop and stare at us upon our arrival, but there was so much coming and going (pun unintended), laughter, and folk dragging each other off into adjoining rooms for more energetic fun, that we were barely (ahem, unintended again) noticed at all.

The problem was, of course, the embarrassment of wandering around the dimly-lit, water and cushion-bedecked revel peering at every amorous couple, seeking to find Alustriel (possibly

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"underneath"). It took some time, but we managed it-and one of the Zhent traitors happened to be literally right on top of her at that moment, so she took firm hold of his throat, mind-reamed him silently on the spot, found out more about the plot than any of us (or the dying Harper) knew, and murmured a few quiet orders to amorous Silvaeren nearby, who drifted away to see to things (I assume she silently sent a few more mental messages to certain personages here and there in the city). Then, of course, she invited us to tarry and join the fun. Oh, and she went right on enjoying the Zhent, trying to lift his shattered spirits (and ahem, something else), rather than clapping him in irons or suchlike. He was trying to gabble apologies and she was nibbling at his ear and telling him, "Don't tell me you're sorry, SHOW ME you're sorry and trying to make it up to me."

And Storm was winking at us all from nearby; Torm groped her under the water and she used one leg to tug him under and hold him there, his frantic bubblings tickling her. Memorable fun.

I do have a brief note from Ed to add: most of the Baldur's Gate NDAs remain in force; he slipped his recent lore reply through a gap in them.

Clever lad.

love to all,
THO

On June 9, 2007 THO said: It was indeed.

However, I'm not going to say anything more about that stag-headed entity, because Ed Has Plans for him/her/it.

love,
THO

June 10, 2007: Hi again, all. This time I present Ed's Realmslore reply to these two posts of related queries from createvmind: "Hello All, Ed can you explain the advantage of Yaun-ti making humans into Tainted and brood guards? In the description it doesn't say anything in regards to a Yaun-ti actually gaining control of the tainted human just from the transformation.

I assume that this process makes tainted humans more vulnerable to mental domination by the Yaun-ti but doesn't actually make the human a slave of the Yuan-ti due to transformation.

If I'm correct then would I be correct in assuming that only Yaun-ti perform this process, never do they give the potion to their slaves to administer on their behalf since they can't follow up with the mind control. Or does the process ostracize the once human from normal society and leave them no choice but to serve the Yaun-ti for fear of human prejudice?

I've notice mention of a Tainted One Harper in Serpents Cowl (SK) but it's not made clear whether he was a Harper prior to transformation.

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Basically I'm trying to see if the tainted ones sent to deal with the PC's would be given potion to attempt to transform the human PC's by their Yuan-ti master."

and:

"Hello All, Mr. Greenwood as a follow up to my Yaun-ti question I now tread into darker waters, if the same potion were given to a pregnant woman, what becomes of the unborn child when she is transformed into either Tainted One or Broodguard? What happens to unborn children when women are subject to harmful spells/attacks that inflict level drain and such things, like a percentage roll to determine whether child is affected and possibly how.

Question only struck me as now the situation may occur in game and got me to wondering, "Women can have it pretty rough in Faerun when it comes to such things, poisonings and drugs and such." so I await your response on such a delicate matter." (Jamallo Kreen echoed an interest in Atad "Yelloweyes," the Harper in Serpent's Cowl.)

Ed replies:

I hope Eric's answer has taken care of Atad on Serpent's Cowl, but I'll try to tackle your other questions.

First and foremost: no, it would NOT be usual for slaves to administer those potions unless the yuan-ti had a lot of captives to "process," and they were firmly in yuan-ti custody (chained or in cells, in a yuan-ti compound or city). Even then, a yuan-ti would accompany the slaves, for reasons I'll outline hereafter.

So tainted ones sent to negotiate, fight with, or capture PCs might have other potions with them that make the PCs fall asleep or slide into a lassitude [equal to a slowed condition, speech falls to a murmur, one action per round and no "free actions"], or more likely have darts or needle-daggers freshly dipped in such potions, but wouldn't carry the transformative potions.

Your assumption is correct: potion-affected (transformed) humans are made more vulnerable to mental domination by the yaun-ti, but imbibing the potion doesn't actually make the human a slave of the yuan-ti.

What the potion does is remove any human fear of snakes, make human tongues capable of picking up scents and the human's brain instantly aware of what these subtle odors mean (so they can sense yuan-ti emotions a lot better than if they haven't drunk the potion), "imprint" the affected human to submit to any yuan-ti staring into their eyes as the potion transforms them, and alters their bodies not just visibly, but also so as to make any controlling spells cast on them last indefinitely (i.e. makes them in effect permanent unless other magical or alchemical means are later used to counter them). They sense vibrations as a yuan-ti does, understand the yuan-ti hierarchy and respond to it (a "chemical tug" within them, in accordance with scent and sight), and are also rendered temporarily docile after imbibing the potion (torpid; they are in no condition to do anything quickly, such as flee, fight, try to resist yuan-ti spellcastings, et cetera).

Yes, the transformation does make most unaffected humans shun the transformed one out of fear and disgust, and in some situations (after the torpor wears off) can drive them to flee or seek the "protection" of the yuan-ti.

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... I've broken Ed's reply here, and will post the rest of it immediately after this one; shorter posts more often seem to get through all right, whereas longer ones are far more likely to trigger a "timed out." Back in a minute.

love, THO

Hi again, all. Here's the rest of Ed's yuan-ti createvmind reply:

Please note that some humans feel "on fire" as the potion begins its work, and may fight or flee in a frenzy before the transformation really starts to take hold, and torpor sets in (so an affected spellcaster could hurl spells, snatch up a spellbook and wands, and then run like blazes, as scales are starting to appear on his or her skin, to get away from other humans and "hide" or seek out a temple, before calming into placidity and slowing to a plod or lying down in concealment to give in to the rest of the change.

What the yuan-ti usually WANT to do is force a potion into a human, and then hold the human's jaw or head so as to stare fixedly into its eyes as the transformation takes place, to gain dominance over the transformed human.

Some humans are overwhelmed by the heightened smell, and vomit (this doesn't lessen the potion effects), and others are aroused (sexually), and writhe and moan or purr, often seeking to rub their skins and the sides of their heads against yuan-ti, other humans, handy walls, and so on.

Moreover, most yuan-ti tribes have their own recipes for these potions, that vary slightly from the potions used by other tribes; this makes humans affected by their potions respond to them as slaves, and experience mild revulsion when approached by other yuan-ti. In other words, the potion makes the humans receptive to the controlling spells of the yuan-ti who fed them the potion, but far less receptive to other yuan-ti.

When it comes to the effects of a potion on a pregnant woman, that must be left to the Dungeon Master. The DM must determine "what happens" so as to best handle player sensibilities, overarching campaign plotlines, and so on. In general: unborn carried children are at more risk than the mother when it comes to life-sapping magic, magical potions, poisons, and drugs (because her body's blood supply transmits everything swiftly to them, in concentration, and because their small size makes them more vulnerable to life draining), so it's quite likely that the potion will be (select a result):

fatal to the unborn

fatal and force an immediate stillbirth

transform the unborn completely into a (pureblood) yuan-ti, resulting in a weak and miniature-sized yuan-ti being born instantly and wounding the mother as it emerges because of its abrupt change in form (even though the mother is being herself transformed at the time; mother/child bond remains)

force an immediate birth; unborn human is unaffected by transformation, but may (depending on development) not be able to survive long beyond birth

mother is transformed, unborn is not; no ill effects on unborn (this is probably the least likely outcome of the options presented here)

This is indeed a sensitive topic, and the DM must decide which option to use with an eye to not upsetting players, maximizing roleplaying possibilities, and so on (for instance, as a DM I would

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find the unborn-transformed-into-pureblood-yuan-ti to be a fascinating outcome, as regards roleplaying, but I would not pick that option if I thought it would deeply upset or anger my players, this being a game intended for fun, after all, and with my overarching imperative being the survival of an enjoyable campaign).

In the "good old" TSR days, these things were very simple: human pregnancy and childbirth were "out of bounds" when it came to the Code of Ethics, beyond mentioning that a given kingdom had an heir or not, or a prince or princess was expected to marry to provide one. We could never have discussed this in print, anywhere.

When writing SERPENT KINGDOMS, all three of us had so much ground to cover, and the Tainted One/Broodguard information had already appeared in print in three other 3rd Edition sources, that there was no way we were going to revisit it (I wrote the yuan-ti "life of" section, as it happened). If someone had wanted me to fill 300 pages just on yuan-ti, yes, this sort of material, plus yuan-ti language, hobbies, and art, a "scent code" and all sorts of other cool details would have appeared. Everything you could ever have wanted to know about yuan-ti, and a whole lot more.

So saith Ed, ever-energetic Realms designer.

Who right now has to go pull weeds out of the potato patch, his wife insists.

love to all,
THO

June 11, 2007: Hi again, all. Ed and I chatted briefly about Atad "Yelloweyes" after his reply to createvmind, and decided the original query, plus the followup from Jamallo Kreen, deserved more of a response.

So here's JK's query: "I, too am very interested in Atad "Yelloweyes." I had him appear briefly as an NPC in a recent game, but since I didn't know whether he was a Tainted One who was fighting the taint with the knowing help of the Harpers, or a Harper who had become Tainted and is now used by the yuan-ti against local humans, I just let him slide through the adventure without giving him any real personality or goals (secret or otherwise) than making some gold as a guide for some of Aluena's guests (the PCs). Ed, please tell us more about him."

And here's Ed's reply:

Atad "Yelloweyes" is the sole survivor of the Ruush'lek ("ROOSSH-[[glottal stop]]-lullek"), a small yuan-ti family. More than two decades ago, the Ruush'lek were exterminated by the Company of Crazy Venturers after the Venturers tracked the boldest Ruush'lek, whom they knew only as "Rimriskal the Unblinking," a sinister yuan-ti trader-in-poisons in Scornubel, to the family lair (after Rimriskal fatally poisoned several merchants in Scornubel the Venturers were buying information about "snakefolk" trade dealings from). The small, well-hidden family cavern-lair is northeast of the village.

Atad is a soft-spoken, manipulative, gentle-of-manner sort (expert at "fading into the background when necessary") who slowly won trust in the Cowl. Of all the Ruush'lek, he was the least menacing to humans (and if truth be known, hated his kin, all of whom oppressed him as a

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"weakling"). He dwells alone in the family lair, keeping his belongings hidden under rocks there and staying at home seldom; he usually sleeps in the open, and when not guiding makes a living as a local maker and seller of soothing (not healing) ointments, cosmetics, scents, dyes, and sauces (he brings them into the Cowl after dark, selling them to the proprietor of the Dusty Dragon for resale).

Atad serves the Harpers as a local "eyes and ears" spy, faithfully reporting to them any contacts he has with yuan-ti or their agents seeking to co-opt him in any schemes (usually shady trade deals originating in Scornubel); his standing orders from the Harpers are to "go along" with all such schemes. The Harpers use him more as a passive information gatherer and source of handy disguises (he's superb at swiftly applying cosmetics, and can change the apparent hue of a human's skin, or make them appear subtly older or younger, VERY quickly) than anything else. His family cavern provides travelling Harpers with a handy "safe house" to sleep over or recuperate in, and he tells the Harpers as much as he can learn (without asking) about everyone who hires him as a guide. He has a way (washed garment hung to dry on a certain branch) of signalling to passing Harpers to follow him on some guiding expeditions (so they'll trail the party he's guiding, keeping out of sight unless he needs rescuing or the party launches a brigand ambush or gets caught in a fight with yuan-ti or anyone else that the Harpers want to intercede in).

So saith Ed.

Several Venturers (notably the characters played by Andrew Dewar) has some side-adventures in Serpent's Cowl, and it was also used in one of Ed's library mini-campaigns. For a time, it was certainly one of those "sleepy little villages that hides sinister secrets."

love to all,
THO

June 12, 2007: Hello again, all. This time I come bearing Ed's Realmslore reply to Blueblade re. this: "A Cormyr campaign query: If I am a young noble in Cormyr right now, Realms-time, do I know which nobles (or families) are most opposed to Caladnei? Or Alusair as Regent?"

I'm not talking exiled nobles or advocates of treason, I mean nobles who aren't fans of Caladnei, or of the Regency, and either politely say so, or quietly work against the authority or plans of either the Royal Magician or the Regent, or both.

Or are such opponents VERY secretive, and I couldn't know?

Thanks!"

Ed replies:

Most young nobles in Cormyr are viewed as "flamebrains" (hotheads) by elder nobles, who will tell said younger nobles (except for heirs) nothing about "sensitive" matters.

However, that doesn't mean young nobles are stupid or unobservant; they can usually tell exactly how their elders feel about something, even when "past personal history" is successfully kept secret. (And it often isn't, due to catty gossip among nobles that servants overhear and can pass

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on even when said younger nobles aren't present to hear, and to drunken or enraged-by-rivals nobles having loose tongues upon many occasions.)

So your "average" young Cormyrean noble, if there can be said to be such a thing, has a pretty good idea of family attitudes.

Caladnei is considered "fair game" (as in: "safe to sneer at"), because she's an outlander, she's not believed to have the competence Vangerdahast did in either using the War Wizards as her personal iron fist or in using them to find out what every last noble is thinking, let alone saying. However, almost every noble is secretly relieved to have Caladnei as Royal Magician and NOT Laspeera (who is presumed to know EXACTLY which noble closets house skeletons, and what all of those skeletons are wearing, too) or someone almost as well-versed in Cormyrean history and with a lot more Art up his or her sleeve. So "catty sneers" on the order of, "Well, what can one expect? She's hardly one of us, truly of Cormyr, now, is she?" are de rigeur, but Caladnei's very "shy, retiring, tentative" style has kept her from nobles actually working against her, beyond snorting, "What befalls when a little lass is handed the top throne-task, aye?" or "When's little Miss Mouse going to grow up a little, is what I'D like to know!" or "What's she hiding, behind her little ooh-coo act? THAT one bears watching!"

With all of that said, her most vocal public critics are probably the Illances, with the older Emmarask matrons (NOT Alaphondar) running a close second.

So saith Ed.

Who will return with more for Blueblade (this time about the Regency, and Princess Alusair) on the morrow.

love to all,
THO

June 13, 2007: Hi again, everyone. As promised, here's the rest of Ed's reply to Blueblade, this time about: "If I am a young noble in Cormyr right now... do I know which nobles (or families) are most opposed to... Alusair as Regent?"

I'm not talking exiled nobles or advocates of treason, I mean nobles who aren't fans of... the Regency, and either politely say so, or quietly work against the authority or plans of... the Regent... Or are such opponents VERY secretive, and I couldn't know?"

Ed replies:

Outside the realm (in Westgate and Sembia), what's left of the Dracohorns and Cormaerils are loud and frequent in their condemnations of the Regency, but most other nobles regard their words as personal enmity and not valid criticisms.

Inside the realm, certain Huntsilvers and Crownsilvers believe Alusair has demonstrated a headstrong, ruled-by-her-rages tendency since childhood that make her fine for leading bloody cavalry charges in battle, but a disaster just waiting to happen as a ruler. They believe that having a very young king is a perfect situation for "prudent and wise" courtiers such as Alaphondar to rule Cormyr, taking direction from a council of senior nobles (said council including certain

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Huntsilvers and Crownsilvers, of course). This could lead to a permanent reduction in the power of the Obarskys and of the War Wizards, so that senior nobles could curb the "excesses" of the Dragon Throne and safeguard a realm that makes war far less often, and in peaceful prosperity enriches the leading noble families over and over again; in other words, laws and customs would benefit the nobles and landowners, not outlander traders such as Sembians, and the perennial problems with Arabel and Marsember would recede as the rightful ruling families of those places saw the ongoing personal benefits of remaining at peace, and using the Purple Dragons (enforcing laws fine-tuned to benefit the nobles) to crush rivals and "upstart" wealthy merchants who "don't know their places."

However, you as a young noble would NOT know that certain Huntsilvers and Crownsilvers are behind such beliefs, only that "any truly sensible noble, who knows what's REALLY going on," believes that such a way of ordering Cormyr would really be best for the realm, if the Steel Regent and the Dowager Queen could only, somehow, be nudged into accepting it. Not that that bitch Alusair can be nudged into doing anything that doesn't involve mounting and riding a young noble who catches her eye. Still, no Obarskyr lives forever...

(You would "know" such attitudes because you would hear them muttered, by many older nobles of many houses, at revels and feasts and hunts and upper-room gaming-moots, over and over again [pointedly outside the hearing of any Obarskys, War Wizards, or Purple Dragons]. Said older nobles would be seeking to slowly and subtly make younger nobles think this way, and keep an eye out for who agrees with such thinking, and who reacts against it.)

So saith Ed.

Giving us all a glimpse of what we Knights have known for years: with Ed as DM, Cormyr is an endlessly fascinating place that really comes alive, with an endless parade of surging and swirling intrigues.

love to all,
THO

On June 13, 2007 THO said: No, no snubbing.

But thanks for your concern.

Ed tells me the ladies of the library he works with love going to CBA - - for some of them, meeting certain authors (and scoring free books) is a thrill - -so someone has to stay behind and run the library. Several someones, in fact, one of them being Ed. Who has signed so many thousands of books at so many CBAs that the thrill is gone. (Various publicists miss him, because they persist in wearing high heels, year after year, and ending up with aching feet - - and Ed insists on giving them foot massages, so they worship him.)

So this year he stayed home and finished up the annotations for the Annotated Elminster, instead.

love,
THO

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On June 13, 2007 THO said: Wooly dearest, regarding your query about "dumb XXX" Realms jokes, Ed will reply soon, but I can start you off by saying that in the Dragonreach lands (well, the Dales and the Vast, at least), Ambral Isle is the colloquial home of fops and dunderheads, so that's one of the regional butts of those "dumb" jokes.

love,
THO

June 14, 2007: Hello again, fellow scribes. This time Ed responds to Bladewind about this query: "Warm winds. I've been pondering on the life and looks of the dark elves before they got cursed for some time now. What was the main difference between the green elves and the dark elves in the regions around Illithiir? The dark elves build more groundlevel cities and lived in the deeper and darker parts of the jungles? Could Mr. Greenwood tell me about their architecture, military and symbolism?"

Ed replies:

Certainly, and with pleasure.

In all species discussions, please bear in mind that we're always talking in generalizations (there will always be individual "exceptions to the rule").

So, IN GENERAL, the green elves embraced the rain and open exposure to weather and the life cycles of green, growing things (especially trees), and sought to live high up in living trees (sometimes in natural hollows within trees, but never cutting or burning out trees so as to harm them). Green elves sought to live in harmony and balance with other benign woodland beings (such as treants), and to "garden" woodland plants so their harvestings, prunings, and meddlings always increased the health and growth of the forest.

The dark elves preferred caves and shadows and the gloom of the forest floor, avoiding bright sunlight and exposure to the elements. Over time, they took to building in stone, "fused with spells" stone (obsidian "black glass one-piece towers) in particular. In winter, they burrowed under snows, erecting hide-and-hoop (arched wooden beams) under-roof supports to make "snow-dens" (we might call them igloos) of sorts. Hiding from full sun and hunting by night were their habits.

Hunting by night brought them into conflict with the nocturnal predatory beasts of the forests, such as the great cats, so the dark elves took to hunting in well-armed bands, and over time shifted into a "we must conquer and rule" mindset: competing predators were to be slain (or enslaved as half-starved guardians). This led the dark elves to be increasingly martial, and brought them into increasing conflict with green elves (why go to the trouble of husbanding and gathering edible plant blossoms and leaves, when you can just forcibly take them from those who've done all the work for you?). These escalating conflicts caused the dark elves to develop the handbow (dart gun), so as to have a "second shot" capability at close quarters in the dark (where use of the green elf longbow could be hampered).

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Green elves came to be regarded as foes, more and more atrocities were done to them by the increasingly aggressive dark elves, and we all know the eventual result.

Green elves used sunlight, reflected sunlight, falling water (cascades and fountains), and many greens in their decoration and symbolism. Growing (rather than picked) flowering plants were abundant in green elf living spaces (your "room" was shared with living plants), and the symbolism of the natural seasonal cycles were embraced.

Dark elves revered moonlight, magical radiances, light reflected so as to cast artful shadows, and lights colored (ruby red, ale-brown, and so on) by magic and thin sheets of polished rock. Living areas were dimly-lit, with curved, cave-like encircling walls and roofs, often with furniture (lounge chairs, sleeping platforms) "built in" as part of the walls; these living areas were often, of course, actual caverns or earth burrows whose dirt walls had been sealed and concealed behind magically-melted silica rock (glass). Revered symbols were concerned with power: magical radiances in the shape of (or actually emanating from actual) weapons or helms or gauntlets or house heraldry; hunting trophies such as horns and skulls and teeth, mounted in staves or on helms or on dwelling walls; wells of water (for underground control of drinkable water was a prized thing) were given pride of place in rooms, and often enspelled to glow, or sited so that moonlight brought down glass-sealed shafts would shine upon the waters.

And so on. :}

So saith Ed.

Whose reply should, of course, be taken as applying only to the Realms.

love to all,
THO

On June 14, 2007 THO said: Quick note of breaking news: Ed just received his advance copies of EXPEDITION TO UNDERMOUNTAIN, and tells me it's "gorgeous."

love to all,
THO

June 16, 2007: Hi again, everyone. This time I bring Ed of the Greenwood's reply to RodOdom, regarding this: "Oh great Master Ed and Mistress THO,

Where can one find a sight like this on Faerun:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2e/Armenia_Khorvirap.jpg/758px-Armenia_Khorvirap.jpg

Ed replies:

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Right, then, we have tilled fields in the foreground with wheat (or another tall grain crop) ready to harvest beyond, green hills that have been cleared and used for grazing, a walled stone home, verdant uplands in the distance, rising to snow-capped mountains.

This could be one of literally hundreds of places in the Realms. To list just a few:

Murghom, looking north to the Mountains of Copper
Durpar, the mountains then being the Giant's Belt range
east of Innarlith, looking south to the Firesteap Mountains
on the shores of the Deepwash, looking towards the Snowflake Mountains
the Dragon Coast, looking towards the Giant's Run Mountains
the Greenfields, looking towards the Cloud Peaks
Semphar
Estagund
Amn
Tethyr

and so on, and on, and on. :) Anywhere temperate near mountains, where the woods have been cleared, and humans have settled to grow crops and graze beasts. Nice picture (not that I have time to jaunt off to Armenia to get a better look, just now :)).

So saith Ed.

Who can tourist-tour the Realms in his head, whenever he wants. He tells me he's spent some happy hours in boring meetings, in the past, doing just that.

love to all,
THO

June 17, 2007: Hail and well met again, fellow scribes. This time Ed makes answer to Reefy, in the matter of this query: "Greetings to Ed and the Lady Hooded One, I have two questions.

What can you tell me about the famed Agannazar? I'm interested in his appearance, personality, mannerisms etc.

The same goes for the mysterious Mistmaster.

I have mined what little printed sources on the subjects I can find."

Ed replies:

I'm afraid the Mistmaster is and remains under NDA. Sorry.

As for Agannazar: shoulder-length blond hair, with "daggerboard" sideburns ("the Elvis look") and a high forehead. Beaky nose, bushy blond eyebrows, piercing emerald eyes (and I mean PIERCING: glare like laser beams, and had a habit of whirling around to fix people with stares), testy manner, sharp voice. Tended to be restlessly alert ("hyper" is how many modern real-world

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folk would describe him), but not a gabbler: usually silent unless spoken to. Strode forward purposefully, head forward (the "vulture stalk," some who saw him at MageFairs called it).

Tended to dress in deep red cloaks, over red or purple silk shirts, breeches and boots (NEVER robes unless "dressed up" to attend a nobles' revel or attend a royal court). Body covered with a thick pelt of fine yellow hair, but face always clean-shaven.

Frowned all the time; when thinking, often spread the fingers of one hand out like a spider, planted them on a tabletop or windowsill, and bent over to stare down at them, standing or sitting immobile for long periods. Tended to hum (and say "umm-hmm" deep in his throat) when contented, never whistled. Tuneless singer and knew it, so avoided singing. Vain; didn't like to be embarrassed.

When I called him "testy," I meant: didn't suffer fools gladly, didn't like to have folk disagree with his opinions or judgements, or question his decisions or deeds (however, he held opinions only on matters he'd seen and thought about, mainly magical; he wasn't a windbag or know-it-all, and detested mages and priests who were).

A loner, whose dealings with the opposite gender were few and of this manner: liked to watch nude dancers (usually in clubs or "higher-class" taverns where patrons were not encouraged to call out comments, throw coins, or otherwise intrude on performances). If the dancers were beautiful elves or half-elves, Agannazar could watch for long periods, and "watching was enough." If the dancers were human, he usually, after watching for some time, paid for a room and a lass to share it with, but insisted the room be utterly dark and the woman blindfolded and a passive participant; he would tip handsomely and make love vigorously, but never utter a word.

Agannazar traveled widely, created about two dozen spells (most of them concerned with fire effects, and most of them refinements of other, older enchantments), often "hired on" for short periods as a guard-mage with costers or wealthy merchant families, avoided shady dealings and seldom went adventuring, and liked to cook exotic dishes, doodle swift caricatures (from memory, later, not as taunting "performance art" face-to-face) of persons he met and disliked. He was intensely interested in what other wizards were up to, and often paid informants (such as the apprentices of other mages, out drinking) to "tell him the latest."

That do?

So saith Ed.

Who spun this up in about two minutes from what he remembered of Agannazar when he roleplayed that mage (and described him to we Knights) when we "saw" Agannazar in a spell that had "recorded" three-dimensional images, with sound, of persons who in the past had cast magic in the room the spell was in. In other words, the room now held a series of short "movies" that could be played back repeatedly for viewing by someone who knew how to call on this spell.

Ed did, of course, create Agannazar in the first place.

love to all,
THO

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On June 17, 2007 THO said: Three niggles, thus far.

The tiniest: misspelling on a chapter head ("Awais" for "Awaits").

The middling-annoying: the cross-section of dungeon levels. Sewers start too deep, Mount Waterdeep is WAY too small (vis-a-vis Castle Waterdeep), and the Citadel of the Black Hand should be well up inside the mountain.

Biggest: the level maps are so small as to become fairly useless "pretty pictures" rather than usable maps. Astonishing move when the publisher is pushing miniatures in an ever-stronger manner.

On the flip side: it is SO nice to get this treatment for the Yawning Portal, and get an overview at last. Much simplified from Ed's original, but then, it all has to fit into one book, not nine or ten.

love to all,
THO

June 18, 2007: Hello again, all. George, you're very welcome!

This time Ed answers KnightErrantJR about this: "Here is a question in commemoration of the impending end of Dungeon Magazine. Since Iggwilv is about to be statted, for the first time, in the final few adventures of the Savage Tide adventure path, and since we've already gotten a bit of a glimpse of Elminster's meeting with Mordenkainen, as well as a few bits of info regarding Vangerdahast and Khelben's experiences with some of Oerth's more powerful wizards (in the Forgotten Realms Adventures hardcover back in 2nd edition)... well, here goes:

Has Elminster (or any other famous Realmsian wizard) met with the dastardly Iggwilv, and if so, under what circumstances?

Thanks in advance."

Ed replies:

So far as I know (meaning: Elminster, Storm, and Laeral insist not, and they're the only sources who ever drop into my study aside from one brief and highly uncomfortable visit by The Simbul), the answer to that one is: No. At least, not knowingly; I have to keep reminding myself that The Simbul isn't the only wizard who wears other shapes than her own more than she strolls about as herself. (An aside: she has a wardrobe full of tattered black gowns, not just one, so it's not a single filthy rag she never changes but rather a "look." Most of her gowns are little better than peek-a-boo "skeletons" of fabric, but she doesn't mind a whit. Barefoot and wild-haired, she simply doesn't care what she looks like or if she's showing skin. She does NOT pose provocatively, slink about alluringly, or care what anyone else thinks of her.

Iggwilv probably dresses and behaves rather differently. :}

So saith Ed.

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Creator of The Simbul but not Iggwilv (Gary Gygax, I think, but I've only chatted with the elder TSR folks twice or thrice; Gygax, Arneson, Brian Blume, Len Lakofka... and Greyhawk was never as enthralling to me as Ed's Realms, so not as many details of "old Greyhawk stories" stuck in my memories, I'm afraid.

love to all,
THO

On June 19, 2007 THO said: Ahhh, LOVELY questions, RF!

I have sent them off to Ed for replies (though I'm not sure whether he'll be able to get to them before he flits off to Michigan in a few days time), but I can provide a partial answer to the second one: many of the characters who seek to appear younger are either adventurers or vulnerable females; they don't want others to get any idea that they are less than vigorous and formidable, so avoid being robbed, raped, murdered, etc.

love,
THO

June 19, 2007: Hi again, fellow scribes. This time I bring Ed's response to Adrix, re. this: "Hail Ed and the Hooded One; I have what may seem a trivial question to pose, and one I hope has not yet been covered in your volumes of answers here at Candlekeep. What makes up traveling rations, specifically, is there anything unique to the realms or various regions contained within? Also, does popcorn exist in the Realms, and if not or so, what snacks do exist?"

Sorry, I'm hungry..."

Ed replies:

No need to be sorry you're hungry, Adrix. I'm almost ALWAYS hungry. :}

Just as in our real world, the Realms holds a great variety of snacks, including those our Lady Hooded gave you.

Let me run through a quick (and far from complete) list. Where places are listed, they are locales where said "handfoods" (munchies) are especially popular:

hand pies (meat-and-gravy-filled, savoury palm-sized pastries of an astonishing variety of ingredients and tastes, from curries, to leek-with-bacon, to minted lamb): the Heartlands, the Dales, Savage Coast North

salted, roasted seeds (especially pumpkin and loalurr [pistachios]): the Tashalar

handwheels of sharp yellow cheeses (some with ground nuts or diced olives inside, or laced with zzar or various other "cordials" [liqueurs]): the Heartlands, the Dales, Savage Coast North

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raisins: the Heartlands, coasts of the Sea of Fallen Stars

date cakes (pressed flat ovals): Calimshan, the Tashalar

fig cakes (pressed flat ovals): Calimshan

cranberry cakes (pressed flat ovals): Sembia, the Vilhon, Turmish

dried apricots: the Tashalar, Luiren, Var, Estagund

dried sausages: the Shaar, the Tashalar

quince sticks (cakes of dried quince pressed together with various beetles, around edible kloorer roots [licorice-like roots of a parched wilderland bush]): Vilhon, Shaar, Var, Estagund

honeydrops (thumb-sized candies of honey mixed with an edible gum and spices to give flavours and stop the honey from melting and running in hot conditions): Calimshan, the Vilhon, Mulhorand, Raurin, Chessenta

sugar cakes (like real-world petit-fours: sugar icing-drenched confections of baked cake that have been laced with jams or chocolate or herbal distillates, for flavour): everywhere (but tend to be paltry in supply, and expensive)

cherrybread (like real-world "Christmas cake" or fruitcake: various diced fruits, marinated in spirits, cooked in a molasses-cake and sold as small whole loaves or slices wrapped in leaves): the Border Kingdoms, the Vilhon, coasts of the Sea of Fallen Stars

blood-drops (beets, sliced very thinly, fried in oil, and then dusted with salt and various spices, from sugar, cinammon, and nutmeg to the various hot spices; we might call these "vegetable crisps")

potato cakes (like real-world Irish "wedge"-shaped griddle cakes)

There are lots more, but most large markets during summer and autumn, across most of Faerûn, should have most of these for sale. Yum.

So saith Ed.

Who loves his snacks.

love,
THO

June 20, 2007: Hello again, fellow scribes.

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As I expected, Ed has indicated to me that different faiths will mean different expected behaviours for paladins, and that in his replies (! yes, multiple!) he will "of course" deal with both male and female paladins.

This time, however, I bring you the words of Ed regarding this recent query from Wooly Rupert: "In the real world, there are eight thousand different "How many X does it take to change a light bulb joke?" Some go for professions, some go for various groups, be they ethnic, regional, or even just having a particular characteristic. Is there a Realms version of this joke?"

Similarly, there have been, at various times, jokes which focus on the perceived lack of intelligence of some groups. When I was little, I heard a lot of "dumb Pollock" jokes (apologies to any hailing from that particular region of the world; those were just the jokes of the time); as a teenager, many of those jokes were repackaged as "dumb blonde" jokes (similar apologies to our fair-haired scribes). Do these jokes have a Realms parallel?"

I posted: "I can start you off by saying that in the Dragonreach lands (well, the Dales and the Vast, at least), Ambral Isle is the colloquial home of fops and dunderheads, so that's one of the regional butts of those "dumb" jokes."

and Ed now replies:

As THO implied, there are different butts of such jokes from place to place in the Realms, though none of them actually include the word "dumb" (it's just understand). In the Dragonreach, jokes are told about the "jack" or "lass" from Ambral Isle. In Aglarond, Unther, Mulhorand, and Chessenta, "Thayans" are thus ridiculed.

In Westgate, they lampoon Sembians, and vice versa (curiously, Cormyr gets left out of this).

In Mulmaster, they sneer at Hillfarrians and Zhents; Zhents look down on so many other places that they have no "stock butt" sort of person, but in Hillsfar, they sneer at "Dalesmen" and "Dale cows" (a stereotypical fat, beefy, mannish Dale farm woman, red-faced, large-bosomed, terrifically strong and tireless, and about as smart as the nearest fencepost).

In Scornubel, they sneer at Waterdhavians, while in Waterdeep they ridicule barbarians and Luskanites.

Amnians sneer at Waterdhavians, "hairy Northerners," and Tethyrians, and Tethyrians sneer right back at "coinhead Amnians." Calishites sneer at "unwashed Northerners" of all origins, while in Tharsult and the Tashalar folk mutter about the fat "reeking-beards" of Calimshan (referring to the habit of some wealthy Calishite men of perfuming their beards; as folk in these places do not ridicule Calishite women, seeing those females as smart persons who manipulate foolish males to get what they can, in the face of oppression from those same males [remember, these are stereotypes]).

The halflings of Luiren tell jokes about the "blackbreasts" of Dambrath (referring to the true drow, not Crinti), and all of Dambrath seems to indulge in jokes about the foolish "nosefeet" of Luiren (referring to a local caricature of halflings are being all noses and feet, with precious little body between).

And so it goes.

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So saith Ed.

Who's not above telling the occasional joke while roleplaying "in character" (as I remember to my cost). Let me relate just one: Ed portraying a prostitute in a tavern, snapping a reply to a VERY lewd suggestion: "What kind of lass d'you think I am? A CONTORTIONIST?"

love to all,
THO

June 20, 2007: Hello again, Realms fans. This time Ed answers Uzzy, regarding this: "Hey Ed and THO! I've a seafaring question today. Do Faerûnian sailors suffer from Scurvy, and how, if at all, do they treat it? And what do they call it? Thanks in advance! Also, can others join in this licking of THO?"

Well, let me answer that second question before I turn things over to Ed. Uzzy: of course. Start whenever (and wherever!) you like. (In the park, while waiting in line to pay in a shop...)

Ahem. Ed replies:

Yes, Faerûnian sailors are afflicted (rarely) by scurvy. "Rarely" because most sailing in the Realms is either out-and-back fishing runs, or coastal shipping runs; unless damaged or blown way off course by storms, most ships stay close to shore, "hopping" from port to port or making "fast runs" from port of origin to a specific destination; in either case, they're seldom long at sea.

Scurvy is called by various names in the Realms, including toothfall (because in advanced cases, the teeth of afflicted sailors fall out), blackjaws (same reason: gums go black), and sea fever. Some sailors know what causes it, and treat it (usually by having limes on board, stored in chests of sand, which the sailors can eat freely; a few crews tried carrying kegs of fruit juices, but these usually fermented, making everyone drunk when they imbibed).

So saith Ed, who certainly LOOKS like an old salt.

Arrr, me buckos, and so on. I, however, look rather better when climbing the shrouds clad in naught but a ragged cap, with a sword clenched in my teeth. Distracting the foe, Ed calls it...

love to all,
THO

June 21, 2007: Hello again, Realms fans. This time Ed answers Uzzy, regarding this: "Hey Ed and THO! I've a seafaring question today. Do Faerûnian sailors suffer from Scurvy, and how, if at all, do they treat it? And what do they call it? Thanks in advance! Also, can others join in this licking of THO?"

Well, let me answer that second question before I turn things over to Ed. Uzzy: of course. Start whenever (and wherever!) you like. (In the park, while waiting in line to pay in a shop...)

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Arrr, me buckos, and so on. I, however, look rather better when climbing the shrouds clad in naught but a ragged cap, with a sword clenched in my teeth. Distracting the foe, Ed calls it...

love to all,
THO

June 26, 2007: Hello again, all. Ed has returned from his delightful jaunt into Michigan, and returns to tackle a query from Jamallo Kreen: "Well met!

I have a question which I know Ed has partially answered in the past, but the Search function is over-burdened today so I can't find what Ed's already written.

I am interested in the Swordkrypt Mountains and their surroundings, i.e. from Neverwinter Wood to the Kryptgarden Forest, from Leilon northeast to Triboar (including the ruins of Phandalin), and northward from the Mere of Dead Men to the mountains themselves. I am interested in the heights of the mountains, how extensive their foothills are, what paths (if any) run through them, how well- (or ill-) forested they are, and what settlements currently exist on, in, and around them.

I have Volo's Guide to the North and The North pdf, the Dungeon Magazine adventure set in the Kryptgarden, and I know about the three (?) "worms of the north" in the area, so Ed doesn't need to rehash what he has already published in print. It's what's in his notes which he hasn't published that interests me.

Pretty please, Ed, tell us some more about the Swordkrypts and their surroundings."

Ed replies:

I haven't said much here at Candlekeep about these peaks, because of a long-outstanding NDA regarding Southkrypt, a dungeon I created and placed there in 1979, that TSR several times expressed interest in but that hasn't yet been detailed in any canon Realmslore source.

As a result, I'm afraid I'm going to be rather brief in this reply. I can say that the Swordkrypt Mountains are high and bare rock spires at their seaward end, but as they march inland become

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rather low and glacially smoothed (akin to the real-world Appalachians of the eastern United States), with bare rock summits (peryton, eagle, and suchlike lairs, and many fissures that ice widens every year, to split off "pillars" of outlying rock and increase cavities (used by various beasts as lairs), and flanks and foothills cloaked in forests (à la [staying with the Appalachians] the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Shenandoah Valley vicinity, or the various peaks in southwestern Pennsylvania).

The Swordkrypt foothills aren't extensive, but contain several abandoned quarries; paths and game-trails wind through their forested verges, but none "cross" the mountains or wander through them; the range forms an effective barrier, so travelers go around it by the seacoast road or well inland.

Thanks to outlaws and the numerous roaming monsters (raiding bands of which seem to be on the increase), plus the insect-infested swamps east of the Mere of Dead Men, no permanent settlements "currently exist on, in, and around them." Exploring PCs will find the stone walls or foundations of some abandoned steadings, but no surviving human, elven, halfling, gnome, or dwarven habitation (there are a few "mountain cave hermit" families of various races, but they know better than to erect obvious buildings in the open; rather, they shift boulders in spring-fed caves to arrange defensible lairs-and even then, seldom survive for many seasons unless they keep moving, to avoid being trapped and massacred by the hobgoblin, orc, and goblin raiding bands that wander the range).

So saith Ed.

I remember a brief foray into Southkrypt, but it did not go well. None of the majestic atmosphere of Undermountain, but all of the nastiness.

love to all,
THO

June 27, 2007: Oh, JK, don't stop at my HAND!

And Penknight, a belated thanks for the good wishes. 'Twas Ed and his wife who were travelling, not me (I just dropped offline to do a little sideline task for my "silent" day job).

And (ahem) hi again, all. This time, Ed leaves the reins in my hands, to answer maelstrom58: "Well, far be it from me to refuse a lady's wishes...

Actually, this makes me think of another question (for THO): THO, did the players of the Knights of Myth Drannor ever run an evil party? If so, could you give us some highlights from the campaign? Thanks, Maelstrom"

You're very welcome, avid scribe. Lick away, by all means. However, I'm afraid if you were seeking salacious details of evil deeds by a party of PCs I and my fellow players ran, you're out of luck. Although from time to time one of us has played an evil NPC for a few minutes (following Ed's written instructions, usually because he's handling a cast of other NPCs who might have disputes with the one we're running, and he wants negotiations or hostilities to develop without playing "all the sides" himself - - and because our own PCs are temporarily absent, dead, or disabled), we have never run an evil party. Sorry. Ed has always made the lives of, and

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challenges faced by, the Knights so darned fascinating that we've never had the interest in "trying on" the experience. Truly.

love,
THO

On June 27, 2007 THO said: Aha. This one I can answer myself.

No, Ed was very careful to avoid "straight" Christian interpolations in the Realms (and before someone raises St. Cuthbert and the other placeholders, let me remind everyone that many faiths have had "saints" [by various names] long before Christianity existed). So Ilmater is NOT Jesus.

Nor did Fritz Leiber say "many times" that Issek is Jesus. This I know as bald fact because I was sitting beside Ed at a long-ago sf convention in which he and Fritz (dead now too many years) discussed this very point. What Leiber actually said (in my hearing) is that Issek can "stand in" for the Christian martyr, "and be Jesus if you will" (in other words, to those who want such an element in their fantasy world, Issek can fill the role). So he can be Jesus to some if they want him to be, but neither Issek nor Ilmater are intended to be Jesus in disguise or alias, and only that. None of which means that a gamer who wants to can't introduce "God" (Jehovah, Yahweh, etc. the One God of Christian belief) into the Realms. However, if that deity then sweeps away the pantheons of many gods, or has every last god be just one god using different masks, the result isn't the Realms anymore. Christians who want "God" to run things can of course have "Ao" be "God."

However, it would be a flat mistake to say that this is or was Ed's sole or hidden personal belief or intention. This has been much discussed among we "home" Realms players and Ed, over the years. Ed wants matters like this officially left "fuzzy" so the Realms can be a cozy home to the maximum number of gamers. In other words, so that every gamer or group of gamers can fill in the details to best suit themselves. (Ed believes in tolerance and acceptance of other faiths and specific beliefs far, far more than most modern-day Christian believers, many of whom seem to want to divide the world into "us" [the believers, meaning those whose beliefs match ours exactly] and "them" [everyone else].)

love to all,
THO

Faraer is quite correct; the cult of Issek was indeed meant as a satire on religion. "A brick-subtle" one, to quote Mr. Leiber's words.

love,
THO

On June 27, 2007 THO said: Hmmm. Trust not THOSE maps. Ed's intro, on this site, is as good as we have regarding the layout thus far (plus the relevant Wyrms of the North article Ed wrote).

love,
THO

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On June 27, 2007 THO said: The Great Assassin Kill-Off was mandated by TSR management of the time (i.e. staff designers were ordered to do it by their employer), so as to appease "Angry Mothers From Heck" and make the D&D game less "Satanic" and evil (devils went away, demons went away, assassins went away - - by those names, at least, purely so some pulpit-thumper couldn't wave a rulebook and thunder that the game contained them. Which would keep the game out of a lot of markets, or so the thinking went.

Yes, Storm is depicted wrongly (so are Sharantyr, and Mourngrym, and a lot of other folks, too). Sigh.

love to all,
THO

True, it was indeed. However, the management of the time (and here I'm looking right at the top layers, not at the creative folks) were not known for their logic.

There was a REASON a certain female sometime owner of TSR was known as "the Whim Queen."

love,
THO

June 28, 2007: Well met again, fellow scribes. This time I present Ed's response to these queries from Jamallo Kreen: "Well met, Master Ed and Lady Herald!

I'll bet that you thought that you were over and done explaining the various forms of address for those whom I called "bedded, but not wedded." Far from it! As I have said before, every answer of Ed's generates at least one other question, and this one concerns lickhips, boldshakes, and coin-lasses and laddies. Aside from the vernacular English words which we all know (or which most of us know), what are specifically Realmsian terms for prostitutes? I don't mean the specialty... ah... ladies... such as Calimport's bearded entertainers (whom you have already dealt with at length), but the everyday, run-of-the-mill sex professional. Also, are there specific "terms of art" to refer to the entertainers from Kara Tur and other such exotic locales who might be considered prostitutes by the undiscerning, but who really do "just" entertain in intimate situations without doing the wild thing?"

Ed replies:

Just like the recent query about snacks, this one has so many replies that I'm sure I'll miss a lot of the euphemisms employed in the Realms. However, let's have a go at a fragmentary list:

low-coin lasses

high-coin girls (obviously, this term and the preceding one refer to rates charged - - and, usually, "quality of presentation," which is to say: to charge high rates, a female usually has to be pretty if not beautiful, actress enough to enjoy her work and to portray what the client wants [from fear to

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innocence to tenderness, and a liking for whatever the client's preferences are], to be clean and provocatively dressed, and to operate in less than squalid surroundings)

ladies of the evening (implies the ability to function as escorts in social situations; i.e. know how to behave at a feast or formal gathering as ladies of breeding, not merely - - or perhaps not even - - sexual partners)

bedwarmers (entirely neutral and open-society-polite term, as it can imply either gender, and everything from a personal maid who literally warms a rented bed with a bedpan and then departs, perhaps never being seen by the renter, to a regular companion hired repeatedly by a given traveler on every visit to a given establishment; usually means "good, hard-working, trustworthy prostitute")

alley girls (implies low and coarse street workers, often women who literally ply their trade in alleyways by night, usually swift "offerings" for a few coins; young boys who can scrape up a copper coin between them usually get their first sight or fondle [only] of bared female flesh by visiting an alley girl in daylight)

festhall downdancers ("festhall dancers" are usually just that: dancers, though they may flirt and dance unclad or partially so; "downdancers" is the usual shorthand term for "MORE than just dancers")

lightskirts (a mild term, usually implying prostitution but can mean merely promiscuous)

looseskirts (need not be a professional; this term really means "willing woman," but is often employed to mean prostitute by folk who dare not, or don't want to be, more explicit)

snakehips (an exhibitionist and willing sexual partner who is either contortionist or acrobatic, or "willing to try" precarious sites for trysts, such as rooftops, high tree boughs, atop wagons, high windowsills, hanging from ropes or balconies, on horseback, and so on; again, need not be a professional)

low-lantern ladies (refers to the Southern [the Vilhon, Calimshan, and points south] practice of dancing, disrobing, and then lovemaking all to the subdued amber or red light of almost-shuttered lamps that have panels of one of those two hues)

willing-arms (usually used to refer to a village whore, as in "ah, this'll be the local willing-arms")

escorts (implies the acting ability and training to function as "arm candy" in social situations such as revels, feasts, and formal gatherings as persons of breeding, not necessarily sexual partners)

hard-currency girls (a term rarely heard these days; it implied that this particular prostitute wouldn't extend credit - - but almost no one does, any more, so the term is dying out except as a leering, over-the-top "scandalous" term used in some plays - - usually by a "shocked, utterly SHOCKED, my dear!" character)

courtesan (a professional "hostess" employed by a ruler at his court, to entertain important visitors; need not have a sexual role at all, but usually does; tone of voice or local knowledge implies sexual side of profession if it exists)

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warmflanks (a very "polite" way of referring to prostitutes; can be said in polite social conversations by or in the hearing of anyone, including disapproving old matrons and children)

whiplovers (originally only a slighting way to refer to worshippers of Loviatar, or S&M -enjoying cultists of Shar and Bane, its use broadened to include masochists venerating Ilmater, and finally all sexual masochists; recently, has seen use in Amn, Tethyr, and Calimshan as a term for those who offer their bodies to be whipped in return for coin)

kisscoin (a polite, affectionate term for those willing to make love for pay)

footwarmer (an utterly neutral term for a paid companion of the opposite sex, who is willing to sleep with clients; usually sex is implied, but the term literally means to provide companionship in bed for the lonely, so they have a warm body to warm their feet against; increasingly, this term is applied to aging, less athletic and adventurous prostitutes)

she-eel (a snarled near-curse, implying someone who teases, takes coin, and then slips away [or robs clients], OR an approving advertisement for someone very supple and willing to use her skills for adventurous sex or to increase the pleasure of clients)

banner (a male prostitute)

skilled-laces (a prostitute of satisfying skills and performance; the term refers, of course, to unlacing garments)

darksail (someone who makes love for pay while masked, or with identity magically disguised; originally many elves and half-elves of Waterdeep used a "shiftmask" spell that covered their faces - - except for their eyes - - in amorphous darkness; this spell is sometimes cast for hire on wealthy wives and husbands who want to "cheat" at masked revels, so if their masks are torn off, their faces still can't be seen; the spell can also be cast to cloak most of the body, so once garments are removed, the body can be felt more than it can be seen, an aid in concealing wrinkles, or identifying marks that betray identity)

slyblade (prostitute who dresses as a man, to woo female clients or as protection against the disapproving or lawkeepers, when meeting male clients who know her true identity and profession very well, or are "tipped off" by prearrangement plus a card, message, or signal)

catclaw (prostitute who likes rough sex or domination, or who will for coin try to seduce others, or act the role of a slave, spouse, conquered war-captive or former rival who is now a willing lover [in other words, benefit or enhance the status of a paying client by her acting, from wearing chains and willingly accepting abuse to pretending to have been smitten by the sexual prowess of the client])

bell-ankles (a Southern term referring to the dying practice of wearing chiming bells on the ankles when dancing or lovemaking, as audible advertisements; this custom is dying out, but the phrase still sees popular use to mean prostitute willing to entertain "walk-in" clients)

slapthighs (low-rate or coarse or willing-to-be-abused prostitute; the term is descriptive, NOT pejorative)

smilecoin lass (polite term for a friendly, "nice" prostitute, especially one who will cook for, provide conversation for, and provide a bed for the night for, a client - - not just providing sex)

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goldglint darling (poetic or "overly polite" term for anyone who provides sex for payment)

playpretty (a female paid for sex by soldiers or sailors)

doxy (mistress or prostitute, especially applied to women who are the shared mistresses of a select roster of men)

warmvelvet (a young, pretty or beautiful prostitute who likes to tease or act alluring or foster an air of mystery; in Silverymoon or Waterdeep, this also means a noble or wealthy young woman "playing" at being a prostitute for the thrills [or to see if she can use this as a "road away" from an unhappy home situation])

chalice (a poetic or very polite term for a prostitute, based on the poetic reference to the female as either a cup that a male drinks from, or a vessel that receives his seed)

glimmersheath (a strikingly beautiful prostitute, or a male crossdressing prostitute; in either case, the term refers to eyecatching beauty and willingly receiving the "dagger" of the male physique)

gold tigress (a prostitute who likes to wrestle with or fight [to be "conquered"] clients, or to bite and claw them; a "tigress" without the word "gold" refers to a female who is not a prostitute but has similar sexual preferences]

I could go on and on and on, because the euphemisms are endless, but these given here are the most universally understood (even if some of them are used only regionally, travelling merchants have spread word of their meaning across Faerûn). If one adds insults and curses to modify these, an entire new roster of phrases opens up, but I'd rather leave those to the inventiveness of individual DMs so as not to upset too many scribes reading this thread.

So saith Ed.

Who flirts outrageously, but has never employed a prostitute, though a (gaming!) business partner once sent a lap dancer to visit him for a "private dance" as a joke (Ed kept his hands to himself and let it be just that: a dance), and on another (gaming convention!) occasion Ed was taken to a club where ladies dance nude and then ask clients to buy them drinks; drinks were duly purchased, pleasant chat was enjoyed, and further offers politely declined. Ah, self-discipline.

Or as Ed put it: "My eyeballs certainly enjoyed that."

And no, I'm not going to "name gaming names."

love to all,
THO

June 30, 2007: Thank you, Alaundo! I'm back, without the slightest problem this time. Your magic touch worked!

(And that's not something I say to ALL the guys...)

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This time, i bring a swift reply from Ed to Kuje's query, just above:

Jim has asked us to keep mum about this project for now - - so *cough* you can probably infer some sort of involvement of mine from that, yes? (The book should be a "must" purchase for public libraries, and I doubt gamers will ever have seen such a roster of Big Gaming Names between two covers before. If you're attending GenCon, buy it!!!) And that's ALL I'm going to say until Jim gives permission for more to be said.

So saith Ed.

Whom I believe has seen at least the final table of contents, to be so certain about the roster of writers. I'm looking forward to this one AND to the 40 Years of GenCon book, which should both be out at GenCon this year. Wheee!

love to all,
THO

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