

So saith Ed

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

Part 21

Jan - Mar 2009

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On January 1, 2009 THO said:- Nerfed2Hell,
I'm afraid Ed can't tell you much about Filfaeril (including how she and Azoun got together) because of some current NDAs and the push to get the Cormyr Lineage published. Ed does have a partly-written (begun back in 1987!) short story up his sleeve centered on an incident in Azoun's courtship of Fee, but it, too, is "hanging fire" until the right time (i.e. those NDAs clear).

Believe me, he'd LOVE to answer you, because Filfaeril is one of his favourite characters. I believe he created her back in 1968 or 1969 (probably the latter) and has portrayed her as an NPC in our 'home' campaign Realmsplay many, many times.

love,
THO

On January 1, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I bring you once more the words of Ed, this time in response to this spanking-new (ahem, BAD Hooded One! Bad! We'll have to spank . . . oh. Ahem again.) query from Bladewind: "Ahum. Pretty tough question. Ed, how much influence do oracles have on politics in for example Cormyr? Are the people who get visions taken seriously by rulers? How much support can a supposed prophet of Savras have in a small village? Is spouting fear inducing prophesies a crime?"

Ed replies:

A FEW hermit and rural oracles are still taken very seriously in Faerun, particularly "new ones," whom most folk believe are truly the direct mouthpieces of deities speaking through them. Most long-established and temple-based oracles are only heeded by clergy (who view them as the deity guiding and critiquing their work) and the most devout lay worshippers), because they have been so wrong or so "right but overly cryptic or woefully partial or miscasting/twisting the truth" before.

So in Cormyr (and most other places), oracles would be viewed as alerts or warnings, but no more (i.e. they would NOT bring existing policies or projects to a crashing halt, but could work to 'steer' future efforts or ongoing efforts). Oracles themselves are generally viewed as well-meaning, honest folk (until spies or third parties prove or strongly suggest they are otherwise). A small village could well believe an oracle of Savras utterly, but not to the point of executing people or burning down major buildings or openly and repeatedly breaking major laws or offending against the rights of other faiths (including Azuth and other "direct rivals"). No, spouting fear-inducing prophecies isn't a crime (though deliberately concocting false prophecies and passing them off as divinely-inspired is), but uttering such prophecies will, over time, get the prophet largely ignored - - and will swiftly lead responsible clergy and local governing officials to denounce the prophet to the extent of "Don't follow what he/she says, but turn to the temple clergy for interpretations! He/she cannot help but distort what the god is trying to say through them!" (And this would be widely accepted by the populace, not seen first and foremost as a cover-up of the oracle's "truth.")

So saith Ed. Eagerly ongoing creator of the Realms.

We can look forward to many more such Realmslore replies in 2009, I hope.

love to all,
THO

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Oh, and gomez: of COURSE it should be in capitals, except that neither Ed nor I want to even hint that Ed is really Death or the Hogfather, because we love those characters so much and want Terry to write so much more about them.

However, Ed can claim to be like Death in at least one way, and can say, as Death did in that superb book:

I *AM* LAST-MINUTE STUFF.

Come to think of it, I often am (in my day job), too.

love,
THO

On January 2, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I'm expecting a Realmslore reply from Ed in a few hours, but in the meantime, can answer some of these latest queries with reference to my notes (drawn from Realmsplay with Ed):

RodOdom, you asked: "Are most gods of mortal descent?"

Ed's notes say:

So far as mortals know from what the gods (primarily through their clergy, but also through holy writings and dream-visions given to lay worshippers) most gods either were once mortal creatures of Faerun or elsewhere, or have "entered into" the bodies of once-mortal creatures of Toril. The 'whys' and all details vary wildly from deity to deity, and may have become confused (or fused) over time; most deities seem to value and preserve an aura of mystery, wonder, and confusion, rather than clearing up theological debates or even schisms.

Jakk, you posted: "As my first question of 2009, I second RodOdom's question, and broaden it somewhat: Does Ed have origin tales for the major gods other than Selune/Shar/Mystryl and the Dark Three? The story of Amaunator and Lathander would be particularly interesting, but given its necessary reference to the perpetual mystery of the Dawn Cataclysm, I don't see the story being told in great detail... but I'd still be interested all the same."

From my notes, I can tell you that Ed wrote up partial (see the mystery, above) origin tales for most of his pantheon; much of what was in the original Faiths & Avatars was based on Ed's notes. However, Ed wanted the focus to be on current worship of the deities (i.e. useful stuff for roleplaying), and to maintain some confusion/disagreement over the past. Unfortunately, Ed turned over all of that information (we're talking scores of closely-typewritten pages) to TSR back in the early days of the Realms, so it's all NDA; he can only paraphrase and talk briefly or obliquely about such matters here, not "set things straight" about the Dawn Cataclysm or anything else. (This has come up more than a time or two before at the Keep, BTW.) So if you're hoping for a string of origins stories for the gods . . . well, keep hoping, I'm afraid.

Ashe Ravenheart, no, there's been no announcement yet. As I said earlier, lawyers are involved, and so things are now moving slowly. Which should come as no surprise around Christmas, when many companies essentially shut down for a week or more, or around year-end for some firms, and the end of the last fiscal quarter of 2008, when (facing tough times ahead) a company might well want to delay any announcement, good or bad, until what they judge to be a better time, in 2009.

Don't worry, when the announcement happens, I'll confirm it here.

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So until Ed weighs in with more lore, later today,
love to all,
THO

On January 2, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. As promised a few hours back, Ed's latest lore reply . . .

Back on the 29th of December 08, rjfras posted this query: "I have a question for Ed concerning one of the rituals performed by the clergy of Mielikki. "At least once a month, every member of the clergy must perform the Song of the Trees and serve any dryads, hamadryads or treat their song calls forth. The clergy members perform small tasks requested of them, but are free of dryad charms through the will of the Lady." Could you provide some ideas on what some of the small tasks might be? Most of the ones I've thought of seem cliché or overly done and needing quite a few years, I was looking for a new perspective rather than starting to repeat used ones. Thanks..."

Ed replies:

Most of the tasks requested are what we might call "forest gardening." Usually they involve planting new seeds of trees, tending growing trees (watering, pruning, removing vines choking them or damaged limbs, thinning out tangles, fertilizing roots, removing rocks, et cetera), seeking new sources of seeds, caching (hidden secure storage) seeds to provide for future needs, clearing beaver dams that expand wetlands and drown trees, or improving either water supply or drainage by digging to reach water or change slopes in a localized area, et cetera.

Trees that are at risk from woodcutters or natural forces may require defending, for example by clearing away loose scree that could cause avalanches, planting grasses and "tough shrubs" to anchor sandy areas before they become desert (or to prevent existing deserts from spreading), and the planting of thorn barriers, itch-inducing plants, and the introduction of "monsters" to discourage woodcutters from continuing felling trees in a particular direction (where other directions are available).

The tasks shouldn't take more than a tenday (so as to prevent a clever dryad keeping a particular priest of Mielikki in perpetual servitude because "Your task remains unfinished!"), and Mielikki makes this clear to the woodland beings her clergy are tasked to serve.

More rarely, tasks can include tracing underground watercourses and aquifers, exterminating or driving off root-devouring fauna or root-damaging miners of all species, and so on. Or preparing "built-upon" ground for expansion by forest life, by breaking up paving, collapsing buildings and carrying off the rubble, or even destroying roads and bridges. (Usually these will be ruins or abandoned structures, because the woodland beings are wise and history-lore-learned enough to know what furious reactions will arise from, say, a human or orc community if "the wild woods encroach.")

So saith Ed. Who long ago lovingly detailed much of the holy duties and customs of worshippers of Mielikki so as to allow the full and colourful roleplaying of Florin Falconhand.

love to all,
THO

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On January 3, 2009 THO said:- Bingo, rjfras! That's exactly right; dryads, hamadryads, treants, and Mielikki all want well-watered forests but not flooded forests (too much standing water drowns the trees, roots first, and creates a wetland with dead standing trees in it). There are other forces at play that value wetlands, but none of these three sorts of sylvan creatures, nor the deity, are among them. Ed and I discussed this in detail once - - and believe me, once you factor in orc hordes, hunting dragons, wyverns, fire lizards, human woodcutters, forest fires, and the like, the forests need all the help they can get. At least to continue to dominate the North (wherever mountains and glaciers don't prevent) as much as they've always been described as doing. So, yes, Rino, beaver dams play a part in a balanced ecosystem, but there's nothing to stop the beavers from continually relocating and rebuilding, when localized actions (by clergy serving sylvan creatures at Mielikki's behest) are made to preserve particular trees.

love,
THO

Edit: for grammar. Geez, my medications are affecting the aging brain. Time to blurt like a Dalek, I suppose.

On January 4, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all.
Rinonalyna Fathomlin, I sent your latest post off to Ed for a direct explanation, and here's his piping-hot-from-my-inbox response:

Ah. Further explanation definitely needed here. First, please understand that my replies (and THO's comments) relate to the Realms deities pre-Spellplague (before some of the major changes among the gods).

Mielikki "doesn't value" wetlands because they're not her portfolio; they are the province of Eldath, who is her close friend and co-worker (among the gods, they are almost close, loving sisters). Eldath and Mielikki don't war over "what's trees and what's swamp," because Silvanus takes care of, and oversees the constantly dancing adjustment of, the natural balance. That's why (from the human viewpoint) there are so many nature deities; they have specialized. Mielikki's focus is on maintaining forests and lush forest life (from flying squirrels and owlbears to tiny ferns and stick insects) in all of its variety (so, stunted and blighted as well as lush and deep), and the latter sort of forests need pools, springs, creeks, and abundant water cycling (mists, night dew, et al). However, pools, lakes, rapids, and wetlands are where Eldath "fades in" and predominates. The two goddesses work together cordially and usually happily, but it is the nature of Mielikki to value trees and ideal conditions for trees, not conditions (standing water, as opposed to bogs) that drown trees . . . and it is the nature of Eldath to value bodies of open water, moving or standing, as one of the best foci of the sylvan refuges and hidden places she champions. In other words, Eldath concerns herself with how open-water features interact with all surroundings, wild woodland surroundings being seen by her as ideal, but Mielikki concerns herself with optimum forest conditions, and sees drowned-tree swamp as "non-forest."

The question at hand was the services clergy of Mielikki would perform in service to dryads, hamadryads, and treants - - and all three of those species value open bodies of water only as sources of needed water and as barriers to forest fires or incursions by various creatures, but value optimum forest-tree growing and living conditions above all else. Hence the focus of the clerical tasks. The creatures the priests are serving want water, but not permanent, well-established, ever-growing beaver dams with greater and greater flooding above such dams. As part of the forest ecosystem, beavers are fine, but as destroyers of the forest, they are not. So the creatures often ask the clerics to destroy the dams (NOT the beavers, please note), so the beavers will spend their time building dams, moving to optimum locations for dams, rebuilding

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dams, and so on, and dry areas of forest will get temporary flooding to replenish their water but not get root-drowned. It's an attempt at control, not exterminate the beavers or eliminate wetlands - - and like all natural processes, it's ongoing and everchanging, not a "do this task, succeed, and all is done" situation.

Silvanus oversees natural balance, and Mielikki and Eldath champion and safeguard types of wild natural areas that are under constant assault from "civilizing" influences (such as human or other species land clearances and farming, or clear-felling logging, or roadbuilders). These sorts of divine relationships have been regrettably overlooked or ignored in print, in favour of more warlike alliances and feuds, and should be better emphasized.

I hope this helps clarify things. If not, you know where to find me. :}

So saith Ed. Creator of Eldath, and borrower of Mielikki and Silvanus from real-world mythology (in their DEITIES & DEMIGODS forms, back in 1st Edition days - - not because he lacked creativity, but because he was trying to express the Realms in "official" D&D rules terms as much as possible.

love to all,
THO

On January 4, 2009 THO said:- Hmm. After posting Ed's response, it occurs to me that something hasn't been said explicitly here that is abundantly clear to longtime players in Ed's "home" Realms campaign: the extent to which dryads, hamadryads, and treants are seen as beleaguered, rare, endangered creatures in the (current Faerunian) age of frequent orc hordes and ever-expanding human civilization.

Mielikki's "adventuring worshippers," rangers, are seen as defenders of terrain and creatures very much under assault (hence her clergy being commanded to serve those three sorts of sylvan creatures - - to try to keep them from being exterminated across much of known Faerun).

love to all,
THO

Edit: spelling. Darned medications.

On January 5, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. I bring you once more the words of Ed of the Greenwood. Back on December 19th of last year, Jamallo Kreen posted these three queries: "Which is a lovely opportunity to ask my next question: We know (I think!) that EI uses World Walk to visit Ed, but are there ways to intentionally visit Earth in different time periods if one departs from Toril in the 14th century DR? (I mean the real Toril, by the way, just so that we're clear on the when and where.)

In Ed's multiverse, is Earth available to access by spelljammer ships, and if so, in what year do they coming sailing in? (Heard on the wharf: "I know Klaatu, and that isn't him.") Perhaps The Sage will please be so kind as to repost again the URL for the Spelljammer fan site; I know they have at least one map showing Earth's presumed location vis-a-vis other crystal spheres.

Third, in Ed's conception of the multiverse, are there powers (or Powers) associated with Earth which prevent genuine time travel, to Earth's past or future, as Toril has?"

Ed replies:

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As far as your first question goes, Jamallo, Gelcur's post about the Safehold is quite right - - and is the only way *I* know of to travel from Toril to a particular "past" of our Earth (and it should be noted that the Yellowstone past reached seems to be a localized "bubble" or demi-plane that does NOT extend to the rest of Earth . . . so, no Elminster striding around the fog-shrouded, gaslit streets of Victorian London confronting Jack the Ripper or working with Sherlock Holmes . . . unless you as DM want him to, of course). This demi-plane has its own passing time, such that if you affect something on one visit, those affects are evident on a later visit, but doesn't seem to "age" onwards with the real-world changes that affected the National Park in our world. Earth IS accessible by spelljammers, but its crystal sphere must be (hint of truth: IS, for all of the following) either very hard to find in the Flow, or very perilous to enter and traverse, or both, because spelljammer visits are VERY rare. Time does elapse at different rates in different crystal spheres, so it's hard to say what year spelljammers arrive, except from the point of view of Earth (the very few known visits were in the very ancient past, and in early Victorian times). Regarding your third question, there are indeed preventions associated with Earth that prevent genuine time travel to Earth's past or future. Just what they are remains mysterious, though they are obviously mighty enough to thwart the most powerful spells known to the Realms . . . so they may well be deities, or mindless natural forces of equal might. By the way, consider that "remains mysterious" to mean until NDAs are lifted that I don't believe will ever be removed, given the current ownership of the copyright holder and their usual stances to avoid real-world religious controversies. Any DM is free to arrange things the way they see fit for their own campaign, but it's unlikely that official published Realmslore will ever Go There.

So saith Ed. Who, please note, isn't ruling out Elminster or other mages (or users of gates/portals/artifacts) jaunting between the Realms and Earth in "real time" (as happened in those many "Wizards Three" articles, a series begun at the request of the magazine's editor of the day). Interested readers are referred to Ed's classic "Gates" article in issue 37 of what was then "The DRAGON" (later DRAGON Magazine) for more, or his classic Hells articles in DRAGON, or the various MANUALS OF THE PLANES (Jeff Grubb consulted Ed unofficially when writing the first one).

love to all,
THO

On January 6, 2009 THO said:- RodOdom, I bring you Ed's prompt reply:

To your first question: No. "Believe in the existence of," yes, but venerate, no.
To your second question: Certainly! Many worship Azuth without believing he's subservient to, or works with, or is even friendly towards, Mystra. Many wizards worship other deities entirely, such as Deneir or Oghma or Tempus. Such wizards may learn specific Weave-lore more slowly or with more difficulty than those who seek and get direct replies on details of Weave-related spellcasting from clergy of Mystra, but level advancement/learning, working with, and crafting mid- to high-level spells doesn't REQUIRE active worship of Mystra. At least one infamous mage gained all of his higher-level spells by stealing or seizing spellbooks and scrolls.

So saith Ed. Creator of Mystra and Azuth, not to mention many, many spells now part of the

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game (even, transformed somewhat, the current edition of D&D).
love to all,
THO

On January 8, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, fellow scribes. Back in mid-December of this year just past, Asgetrion posted: "Milady THO, I'm (finally) in the middle of reading 'The Sword Never Sleeps', and I must say that to me it feels to be the best novel from Ed I've read to date -- 'Cormyr: A Novel', 'Silverfall', 'City of Splendors' and the books in the 'Shandril Saga' included (all of which I hold in very high regard -- regardless of some of them suffering from butch... uh, poor editing ;). I think Ed has portrayed all the characters and their motives in a very believable light (I just *LOVE* the dialogue and interaction between the characters and their individual personalities -- whether they're Royal Princesses or Court Wizards or Purple Dragon officers or Zhentarim agents). And, there's so much attention to detail and nuances, both in the story and the language. Somehow I feel that Ed would have had more time and energy to spend on this book, because the "tone" underlying the writing seems to be much more... how to say it... light-hearted? Relieved? Excited? Of course, I may be wrong, but to me it feels like a lot more free of pressure (and other hardships) I know Ed had been under. I'm just *so* excited about this novel, and hope that you convey my humble thanks to Ed for writing this novel -- it feels like a true gem among all the "required reading" I've lately done (for professional reasons, as Ed surely knows). And I also wish to thank him for including so many juice, inspiring ideas and details that I can st... er, borrow into my Cormyr-campaign! A truly *GREAT* novel, and a "must-read" for all FR fans!"

I conveyed Asgetrion's glowing review to Ed, who replies:

Awww, shucks. You'll turn my head. (Strikes pose, stumbles, pratfalls.)
Seriously, I'm very glad you liked the detail and nuances and interactions, because those are just the things I was concentrating on, so I pulled off what I was trying for. Including the light-hearted tone.
However, I certainly wasn't free of pressure while writing it. I was late with it and juggling many projects at once and dealing with some real-world family crises at the time, and must admit I sat down at the keyboard more than once fending these things off rather defiantly.
So if the book comes across with that loving-what-I'm-writing tone, I conquered and prevailed. Bwoohahahah! World domination by next Thursday, and so forth. :}
Or better yet, I'll just write another Realms novel, instead. I have some dandy plans up my sleeve, believe me!

So saith Ed. Who can't say anything at all yet about what future Realms novels might contain (sorry, Zanan). However, all things come to those who wait . . . and wait . . . and wait . . .
(Patience, grasshoppers all.)

Oh, and Asgetrion: Ed's at work on a reply to your Thunderstone-vicinity queries.

love to all,
THO

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On January 9, 2009 THO said:- Well said, Brian! Very well said! I'm sure Ed will have very little to add to that.

I know he's told me he LOVED doing the Alusair scenes, and would do more of them, but feels guilty that Tanalasta didn't get enough "face time," in the third Knights book.

Not to mention the Knights themselves didn't get enough scenes, and the hargaut and the two "ghosts" got all too little explanation and exposure.

So, sigh, "everything" about covers it. :)

love,

THO

On January 10, 2009 THO said:- Ahem. Realms questions, yes.

Baleful Avatar, the low-magic and few brute-beasties, more intelligent adversaries and intrigue, intrigue, intrigue is DEFINITELY the order of the day in an Ed-DM'd Realms campaign. Listen not to all the slanderous calumny of "PCs are powerless because it's the Seven all the time, nude except when clad in randy old Elminster, Ed's Mary Sue" talk. Unless players send their characters to actively seek out the rulers amongst the Seven, they will rarely appear in play.

Elminster tends to show up (rarely and for short periods) as a narrator, or "last ditch hint" provider, not a PC ally or superhero who overshadows PC actions. He generally seems whimsical, kindly but sarcastic, a few bricks short of a load, and VERY busy, teleporting "in" for a few moments and then "out" again, moving on to deal with his NEXT crisis. He feeds PCs a sense of excitement, of layers of intrigue they haven't thought about and conspiracies all around them yet hidden . . . and occasional "ye might try this" advice, and that's it.

Otherwise, he's just "not there" most of the time, and PCs blundering into his Tower will find it mysteriously deserted and empty, or that they've been gated halfway across the Realms or into the Underdark as they step across the threshold, or that some frightened Zhentarim adventuring band or other has stepped into the Tower ahead of them, and is now anxiously trying to fight their way back out, through the PCs.

love to all,

THO

On January 10, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I bring you Ed's latest serving of Realmslore, this time a beginning on replying to the eight Thunderstone-and-vicinity questions posted by Asgetrion back in mid-December.

Here's the query Ed's dealing with in today's post:

"Greetings, Milady THO and Ed! I have been running a Pathfinder Beta playtest campaign, which is set in Thunderstone, in Cormyr. I have written a lot of material for it, but since a lot of the events in the campaign have taken place outside the town, the players have not interacted a lot with NPCs outside their "inner" circle (i.e. families and shopkeepers and prominent allies, such as tutors). I'm still fleshing out details, and filling in stuff as the campaign progresses and the PCs are drawn deeper into local intrigue, and therefore I have a plethora of questions for you:

1) Which noble families have holdings in or around Thunderstone?"

Ed replies:

(The time of the lore that follows is around 1370 DR.)

Between the Thunderflow and (a line of hills that borders) the Vast Swamp is a verdant band of farming and ranching country (rolling, grassy hillsides, hedgerows, wandering dirt lanes and small woodlots) and it's also what's sometimes referred to in our real world as "karst" country (springs

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rise, run along the surface, and then disappear down sinkholes, and there are lots of subterranean streams, hidden caves, and limestone, which means most waters run clear and pure). It's well-watered by meltwater streams running southwest, down from the Thunder Peaks, and the prevailing winds (usually fairly constant, steady, mild breezes) mean it gets a lot of sun; clouds tend to scud swiftly across the sky, not settle in and cause overcasts. As a result, crops grow well and livestock fattens up swiftly, so a lot of wealthy Cormyrean families (and that of course includes the nobles) have holdings here, even if they're only farms worked by commoner tenants.

That doesn't mean that the same "lot" of noble families visit Thunderstone often, or own dwellings in or near the village.

In Thunderstone proper, the Hawklin family owns a row of stores along "the Rise," the main street (that parallels the Thunder River), and two homes: a modest dwelling with stables in its own small walled orchard and garden, hight "Thundershaws" and used for putting up guests, business clients, and sometimes by certain Hawklines who want to entertain away from the rest of their kin; and Hawklinforce, a stone mansion with its own high stone walls, stables, wagon sheds, and brewhouse. From "the Force," local factors (trade agents) of the Hawklines administer the dozen ranches and crop farms (cabbages, barley, oats, and parsnips) owned by the family, and rent out family coaches and wagons to locals for divers purposes. As a result, the Hawklines are prominent locally, their views respected and heeded.

The Huntsilvers maintain a lower local profile. Their tall-towered stone mansion is known as Hunting Castle, and has an impressive stone wall and stout front gates, but isn't otherwise fortified. It is perhaps the most defensible large building in Thunderstone, but its small enclosed grounds are crowded with large, old trees (oaks and duskwoods), the boughs of some of which offer easy access to some of the lower Castle windows. There are persistent local rumors of secret tunnels connecting the cellars of Hunting Castle (which are said to contain all manner of gruesome sacrificial cult altars or Loviatar-loving flogging and trysting "dungeons") with secret passages in the walls of scores of local buildings. According to Elminster, there are two secret passages, meant to allow olden-day Huntsilvers to arrive and depart without being seen by kin or slayers hired by rival noble families, they are guarded by helmed horrors, and there are no altars or pleasure-dens.

In Thunderstone, the Huntsilvers generally keep to themselves, moving about the village in closed coaches or on fast horses. They use Hunting Castle very much as a retreat, in which to read and catch up on hobbies (such as, for several Huntsilver ladies, crafting gowns and practicing at the lute, handharp, and with voice, and reportedly for some Huntsilver males, wenching with "laugh-pretties" brought up from Suzail for such purposes). The family owns about thirty farms, all worked by tenants, well to the south and southwest of Thunderstone.

Hunting Castle and Hawklinforce both back onto the Thunderflow, having their own (modest and largely disused) docks and boathouses, and face onto the "best" street in Thunderstone, the winding Nightcloak Ride, which is lined with most of the better old stone dwellings in the village. It lies largely north and west of the Rise, but hooks sharply south just west of Stag Skull's Bridge, to intersect with, and end at, the Rise.

The Illances, Naerinth, Summerstars, and Wyvernspurs all own modest walled stone homes in Thunderstone, but visit them seldom (in the general way of nobility, such "nighthearth" houses are used as overnight way-stops when travelling, to host occasional meetings with business associates, and as retreats or trysting sites by individual family members. These four families are locally most active elsewhere (the Summerstars in Firefall Vale, which I shared lore about back in the 2004 replies here at the Keep, I believe [Sage or Wooly or Kuje, please jump in and correct my dating if I'm misremembering], and the other three noble houses largely to the north of the Hullack, or at least of the Thunderflow.

The Immerdusk noble family owns four old but solidly-built homes in Thunderstone, and owns six farms just south of the village proper. All are worked or inhabited by tenants, and Immerdusks are

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so seldom seen in this region that many locals believe them to be extinct, and that the factors speaking for them are actually courtiers working for the Crown, who just won't admit that they've taken over the chattels and holdings of the Immerdusks.

House Indesm owns a shop on the Rise and maintains very modest lodgings (a suite of four rooms, occupying an entire floor) above it, with the shopkeeper and his family dwelling in the gabled and dormered attic above them. However, they are seen in Thunderstone seldom, and come and go without fanfare or much in the way of coaches, outriders, servants, and the like. The Indesms own sixteen ranches and farms, mainly east of Thunderstone. All are worked by tenants, though the Indesms visit and inspect them often. This family keeps mainly to the hold of Hawkhar (sometimes called Hawkhar Keep or more often and formally "Hawkhar Hall," though most folk these days now call it simply "Hawkhar"), consisting of a fortified stone mansion and tower at the heart of a walled horse-farm where many fine mounts are bred, reared, and trained. The walls also enclose a small woodlot and orchard, and have an outer "thrust" or loop of wall, pierced by two always-open gates, that cradles the hamlet of Hawkhar, a small settlement dominated by the families of Indesm servants.

The Indesms are typical of most Cormyrean nobility in the countryside; they have and dominate their own settlement or hold, and only visit and rent or own dwellings in the villages, towns, and cities of the realm. The other three Thunderstone-home-owning noble families follow this pattern, too; they are the Houses of Buckfast, Haelbroke, and Yellander.

For more about the Yellanders, interested readers are directed to *SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE*. This House did not end with the execution of the lord who featured therein, because King Azoun would not hear of the three estranged and blameless-of-treason Yellander nieces who dwelt in Suzail being shamed and paupered by the actions of Lord Prester Yellander. The War Wizards had already thoroughly upset the three with sudden, brusque mind-reamings (which confirmed their utter innocence; they were wholly unaware of Lord Prester's drug-smugglings, or his assembling of a private army and the murders he directed them to do). One of the three nieces, Anathae, was a longtime friend and confidant of Queen Filfaeril, who took charge of the rather dazed Anathae and briskly steered her into marriage to a commoner she'd long had eyes on, a Palace courtier by the name of Hresker Falbruin. So there's now a capable and tactful Lord Hresker Falbruin, charged by Queen Fee with finding suitable and happy mates for Anathae's two sisters, Paerile and Tannaura (a process that is taking years because both of them are rather shy, delicate ladies and Hresker, Anathae, and Filfaeril are all agreed that the very last thing that should happen is settling them with less than ideal partners).

Hresker and Anathae Yellander now dwell in Whitewings (the renamed Yellander seat in Galdyn's Gorge, a modest, unwallied keep-and-attached stone mansion surrounded by gardens and a deep, wooden-spike-filled ditch to discourage marauding wilderland monsters; its new name comes from all the doves raised for food by Anathae's longtime maids, who came from farming families known for their flavourful dove pies), visiting Suzail only for major Councils and at the end of summer. Prester Yellander's simple, rustic hunting lodge on the edge of the Hullack Forest sits disused, and will soon fall into ruin if not maintained.

Less well known in Suzail are the poorer, more rustic local noble families of Buckfast and Haelbroke. These "true bloods of the Thunderflow" lead lusty lives of running their farms directly, brewing and distilling, imbibing the results, and hunting from the saddle.

They also seem to have "ridden" great numbers of willing local lasses, and are impoverished in part because of all the bastard offspring they help to support - - which has linked them, time and again, to divers local families, businesses, and farms.

Their byblows have been sent literally by the score into the ranks of local Purple Dragons, who are inclined to look the other way at Buckfast and Halebroke indiscretions, which in turn has encouraged male members of these houses to becoming accomplished rakes, drunkards, and local "rowdies" behind many a local brawl, wildly whooping midnight gallop, accidental fire, and prank.

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The current patriarch of the Buckfasts is Lord Rothtil Buckfast, whose hardy, lusty, fun-loving mate is Lady Suvreene Buckfast, and they dwell with three sons (including the family heir, Ravance) and five daughters at the family seat of Buckhaven Hall, a walled manor house and 'home farm' in the countryside east of Thunderstone. This "heart of the Buckfasts" household also rents two rooms above a chandler's ("Maerikho Hayhondlow, Chandler to High and Low") on the south front of the Rise.

Other prominent Buckfasts include Melhard, a fat and blustering old bellow of a rake with a legendary capacity for drink, and Sargram, an aging but still deadly fighter-of-duels and bedder of anyone female and handy (the reason for a lot of those duels; noble wives are his favourite quarry, and his outrageously leering flirtatiousness [or "charm" as the ladies tend to prefer to call it] seems to conquer many of them).

The current head of House Haelbroke is Lord Larandyr Haelbroke, a haughty, humourless retired soldier (he recently departed the rank of ornrion, a West Reach posting, in the Purple Dragons when his father Lord Uskarr Haelbroke died, his mother Dardorra having predeceased Uskarr). Larandyr's stunningly beautiful wife is Lady Mirjlarla Haelbroke (formerly a Truesilver), and they dwell with their two daughters, Tasharra (the family heir) and Raedaera at the family seat of Buckhaven Hall, a rather spartan walled keep and 'home farm' in the countryside west of Thunderstone. They also rent a luxurious house on Nightcloak Ride in Thunderstone (Nightowl Roost, which is owned by Storm Silverhand but managed for her by the suave estate manager Maland Orlistand of Suzail, a secret Harper) where Lady Mirjlarla spends increasing amounts of time entertaining noble lady friends "come out from Suzail to see the rustics." A glowering Lord Larandyr rarely attends these visits, and the couple's two daughters are caught in a tussle between their parents for their time and attention (although Tasharra and Raedaera, who have both inherited their mother's raven-black hair and smoky-eyed good looks and buxom curves, dearly want to see the latest "cityside" fashions and manners, they both LOVE riding, ruling, weapons-practice, and all the other "lordly" stuff their father wants to teach them and do with them, that are more often the province of male nobles when their female counterparts are confined to empty-headed chatter in parlors and "lace-chambers").

Other prominent Haelbrokes include Galragar, Mresper, and Borlingar. Galragar, the eldest, is Larandyr's uncle, and the other two are his cousins. Galragar is a fair-haired, unshaven, rollicking meaty bull of a man, load and coarse and jovial. Borlingar is a younger, dark-haired echo of Galragar, whereas Mresper is sly, witty, slender, and agile. All three are tirelessly-energetic roisterers, wenchers (Mresper may on occasion also prefer young and handsome male partners), and fun-seekers, the bright stars of every revel they take part in. They are always thinking up some new "society" or club or prank, some entertainment for themselves and those who "ride with them" to take part in; Larandyr's last attempt to host a solemn feast for Suzailan lords he desired to impress was "pranced" (in the real world, we would say "crashed") by Galragar and Borlingar leading a dozen strapping local lads, most of them wealthy or highborn or both, all riding horses and wearing heavy makeup and beautiful womens' gowns, garters, and all, into the ballroom to a skidding dismount and wild dance with the attending - - and utterly astonished - - noble lords. This is a typical prank, neither a highlight or lowlight, but it strengthened Larandyr's cold distaste towards all three of his "wild wolves" of kin, whom he disowns and shuns at every opportunity. (His house wizard, a lean and homely mage by the name of Baerglan Dunstag, who is of course a War Wizard, refuses to let Larandyr bar his gates to the three or move to try to legally dispossess them [an effort that would fail, anyway, as only the Crown can strip someone of their rightful heritage, and then only by exiling them and taking away their citizenship as well], but Larandyr refuses to recognize or speak to them, always addressing cutting remarks to any of the three to any handy servant or statue or potted plant, loudly enough for the shunned kin he wants to hear, to do so. For their parts, the three are amused at Larandyr's attitude, not upset or ashamed.)

Those are the living nobles. There are indeed a handful of extinct ones that will serve for answering your second question. For now, enjoy (I hope) this lore.

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So saith Ed, whose deep love for Cormyr shows. Damian, will you be a dashing knight and update the Cormyr compilation thread?
love to all,
THO

On January 11, 2009 THO said:- Damian, I'm away from my notes at the moment and can't recall the name, so will have to wait for Ed to answer, but it is indeed more stream than river, and I THINK had "stream" in its name, locally, as in "XXXX Stream."

Sigh. Getting old, memories going . . .

In the meantime,

hello again, all. As promised, Ed has a very swift reply for most of Garret.Dorigan's questions (the exception is the Genasi query, which Ed has to consult about; his preliminary opinion is that most humans don't distinguish well between sorts of genasi, though halflings and elves and gnomes do), so here we go:

"(2) Do certain regions have a specific armor setup for their armies, much like Dark Ages countries had specific quirks for their armies in our world? Not so much on the point of "The Purple Dragons wear plate most of the time, Sembians..." but more that, do regions wear different helm types to stand out from others and what are some examples if so?"

Ed replies:

All armor is of course handmade, and almost every helm is subtly different.

However, in general, as of 1370 DR, most realms in the Heartlands have helms for knights, nobles, cavalry and officers that resemble real-world historical "great helms" in general looks (full front "prow" faceplate, with two eyeslits and some breathing-holes down near the lower front or beak), except that the frontplate IS a hinged visor, either up-and-down or side-hinged. A gorget to protect the throat will be worn underneath, and usually this goes with plate armor that has an upstanding protective collar that fits outside the helm (and the head wearing it, so there's room to turn your head without striking your own collar), too. Some sort of plate armor is usual for armored persons of such rank.

General infantry wear chainmail with breastplates, backplates, and plate-fittings at all the joints (elbows, shoulders), and have helms like historical barbutes or "Milanese" style: open slit down the front that widens into two eye-holes at its top, separated by a reinforced noseguard. Castle guards and bodyguards will have better armor than this "augmented" chainmail.

Militia will wear conical "cap" helms or older salvaged helms of all sorts, usually with an attached throat and neck-guard of leather-studded-with-sewn-on salvaged (and thus irregular in size and shape) metal plates. Their armor may be just about anything, from heavy leather "jacks" on up. The only general comments that can be made about helm styles are these: Aside from the "show" guards flanking some city gates, the gates of Piergeiron's Palace, and the front gates of Castle Waterdeep, Waterdeep has EVERYTHING, because its folk come from everywhere and merchants and local armorers are constantly introducing new designs. Cormyrean helms are rather English in looks, lacking the pointed "duckbill" or "beak" visors of French design, but the armies of Tethyr, Amn, the Vilhon, and (because they're mercenaries, drawn from elsewhere [such as the Vilhon]) Westgate and Sembia DO have basinet-style helms with those pointed visors. The sallet (helm with sweeping or lengthened "tail" or back-of-neck-guard) style of helm is favoured in Tethyr and down the Sword Coast, but less often seen elsewhere. And finally, Cormyrean helms tend to have rounded tops, but Sembian helms (and those of Chessenta and

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around the eastern Inner Sea) have “tall,” pointed-top shapes (in other words, high peaks that enclose some empty air above the scalp).

These are generalizations, remember, because only a few realms have large standing armies with anything approaching a “uniform equipage code” (the Purple Dragons are one such force). Two of the original series of FR supplements (the Horde Campaign and Gold & Glory) have Osprey-style paintings of typical military uniforms of the day that can be consulted for a “general look,” but in a pinch, an individual warrior can be wearing almost anything and the DM can explain it away as a local variance (some places have blacksmiths rather than skilled armorers, and some armories and garrisons have only a few “bright and presentable” suits of war-harness, in only a few sizes, and improvise for everyone else, covering the worst bits with strapped-on shields and bindings of cloth that echo the proper battle-colors on everyone else’s surcoats.

“3) Where, if anywhere, could one find a trenchcoat? Not in a type made famous by the Matrix movies, but more along the lines of the character of Geoffrey Chaucer in 'A Knights Tale'. A better description would most likely be, similar to a French toggled longcoat of the Hundred Years War.”
Ed replies:

As I recall, the Chaucer character showed up NAKED in that film. :) It was the Black Prince (in the scene with Heath Ledger’s hero in the stocks) who wore a magnificent longcoat.

To answer your question for the Realms, you can find such coats almost anywhere in the Heartlands and Sword Coast North, worn by those who must stand or walk distances in the outdoors in almost all seasons except the hottest summer months (and even then, in prolonged driving rain, someone with access to his longcoat might get it out). They are made by tanners and leatherworkers in many, many Faerûnian communities. However, they tend to be owned and worn only by those of means (nobles and the wealthy, and higher-ranking officers); most non-combatants and those of less coin in the Realms wear “weathercloaks” instead, which are almost-down-to-the-ankle-length cloaks, lighter than leather and lacking fastenings except brooches (pins). Weathercloaks blow around more and don’t provide as much protection against cold winds, being as they cling to the arms and shoulders when pinned shut.

“4) Is there Brigandine in the realms? And if so, where could one find an armorer to convert coats and vests to such? My guess would be Cormyr, but...?”
Ed replies:

One can find armorers to do such work in many, many places (cities, large market towns along trade routes, and in dwarven and gnome-dominated settlements everywhere), because reinforcing garments with sewn-on or secured-with-links metal strips is journeyman and ’prentice work, and (like sharpening knives and daggers) part of the daily “bread and butter” coin-earning livelihood of any armorer or smith (yes, any smith can make brigandine, though really good overlapping or not-obvious-as-brigandine-to-the-eye brigandine requires a skilled armorer or at least the close supervision of someone with those skills).

However, making brigandine also requires a skilled leatherworker (the same sort of skills needed for leather or hide armor, or splint mail work, or the making of leather underpadding for full coat-of-plate armor). One can’t just attach shaped pieces of metal to an existing garment; the result will be something that “hangs heavy,” hampering the wearer’s movements, that doesn’t provide proper overlapping coverage during battle (when one twists, trots, swings weapons, and so on), and that can even cut or bruise the wearer. Proper brigandine requires taking the garment apart and rebuilding it in overlapped layers, with a lot of new leather being sewn on.

Any armorer good enough to keep a business going for more than a season will have a spouse,

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children, aging parents or other relatives, or apprentices or journeymen working for him or her who can do the necessary leather-work to make brigandine armor, or will be able to do the leather-work him/herself. Brigandine armor rots and falls apart (thanks to the metal reinforcements cutting into the leather when struck by weapons, and thanks to rust discharges and the weight of the metal) faster than most other sorts of armor, so repaired secondhand brigandine armor is a plentiful commodity - - but secondhand brigandine armor requiring MORE repair is even more plentiful in shops and smithies.

However, the short answer to your question is that armorers can be found in almost all cities and large towns, and many other places along trade routes or in dwarf or gnome (or orc, for that matter!) communities, and that all armorers can modify garments into brigandine armor. Whether they will agree to do so or not is, of course, a roleplaying matter.

"5) Are there any jobs in the Realms that are un-glamorous but well paying, in the same vein as American garbage men (I'm sorry, Sanitation Professionals) making almost \$50,000 a year in most regions?"

Ed replies:

Yes, but how plentiful these jobs are, what they are, and the local definition of "well paying" varies widely across the Realms. For instance, gravedigging is poorly-paid and unglamorous in some places, but very well paid in others. Sewer-work in Waterdeep (because it's guilded work, and highly dangerous to boot) is VERY well paid, but unpleasant and unglamorous. Stonemason-work concerned with fortifications (castle and wall repairs, or shoring up vaulted cellars everywhere, as well as "mining" to enlarge cellars or tunnels or privy-chutes, plus lining same to prevent collapses) is generally unglamorous and underappreciated by wider society, but is always well paid. Animal-training (and monster live-capturing, which is almost always adventurers' work) tends to be unglamorous but well rewarded. So, for that matter, is finding and bringing back alive or in good condition rare plants (or eggs) for herbalists and alchemists. The painting and plastering of grand rooms in palaces and nobles' mansions, and the styling of hair and the custom fitting and making of garments for such persons, is also generally unglamorous but well paid. And so on. In some communities, smiths, plumberers, and butchers (slaughterers) are paid well for unglamorous work. So are bed-nurses for royalty and nobility, particularly those who bathe, tend, and guard the mad or long-term-afflicted . . . and royal or noble tasters, who sample the food and drink of important persons to "take the fall" for them if bad cooking or murderous malice are suspected.

I could go on listing particular occupations in particular places for a long time. In general, if a job is dangerous or unpleasant and the hirer wants discretion (or absolute secrecy) from the person doing that job, rewards are high. One seldom thought-of such job is the person who discreetly writes love letters or job applications or delicate apologies on behalf of noble or royal patrons, or wealthy patrons seeking to deal with nobility or royalty. In short, a scribe who poses as another person, writing for them and keeping both the writing task and the contents of what was written VERY secret. A variant on this (believed to be the source of one court lady's fortune, some centuries ago in Cormyr) is the writer of "lust tales" [explicit porn] or "heartwarms" [flowery romance] intended only for the eyes of one royal patron (and sometimes written "to order," naming specific persons or acts to be described). In rarer cases, bards secretly hire others to write their jokes, or royal patrons hire others to write "their" ballads and witty poems.

So saith Ed. Who will, I fondly trust, return with the reply to Asgetrion's second question (about extinct noble families in the Thunderstone area) tomorrow.
love to all,

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On January 12, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, fellow scribes. I bring you once more the lore-words of Ed of the Greenwood, this time in response to two queries.

First, crazedventurers asked the name of the stream in Eveningstar that runs down the west side of the temple lands; Damian, Ed confirms that it's called "Starglimmer Stream" (or more often just "the Starglimmer"). The priests of the local temple have dubbed it "Morningstar Rill" in honour of Lathander, but no one outside of the temple uses this name or would even know what it referred to, if they heard it. Some elder inhabitants of Eveningstar refer to the stream by its nickname of "Bloodwater Brook," which came from an old battle between skirmishing nobles in the civil strife of Salmember's Regency, wherein local legend holds the waters briefly ran red with the blood of the fallen.

It strikes the eye as a shallow, fast-running, coldwater stream about eight to ten feet below the level of the surrounding land, that has cut a winding streambed about twenty feet across (as root-choked earthen banks erode and tumble down). Like all fast watercourses, it undercuts its banks on the outsides of curves and deposits large gravel bars on the insides. Children play in it (south of the temple lands, that is) and are sent to bathe in it, and occasionally a goodwife will soak a thoroughly-dirtied garment in its waters, held down by stones, for cleansing [i.e. to "wash out" a large bloodstain].

Second, Ed responds to the second of the eight Thunderstone-and-vicinity questions posted by Asgetrion back in mid-December:

"2) Are there any "extinct" local noble families, who might have dabbled into necromancy and/or demon worship, and were either exiled or executed or imprisoned?"

Ed replies:

There are indeed.

Thunderlunnar (or more recently, "Thunderlans;" both terms mean inhabitants of Thunderstone) and other locals might believe the Immerdusks are extinct, but in truth the following noble families, once locally prominent, have vanished: the Houses of Bracebolt, Drauthglas, Mallowbridge, and Tulwood.

According to what local legends once heeds, any or all of these families may well have dabbled with necromantic magic and/or worshipped or consorted with demons, but there are no local tales or suspicions of the old, old Drauthglas clan being exiled, executed, or imprisoned. "Longest gone and least remembered" is how most locals recall them, if at all; an ancient name clinging to the Hullack forest, and no more. So consider them a possible but least likely candidate, of the four choices, and pass on to the others.

The House of Bracebolt flourished in the time of King Duar, and had a reputation for handsome good looks and skill-at-arms, not any interest in magic. Most Bracebolts died in battle (fighting for Cormyr, loyal to the king of the day), but two were imprisoned for short periods on suspicion of murder; one [Lord Helaerd Bracebolt] was acquitted and the other [Lord Rorell "Rory" Bracebolt] escaped from a dungeon, never to be seen again (he was pardoned in absentia when later War Wizard evidence pointed to another person as the murderer, and was widely thought to have lived out his days either "living wild" in the Thunder Peaks or living simply as a forester under another names, somewhere in Battledale or Featherdale).

The family line went extinct in 1225 DR, when the childless, unmarried Lord Belarkus Bracebolt died fighting for the Crown in one of the many, many battle-victories of King Dhalmass.

The Mallowbridges are quite another matter. The males of this family tend to be soft-spoken, smiling men of dark hair, good looks, and cruel lack of morals, who swindle and deceive and cheat their ways through life, employing secretly-hired agents to end unpleasant problems (such as rivals or those they owe coin to) with a sharp dagger some night.

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The last Mallowbridge is thought to have died a pauper's death in the reign of Rhigaerd II, but the family (which rose to nobility in the reign of Andilber, through wealth and battle prowess and informing the Unfortunate King of several plots against him) lost its title and standing (though not properties) by the decree of King Palaghard II, earning this unusual fate because they were suspected of scores of bad deeds, but no hard evidence could be found against them. They had access to dark magic and used it, because every last War Wizard sent to investigate them died, mysteriously torn apart by unseen creatures who left no traces - - creatures who devoured or carried off the heads of the unfortunate mages, and cast many dark and powerful spells on the remains and the death-sites, that prevented other War Wizards from using spells to determine just how they died or what they saw or learned.

So this family are prime candidates for what you have in mind. The patriarch of the House when they gained noble status was Hander Tarius Mallowbridge, created Lord Tarius Mallowbridge (he never used his childhood name "Hander," which he hated, once his father was dead; Tarius was the name of his grandsire, and his father had been Honder Mallowbridge, leaving the son heartily sick of being called "Hander son of Honder").

Lord Baeryn Mallowbridge was head of the house when it was stripped of nobility; he was exiled, but his sons Tonthur and Naeryn were not. Both went on to have large families, that finally dwindled down to Esker Mallowbridge (a descendant of Tonthur), who died living alone as a forester in the Hullack, sometime in either the winter of 1331 DR or the spring of 1332 DR. However, there are many local tales (mostly dark tales of malicious spellcastings) of various Lady Mallowbridges dabbling in magic, sometimes magically ruining young local men after seducing them. Although Mallowbridge wives came from many families (often of wealthy non-noble Marsemban stock), the tales generally portray them as slender, beautiful, and as having long, long dark hair. Elminster attests that many of the never-wed Mallowbridge daughters, who dwelt in various family homes and became aging aunts and then very-long-lived crones, were accomplished sorceresses or trained wizards, and aided and taught each other, waylaying and seizing the scrolls and tomes of traveling mages when they could to increase the "family power." The wife of Tarius was Lady Tamglaera, the wife of Baeryn was Lady Anglorae, and the wife of Glarem (the wealthiest and most powerful Lord Mallowbridge between Tarius and Baeryn) was Lady Resildra.

Tonthur's wife was named Harellae, and she is known to have been powerful in magic, ruthless, fearless, and to have often fared far in the Hullack, walking alone and using spells to slay creatures that she then devoured raw (earning her the nickname "Wildfangs").

Naeryn's wife was Oloebrae, a delicate beauty who was masterful in acting and manipulation, and who probably poisoned Naeryn when she tired of him (she went on to take two subsequent husbands, both wealthy merchants of Suzail, and the first of them also died of poison, as did Olobrae's sons Ithril and Ongammur. Only a daughter, Taeril, outlived her mother, and she did so by fleeing to Waterdeep and disappearing (probably altering her face, taking another name, and plunging into a new life as a drudge-servant or tavern dancer, though one tale whispers that she used spells to appear to be a man, and rose to become a guildmaster; this tale may well be true, or may have arisen because "Taeril" is a name borne by both males and females in Cormyr).

The last candidate family is the House of Tulwood, a line of arrogant, fair-haired, malicious men (and a succession of commoners who married them, because they seemed uniformly unable to attract brides from amongst the nobility of the realm) who were known for skilled swordsmanship, feuding, and personal obsessions. Some were obsessed with worshipping the Cormyrean monarch of the day, some were obsessed with married noblewomen or priestesses they could not have, and some were obsessed with collecting oddities or with mastering strange hobbies (such as tying miniature animals from knotted string, or painting miniature likenesses of lovers on the fingernails and toenails of their wives).

Aside from fighting, riding, wenching, and feuding, however, few of the Lords Tulwood accomplished much, though Lord Baerent Tulwood was that rarest of things: the head of a noble house (during most of the reign of Azoun I) who was also a master swordsmith.

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The Tulwoods rose to nobility in the reign of Irbruin, ennobled for military service to the Crown (defending easternmost Cormyr against brigands, monsters, and various self-proclaimed kings of their own fledgling realms). From the first Lord Tulwood, Omburr, the family had many sons and few daughters, tended to embrace military careers, and tended to have short and violent lives. The last of the many Lord Tulwoods was Korlandur, who died in the summer of 1319 DR in a violent fall over a cliff on horseback that shattered most bones of both horse and rider (the plunge may or may not have been due to foul play; Korlandur was a cruel man known for unhesitatingly disfiguring the faces of those he disagreed with by means of his metal-barbed horsewhip, who'd earned himself many foes).

The Tulwoods were bullies who tended to hire mercenaries and wizards to beat any foe who stood up to them (though they were careful never to cross any courtier, local lord or Crown agent, the Obarskys, or any of the three "royal" noble families), and many of them dabbled in magic as a hobby (usually without much results, but then, those who succeed in dark summonings and the like seldom want to advertise their successes in a realm so dominated by War Wizards).

One Tulwood, a heir Rantaver (his younger brother Borovan became Lord after the death of their father, Gulthur), was exiled in the reign of Duar (for strongly suspected but not-quite-proven treason), and more than a dozen Tulwoods were imprisoned for short periods, for various violent actions perpetrated against other nobles (or in one case, a visiting envoy from Amn). There are no records of executions, but there are strong suspicions of Tulwoods being involved in dark magic and of summoning demons, so they, too, are candidates.

Perhaps you could use both the Mallowbridge AND Tulwood families, with Bracebolt as a red herring, and REALLY get your players deep into intrigues and shadowy conspiracies and shadows from the past. Heh-heh, and so forth.

So saith Ed, opening up several cans of worms with great glee, it seems to me.

Ah, Cormyr, so dear to my heart and so delightful. May your tale be told, some day and some way.

love to all,

THO

On January 13, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. This time Ed responds to the third of Asgetrion's Thunderstone-related queries:

"3) Which sort of presence do the Heralds and Harper and Zhentarim agents have in Thunderstone -- i.e. do stay just "stay put" and observe, or have an active presence in the area?"
Ed replies:

There is a local herald, Bannermere, but this is a new office held by a novice, a young, slender, brown-haired man originally from Berdusk, who is polite and rather shy, and derives most of his income by designing and limning signs and writing letters for locals (he is not a Crown herald). He keeps to Thunderstone, and interested clients come to see him; it's recently come to light (much to his embarrassment) that he secretly writes salacious chapbooks for sale in Scornubel and Waterdeep, including the popular "Rorel the Conquering Blade" series (in which the debonair, swirling-cloaked Rorel beds an endless series of willing women, often after dueling their craven and cruel wife-beating husbands). Interestingly, there's long been a rumour that the Rorel books were penned by the same anonymous hand that once presented the now-banned chapbook "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" to a receptive Suzail and even more eager Purple Dragon posts up and down the Realm, but a blushing and stammering Bannermere denies ever even dreaming of

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portraying the Dragon Queen in such a light. (Another rumour whispers that Filfaeril, who has been officially silent on the work, secretly enjoyed it very much and cajoled her royal husband into acting out the events of several of the encounters therein - - but rumour, like a barking dog, oft makes much more noise and arouses more ire than it in truth should.)

There are no publicly-known Zhentarim agents in the area, but "everyone knows" they do pay locals for spying and passing on information, and that there IS a Zhent paymaster somewhere in Thunderstone. It's almost certainly a shopkeeper, and the local Purple Dragons do keep close watch over one Tunstal Draeger, a seller (but not maker; his wares come from the docks of Marsember) of rope, cord, and wire.

However, the Dragons and even Draeger are unaware that Draeger is a decoy Zhent spy and paymaster, who continues to operate and be paid by a travelling Zhent master (a Selgauntan "manywares" caravan merchant by the name of Drustigo Parlath) despite the fact that the authorities are "on to him," and the Zhents know this. While the attention is on Draeger, the REAL local Zhent spy, the scent and potion maker and seller Naerilda Jackalane, does the real spying. She's a bone-thin, long-nosed, rather homely woman who's a superb mimic and actor - - and VERY careful not to attract attention to herself. She openly makes regular herb-gathering and buying trips (gathering on the banks of the Thunderflow and in the verges of the Hullack Forest, and buying from specific farms), tries to carry on romances with several local Purple Dragons (purportedly because she's lonely and desperate for a mate and has a "thing" for "men in Crown uniform," but actually to allay suspicion and to learn what she can of local Dragon gossip), and is known to discreetly visit local households after dark to deliver love-potions and herbal ointments that aid in "love's arts" (lubricants and stiffeners, to put it less delicately). She has no public skill in healing, but is known to make and sell very effective ointments that effectively deaden all pain (and itching sensations) in a localized body area, and secretly possesses about a dozen magical healing potions for her own use and to aid wounded Zhents who might need them. Her Zhent name is "Thunderblade" or just "Blade," but Zhents who think they might be overheard while speaking of her are supposed to refer to her instead as "Thunderflow" so that what they say will be mistaken either for the river, or as a SECOND agent.

The Harpers have two safe-houses and lore-moots in Thunderstone, both the homes of retired, aging, limping from old wounds ex-Dragons (who are now covert Harper agents). They do nothing at all to attract attention to themselves, beyond opening their doors after dark when certain signals are given, and taking in guests they hide in their cellars, in secret passages, and in hidden attic areas. An ever-changing succession of younger and more active Harper agents move through the area and do all the fighting, skulking, prowling, and spying (the Harpers in Berdusk regard the Thunderstone area as a good "training-ground," but also send more experienced Harpers to watch over the novices, both to rescue them if need be and evaluate them).

The two elderly Harpers are the grizzled and laconic (most known for his severe limp and his jutting, oversized, sharp-pointed lower jaw) Pharvukh Bonehondur, once an orrnrion in the Dragons who came from Teziir and joined the Dragons as a youth, in a hiring fair in Suzail; and Malaeva Irlingbreak, a sharp-tongued, tall but stooped by her aches, slightly-limping and cane-using woman who has long, untidy white hair, piercing black eyes, and a habit of purring audibly when contented or amused; she was once a constal in the Dragons, at High Horn, and earlier in her career, when holding much lower ranks, served for many years in Arabel.

Both of them are expert at tending wounds and keeping their mouths shut; Bonehondur runs a knife-and-tool sharpening service out of his home, and Malaeva makes carved and ornamented wooden front doors and shutters (and a few small carry-coffers, too).

So saith Ed, who seems to be really building up lore so Asgetrion, Damian, and anyone else who wants to can use this area for a campaign setting. Whee!

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(I know Ed expects to have an answer for Asgetrion's fourth question next, then Damian's most recent query. Glancing over Ed's reply, I want to emphasize that the Zhent agents he mentions are NOT the only ones, just the only long-term-resident ones; to avoid being easily exposed, the "do the dirty stuff" Zhent agents, of whom there are probably around six to eight at any one time in the Thunderstone area, "move through" the district and on to elsewhere, being replaced by "the next wave.")

love to all,
THO

On January 13, 2009 THO said:- [In answer to the question posted by Scribe Malcolm] Are off-duty Purple Dragons likely to still be in uniform? Or partial uniform? (I don't mean if they stop to buy food or drink on the way home, I mean if they go out carousing most of the night.) Are there rules against wearing your uniform to brotheXXX ahem, festhalls? Or anywhere else?

THO:- I seem to remember this coming up in play with Ed as DM, and the answer was: it varies according to the local Purple Dragon commander. I THINK. Off to Ed for a proper reply, of course.
love,
THO

On January 14, 2009 THO said:- Thank you! But (hah-HA!) we're not done yet!
Yes, hi once more, fellow scribes. This time Ed tackles the fourth of Asgetrion's Thunderstone-related queries:

"4) Are there any notable castles or keeps in or near Thunderstone?"

Ed replies:

Aside from those already mentioned for the various noble families (including the Summerstars, back in my 2004 reply and in the novel STORMLIGHT that preceded it), no.
There IS "Ravaer's Stronghold," an "earthen-ring-wall-surrounded by ditch" defensible redoubt for the use of Purple Dragons trying to repel any invasion in force from the Thunder Peaks, that stands in the open countryside (rolling, unfenced common ranchers' fields) not far west of the mountain foothills. It's exactly what its name implies: a grass-covered series of earthworks, with a single entry "lane" or elevated "ride" leading into it from the west, this lane having precipitous ditches on both sides, being just wide enough for a small wagon or two riders abreast, and having a "dogleg" bend in it to make charges difficult and aid defenders. This feature is named for a long-ago Purple Dragon commander who died defending Cormyr from a Sembian-sponsored raiding force there, and is notable for having a single stone-lined subterranean "refuge room" at its heart, a chamber about twenty feet square ("about" because its walls are a series of embrasures or niches ending in sleeping benches) that has three stone caskets (like coffins) at its center that can serve as coffins, or tables, or food and water storage (Purple Dragon patrols keep them stocked with skins of water, raw cabbages, sausages enclosed in clay to keep mold from growing on them, and firewood). The refuge room is reached down a long, narrow ramp from a hole in the ground covered by a single stone slab and sheltered by a three-sided earthwork "cave" that can provide some small shelter for hobbled horses; the cave has several hitching-rings set into its sides.

Perched on the sides of the lowest Thunder Peaks are the crumbling, open-to-the-sky remnants of several ancient "robber baron" castles; simple keeps that are much used by roosting birds

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(and, from time to time, perytons and even wyverns, though the Purple Dragons call in War Wizards to exterminate such unwanted inhabitants, whenever they're noticed). These serve more as landmarks (meeting-moots and the sites of occasional smuggling caches) than as shelter; the best-known are Kaliphur's Keep, Imbral's Tower, the Wyvernteeth, and Black Helder's Roost.

A wealthy but non-noble family from Suzail, the Varvrail family, bought a cluster of a dozen farms about a quarter-day's ride south-southwest of Thunderstone, and there started construction of a grand fortified stone mansion. However, the clan ran out of money after several investments went bad and their participation in smuggling from Westgate to Suzail was uncovered. (Several members were jailed, and the family now toils as shopkeepers in Suzail, in much reduced circumstances.) The mansion was barely begun, and consists of heaps of earth, a large pit, and the beginnings of a front wall with a row of high arched windows; the surrounding farms and the piles of cut lumber and dressed stone blocks assembled at the site but not yet used in the construction were sold off to pay family debts, leaving just the one unfinished wall, plus its temporary timber supporting buttresses and a scaffold that has long since sagged into a crazily unsafe state. It was to have been called Varvrail Hall, but is locally known as "Folly Hall."

So saith Ed. Who adds that he left the depths of the the Hullack Forest, the heart of the Thunder Peaks, and the Vast Swamp out of this, as being not part of the "Thunderstone area," but rather its borders. All three contain both human and elven ruins (and of course there are also dwarven, gnomish, and orken ruins in the Thunder Peaks), as it happens, but many of them are tied up in all sorts of NDAs, some even linked to the old SPI (TSR-acquired) Dragonquest game (in other words, the Watching Gods alone know when we'd ever get those sorted out, to say nothing of lifted).

love to all,
THO

On January 14, 2009 THO said:- Darkhund, your question has been sent off to Ed, but here's something on the topic from his notes, in the meantime:

Human ruins are numerous across the Realms, those of orcs, dwarves, gnomes, elves, and halflings less so.

Elven ruins are sparser thanks to racial numbers and because many elven dwellings were "alive" (trees), and have not survived in any recognizable form. The other races all had many subterranean or "dug out" dwellings, and these have often collapsed, been taken over and enlarged by later users, or built on by humans (gnome and halfling abandoned dwellings especially).

So saith Ed. Who thinks of all things.

love,
THO

On January 15, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. This time Ed responds to these queries from crazedventurers: "Thanks Ed for more excellent Lore regarding Cormyte nobles and their doings. The depth of detail is easily transferable to any game and any other kingdom (Faerun or beyond)

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by tweaking a name or two - just brilliant.

In general are nobles whose lands are on the edge of the Cormyr more 'earthy' (or whatever the Realms equivalent word is) in their doings and manner (they seem to like riding, hunting and fighting a lot etc.) than those in cities (who are perhaps more political and mercantile, or am I stereotyping too much!)? Am wondering if they can be this way because the 'reach of the Court' doesn't stretch that far and/or because the Crown take the view that as long as the nobles keep the borders as safe as possible from monsters, Zhents, brigands and creeping Sembian interests then they are not overly concerned what the country nobles are doing unless it's extremely bad? Which leads to another question or three..... I know Cormyr is not Feudal as in real earth history European Feudal, but are Nobles who are stuck out in the wilds expected to keep the borders safe, is that part of the 'deal' that keeps them in their position of nobility?

Are they expected to (can they?) raise their own troop to patrol their lands and/or to support the local Purple Dragons army? If so, do the Crown/Wizards of War turn a blind eye to them raising a 'just larger than required' force of troops that they might use to extend their borders a bit further out into the wilds to secure a mine / forest / farmland / hunting preserve that enriches themselves and not necessarily the Crown or the local subjects? (assume the family are loyal to the Crown and are not raising an army to challenge the Obarskyrs).

(Brian, if you want to chime in with an answer then please feel free)

Thanks once again

Damian

who is off to update his Eveningstar map and file away the differing local names for the stream to confuse his players later"

Ed replies:

Hi, Damian. You're very welcome. I love doing this, and am always happy to help explore the Realms.

Yes, border nobles (the polite term used in Cormyr is "upcountry nobles" and the less polite one is "backcountry nobles," which begins a slide into "backcountry bumpkins" and progressively ruder terms) do tend to be more earthy (or "rustic," which is the more polite disdainful expression) . . . but most of them in return look down on "cified" or "dandified" nobles who "lack all real connection to this great land of ours."

It's not out of any blind eye turned by the Crown or the Court, because very few upcountry nobles (except the elderly or ailing) miss any chance to get to Court in Suzail for important Councils, feasts, receptions, and times of important decision-making (which their own house wizards, the local lords and Crown heralds, and local Purple Dragon commanders all take great care to keep them all informed about, because the last thing any occupier of the Dragon Throne wants is unrest among nobles because something happened "behind their backs" because they weren't told about something that was going on).

It's simply because they spend more time hunting, riding on woodland trails or trysting out in open countryside or otherwise "taking the air" and enjoying simple pleasures (bobbing for apples, anyone? dancing with village lasses at various farming "fests"?) than do nobles who keep to Suzail and concern themselves with gossip, intrigue, investments (and lather, rinse, and repeat). It IS true that nobles who help police border areas are allowed more leeway in deeds and speech than a city-dwelling noble would be, because local Purple Dragons know them better and know the scant resources and the problems (brigands, roving monsters, Sembian and Zhent and other organized subversive forces) they and the Dragons themselves face, and (to use a modern real-world term) "cut them some slack" because of this. It's also true that for years Vangerdahast secretly pursued a policy of letting everyone think his vigilance was sadly lacking "out in the upcountry," so nobles would "get up to things" (often using their hunting lodges for meetings, as certain nobles did in SWORDS OF DRAGONFIRE) and thereby reveal something of their plots and how energetic and committed their opposition to the Crown (if any) really was. It gave his

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War Wizards something to work with - - and a place to practice using nasty spells on bad guys in a way that would have set any of the three cities of the Realm into rioting, if repeatedly done in their streets.

All nobles are responsible for policing (as in, seeing that Crown law is not ignored, and applied selectively) their own lands (though locally-stationed Purple Dragons and the everpresent War Wizards also do so, as well as watching over the nobles to see how well they do it; the various "local lords" installed by the Crown are largely there to apply justice to the servants and property and minor actions of nobles, and to give commoners someone "objective" to appeal to, if they think nobles are abusing their rights and powers). In border areas, yes, this means resident or property-owning nobles help pay for the militia and see to it that a goodly number (it varies; the local lord will tell them if he thinks they're shirking) of their servants are part of the local militia and trained and equipped accordingly (these skills should benefit the nobles, too, in case any of their buildings or lands come under attack). In times of declared war, the Crown has the legal right to demand any noble contribute trained and equipped warriors (or mounts and supplies and a large amount of coin in lieu) to the cause; often loyalty is measured in whether or not the nobles themselves (or at least their young and vigorous sons or nephews or even nieces and daughters) "take up saddle and sword" and fight alongside the Crown forces.

This indeed resembles real-world nobles' duties, but of course where the comparison to feudalism breaks down is in land ownership and the status of commoners. Cormyr is far more like a modern "First World" or "Western" democracy (no serfs or villeins or slaves, genders legally equal, etc.) than medieval real-world feudalism. (Tenant farmers, yes, but they are free to move on and there are strict limits on what any noble can command any commoner to do; except privately, within a family, it's very hard for a noble - - or anyone else in Cormyr - - to legally get anyone into a situation of "slavery in all but name").

So, yes, a noble legally can (and are expected to) raise strictly-limited private armies, as personal bodyguards and to defend their homes and other properties. They are expected to lead them, or at least send them, to aid local Purple Dragons (under the command of said Dragons or another ranking Crown official like a senior War Wizard, NOT under their own command, though again, many nobles hold or are given temporary Dragon "battlefield ranks" in the event of war or widespread armed strife). However, arming too many men, and/or sending them to do things that may have something to do with protecting their noble master's interests or settling his/her feuds, but NOT with directly protecting the noble's person (or that of his kin or undisputed property) is a serious crime that will almost always be met with War Wizards immediately casting spells on the men and the noble, and imprisoning them all to await the "justic and pleasure of the King" (or Regent, or ruling Queen; in practice, Vangey often decided things before the Obarskyrs found out, and Bhereu and Thomdor were also trusted to speak for the King). So amassing too many men gets them called a "private army" and that's bad, but sending servant after servant for full and regular refresher weapons-training and fitting them with armour and arms personally suited to them is good.

Nobles have always (in fact, constantly) tried to arm too many private soldiers and use them to patrol and then use larger and larger border areas, with a fair degree of success (land with structures on it is obvious, but ranching land dotted with small plantings of crops could be the work of someone who "just moved on," or "the monsters just got 'em" . . . and who's to tell when a noble's servant trained to weapons like a good militia member is part of that noble's private army, or not?).

That's why house wizards were installed - - and the War Wizards keyed on mindscrying the few house wizards that particular nobles insisted on choosing, rather than having a War Wizard as a house wizard; it was to prevent nobles (such as the usual malcontents in Marsember and Arabel) from quietly assembling dangerously large private armies, or annexing great amounts of territory without requesting (and paying for) formal title.

So minor expansions, yes, particularly if the nobles build or improve roads, but if they then fence off those roads, or become too greedy, Vangerdahast and an Obarskyr (or in later days, Alusair and Caladnei and a large bunch of other War Wizards and Purple Dragons) will pay the offending

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noble a "friendly visit" at which they'll be bluntly but privately told their activities have been noticed, and will cease if they desire to retain their heads. If the noble then remains friendly, so will the Crown. However, the noble has been reminded that they are being watched, and will receive subtle later reminders, too (reports from house wizards, sightings of groups of War Wizards strolling through the noble's land examining wells and granaries and barracks, servants being politely questioned, et cetera).
Heh. Hope this is of help.

So saith Ed. Ongoing and enthusiastic creator of Cormyr and all of this fun!
love to all,
THO
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On January 16, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all.
This time Ed responds to this recent query from Menelvagor: "Was this "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" ever mentioned before? And how did the Crown and Fee react (publicly and privately, please) to this? Did they even read it? (I can guess at its contents, so no need to ask about that)"
Ed replies:

I have mentioned it in the drafts of several Cormyr-set novels, as one of those "in jokes" that the editors used to enjoy reading privately, and then prune before publication. By which I mean: they and I both knew such snippets were never going to see print, but I wrote them for fun (back in the dear dawn days of TSR, and up until quite recently at Wizards, one of the editors would discover such a screed, have a laugh over it, then print it out, stand on her chair in cubicle-land, clear her throat loudly, and then read the said steamy scene out loud for everyone.
It provided a few moments of amusement for most of the Books Department folks, and those who needed to concentrate hard whilst editing and didn't want to hear it were already hooked up to iPods or similar headphone and earbud devices that walled them away from such distractions. In those unpublished ("suppressed" if you will, but with my agreement and expectation that they would be edited out), I mentioned this specific fictitious salacious work as one in which Purple Dragons would laugh over, and then get very red-faced when Queen Filfaeril strolled past them as they stood guard together, AND as something court ladies or noblewomen would gossip and titter about - - and then subside into shocked silence when Queen Fee came upon them quickly and joined their conversation about it.
Publicly and officially, the Crown ignored the work, except to ban its possession by any Purple and Blue Dragon (something deliberately not enforced in private dwellings, only within guardposts, armories, barracks, naval bases, and fortresses such as High Horn) and to send undercover courtiers around the cities of Suzail, Marsember, and Arabel to quietly buy up all the copies they could find, and "disappear" them. The Court Wizard (Vangerdahast) then issued a decree that the said work contained "dangerous hidden magics that would enact a curse upon the reader," and banned its printing or copying out by hand, within the realm of Cormyr.
Publicly (aside from face to face meetings with individual nobles, as described above) Filfaeril ignored the existence of the work. It would be considered a grave breach of Court etiquette to mention its title to any Obarskyr, though personal friends of various royals know when they can ignore Court etiquette and when they should follow it. Filfaeril herself told some (shocked) noblewomen that she'd "quite enjoyed it," and "hoped to read a sequel, and see what further fancies the clever, clever author could IMAGINE." Tanalasta was too embarrassed to ever

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mention it to any of her fellow Obarskyrs (though a War Wizard reported to Vangerdahast that he found a copy under her mattress during his usual secret "checking for dangers" inspection, as well as finding copies in the possession of several personal maids and ladies-in-waiting to all three female Obarskyrs), Alusair discussed it frankly with both her mother and father (separately), Filfaeril and Azoun do indeed share a copy and have read it separately and together - - and have tried some of the scenes described therein together. Neither of them is inhibited, and as the ruling royals, THEY decide and set the morals of the realm, not the other way round (unlike in our real world, there aren't sole dominant clergies in Cormyr, and therefore the royal family isn' beholden to the opinion of this or that priest as to what's "good" or "proper" or "appropriate" behaviour, because the many differing views of the many differing priesthoods offset each other, as it were. In other words, the rumours that Filfaeril enjoyed the work are true.

The rumor that Bannermere wrote "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" is not true. The author IS someone long known at Court in Cormyr, but I think it's time for some fun; I'll leave it to scribes to guess the identity of the author, here in this thread, and give no hints - - but I WILL confirm when someone guesses right (and say so when a guess is wrong). To avoid repetitive "carpet bombing" guessing, let's limit it to three guesses per scribe. So, stare at all those Cormyrean faces, and ask yourself: who's secretly naughty, with pen in hand?

So saith Ed. Ho ho! Unleash the fun, indeed! consider yourself challenged, scribes!
love to all,
THO

On January 16, 2009 THO said:- Heh. Steven, you rogue, you!
Rhewtani, I believe the paucity of information on the Cormaerils is due to one of them being a PC in one of Ed's long-running library campaigns, and so you might not get much more out of Ed. So far as I can recall, said PC was Beliard Cormaeril, and was a bastard son of Azoun. Ed has, I believe, given lore replies here at the Keep in the past that have mentioned the Cormaerils.
Sage? Wooly? Kuje? (I hate to always cry out for assistance, guys, but the search and display powers of the computer I usually use to access the Keep are severely limited.)
love,
THO

On January 17, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. This time Ed returns to Asgetrion's list of Thunderstone-and-vicinity questions, and tackles this one:
"5) Which religions have shrines (or even temples) in or around Thunderstone? I've already included shrines to Tymora, Tempus, Chauntea, Silvanus (outside the town) and Torm -- some of these due to PC backgrounds -- but I'd like to hear from you if I have forgotten an "obvious" deity from that list."
Ed replies:

You have all the major ones except Lathander.
There's a shrine to Lathander on the south side of the Rise, at the west end of Thunderstone (where the Rise becomes the overland road linking Thunderstone with Hultail and the heart of Cormyr).

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There's also been talk of establishing a shrine to Waukeen, but the presence of a shrine at Hultail has delayed any such plans indefinitely; visiting that shrine gives local merchants an excuse to get loans from moneylenders in Hultail without admitting they're seeking loans (they explain away such trips by saying they visited those same persons in Hultail for moneyCHANGING purposes, and also made the rounds of warehouses and local merchants in Hultail to restock their wares for their shops back in Thunderstone).

Just north of Thunderstone, across the Thunderflow and into the Hullack Forest, no more than a long bowshot northeast of the forest verge immediately north of Stag's Skull Bridge, is a clearing in the Hullack surrounded by thick, thigh-high stands of silverleaf fern, where a shrine to Mielikki is situated. Only Harpers and local rangers know about it and use it, though rumors of its existence are beginning to spread in Thunderstone (some Harpers are trying to counter them by spreading other rumors that a shrine USED to exist, but was destroyed with "fell magic that still lingers," and so should be shunned).

This builds on a Crown prohibition on woodcutting in the Hullack within a half-day's travel of the north end of Stag's Skull Bridge, which was decreed just before Azoun IV came to the throne to halt what was beginning to happen: local woodcutters deliberately clearing a swath due north from the end of the bridge, intending to cut clear across the Hullack and found a new settlement on the East Way where their new road, when it was completed, met the East Way. The Crown had no intention of allowing certain beasts and elven ruins in the depths of the forest to be disturbed, and have to deal with the result just so a few merchants could enrich themselves (and found a new settlement that would either be independent of Cormyr and therefore a rallying-point for all rebels and foes of the Forest Kingdom, or an isolated part of Cormyr requiring the Crown to build a castle and permanently station many Purple Dragons (plus a local lord, and necessary staff and servants) there (a permanent ongoing expense).

The planned road was to have been known as the Hullackheart Trail, and the community Rabruin's Tor after a landmark crag (just south of the East Way, just east of where it plunges into the Hullack on the Thunder Peaks side) bought and occupied by the chief backer of the road, the wealthy woodcutter and wagonmaker Estann Rabruin. He was a strong-willed, unscrupulous, tireless man who's been dead for more than a decade, but the families of his five far more timid and less energetic sons (of whom the most forceful and capable is probably the eldest, Torstryn) still ranch and cut wood from the Tor.

Back to that shrine to Mielikki.

It's seldom used, even though it's shared with worshippers of Lurue, and there's nothing in it to show its use except an eerie blue glow that arises when the name of either goddess is uttered, or surrounds any offering made to either deity or to Silvanus or Eldath, or that gathers around any unsheathed metal tool or weapon in the glade (rising to a painfully-hot flare around any metal tool or weapon used to cut or strike wood or a growing green plant in the glade). Fires will not ignite in the glade, and fires brought into it will swiftly die (including fireballs, flaming spheres, and other magical fires).

Faithful of Lurue and Mielikki often sleep the night through in the glade, lying on the bare ground (there are some large, soft patches of moss), in hopes of receiving guidance from their goddess through dream-visions - - and they are often rewarded.

Seven narrow, winding footpaths lead out of the glade in all directions, two plunging deep into the Hullack but the others all eventually circling back to its southern (Thunderflow-bank) edge, and by the power of the goddesses and Silvanus, these always remain clear of brambles and saplings, but are never obvious to the eye; they seem "not to be there" except to creatures actually on them.

So saith Ed. THE master of Realmslore, though he has been delighted to witness the emergence of many others, from Ian Hunter to Jeff Grubb and Steven Schend to Eric Boyd, George Krashos, Elaine Cunningham, Grant Christie, Brian Cortijo, Tom Costa, and others down the years.

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On January 18, 2009 THO said:- Hi, all.

Time for an update in the unfolding "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" contest (don't worry, Ed will think of a suitable prize). Ashe Ravenheart has used his three guesses valiantly: Alaphondar, Royal Sage of Cormyr; Giogioni Wyvernspur; and Vangerdahast.

crazedventurers has echoed Alaphondar, and RodOdom has cleverly suggested "King Azoun himself." Gomez has advanced Valantha Shimmerstar as a candidate, basing this on her "apparently mischievous" character and the VERY shrewd observation (pray read nothing into this comment of mine, scribes) that "it would be very much Ed if the writer was a woman." Rinonalyna Fathomlin then guessed Elminster, Storm, and Tessaril Winter; and Wooly Rupert opted for Glarasteer Rhauligan (he HAS to be "our favorite dealer of turret tops," being as Ed deliberately hasn't named any of his three current competitors in print yet), with crazedventurers then confessing that Rhauligan was the second name to pop into his head (which neither Ed nor I are counting as an official vote, just a comment).

Broken Helm then advanced Lady Aerilee Summerwood ("that lady envoy from Silverymoon, from Ed's SWORDS trilogy") and Laspeera as possibilities.

Longtime Realms helmsman Steven Schend then nominated (in jest, I hope) "said roguish miscreant Garen Thal."

Aside from that last one, good and shrewd guesses, all (and mentally picturing it being Aerilee Summerwood, and her, ahem, field research before setting pen to page, gives ME the delighted shiver-giggles), but Ed sadly has to report that all of them happen to be wrong. People AT COURT have suspected all of those candidates, however (Alaphondar, Vangey, and Azoun very strongly).

Yet keep guessing, scribes. Only Ashe and Rino have fired salvos and thus used up their chances, thus far; everyone else is still in the running. I remind scribes again that the hint was that the author was "long known at Court" (rather than necessarily prominent or well-known at Court).

Heh-heh.

As Damian commented, it is a nice contest. Good fun for all. And yes, A Gavel, Ed agrees with you, and will provide a few sample titles of things the various candidate characters have written. Now for a Realmslore reply from Ed. This time, it's to Scarbeard's post: "First, thank you for the fun reads, the Realms in general, and the many questions and comments that abound on these boards. Good stuff.

Now to questions...

Any hint on the whereabouts of the dragonstaff of Ahghairon? Or even its master, Maaril the Dragon Mage, or is all cloaked under the devilry of NDA's after his tower rocketed into the skies? With Waterdeep's navy in the drink and relying mostly on the graces of Mintran warships for defense, would you guess an increase in pirate activities throughout the Wailing Years? Even more, threats from spell-scarred monsters or even the creepings of the Abolethic Sovereignty (though I know they're mostly in the Sea of Fallen Stars) may tax the resources of protecting merchant vessels and the shores of Waterdeep, giving rise to perhaps the hiring of privateers and such to bolster the Mintarn navy. I'm not very knowledgeable on Mintarn's sea might, but just how dangerous is the Sea of Swords now and has it stifled trade? Is this why Waterdeep scuttled its ships, not having the funds to keep a fleet maintained, and instead hiring out with trade pacts and such?

Thanks for your time,

Cheers from the dirty dwarf"

Ed replies:

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I'm sorry, Scarbeard, but for now, the answers to all of your questions are NDA (future fiction plans for the Realms, on the part of more than a few authors). In short, these matters are not (yet, anyway) mine to reveal, though in the unpublished "bible" for the 'Ed Greenwood Presents Waterdeep' series I did say more about Waterdeep's navy than has thus far been revealed publicly. There may come a time when I can speak more freely, but more likely you'll read answers (of a sort) to some of your questions in future Realms fiction.

Mind you, no one should interpret these words of mine to mean someone's writing a book right now about the scuttling of Waterdeep's navy and the rise of piracy led by that masked swashbuckler Maaril the Dragon Mage, wielding the dragonstaff of Ahghairon . . . but that might make a rip-roaring read, mightn't it? Hmmm, let's think more on this . . .

So saith Ed. Who's teasing, but also reminding us how some of the past Realms novels have come to be written. Hmmm, indeed.

Oh, Wooly? Ed got your e-mail, but it was all scrambled (problems his end, not with your message) and he's only just now managing to get to work on piecing it together. Expect an answer Monday or Tuesday.

love to all,
THO

On January 19, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. Ed delves back into Asgetrion's roster of Thunderstone queries, to deal now with this one:

"(6) Which demihuman races have any "presence" in Thunderstone? Is it alright to assume that whole families of gnomes, halflings and dwarves live and work there? Any lost (i.e. forgotten) dwarven or gnome clan holds/strongholds nearby?"

Ed replies:

Even as passing travellers, elves are rarely seen in Thunderstone and the farmlands around it, though there are a few resident half-elves. Dwarves are seldom seen, though there are a handful of residents (and more in small, simple family delves in the foothills of the Thunder Peaks; they will gather at the higher, deeper-dug former dwarven strongholds of Aszcrag and Hulder's Axe in the mountains proper, in times of war, alarm, or need. (These places are otherwise deserted, except as a place where casks of water and excess grain are cached in times of plenty, for later lean times, and as places passing dwarves may shelter in, overnight, if "stern weather" catches them.)

Gnomes are fairly common, both in Thunderstone and the surrounding ranching and farming country, and in the foothills (where, like the dwarves, they dwell in small and simple family delves, most of them being built around springs of drinkable water that rise to the surface and then flow out of the delve; because bears, owlbears, leucrotta, and other formidable beasts like to lair in such places, gnome family "holds" usually have pit traps lined with sharpened timber stakes, and similar "confinement" misdirections, plus "rockfall" chutes that allow tons of rubble to be unleashed down onto the heads of persistently-digging intruders).

Halflings are very common in Thunderstone and its surrounding farming and ranching country, making up perhaps 2 in every 10 sentient inhabitants, but deliberately keep a low public profile so humans won't fear their numbers and resent or be suspicious of them. Many farms owned by humans are largely worked by halflings, who tend to be the majority of bakers, brewers, and livestock trainers and tenders in the area.

In Thunderstone proper, dwarves and gnomes do all the plumbing, almost all the smithing and

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mason-work, most of the roofing and large-scale carpentry, and a lot of the carving of everyday furniture and items (carry-coffers, bread-boxes, storage tins, portable display racks and shelves), too.

This is very much "typical" (stereotypical) work for these races, but there are also local halfling artists, gnome potters, and gnome and dwarf hatters, lacemakers, and gown and dress-makers. A halfling family makes many of the rope-web and heather-and-lavender-stuffed bed riggings and mattresses, too, and several gnome and halfling families compete fiercely to dominate the local glasswork industries (mainly bottle-making, but also lamp "chimneys," small window-panes [in this region, typical windows consist of a protective grid of stout "beast bars" outside a grid of wood, clay-daub sealant, and small square glass panes], and hand-mirrors).

The highest-profile demi-human in Thunderstone is probably Daerigrol "Old Daern" Halindcleave, who strides the streets every mid-morn and mid-afternoon in a dirty, scorched ankle-length leather apron growling old songs to himself and periodically clashing two sickles against each other above his head. He's Thunderstone's roving knife- and tool-sharpener, and will do "three simple blades for a copper, or one good one" (a 'good one' meaning a sword, axe, face-razor, cook's cleaver, or other vital or large blade). Daern's sons are swift and efficient installers and repairers of hinges and latches, but one must call on them in their shopfront on the Rise to get them to come out to wherever their skills are needed. (They are masters of fashioning, adjusting, and re-rigging counterweights for doors [and, if one asks discreetly, traps].)

So saith Ed. Coming through in his usual enthusiastic manner.
love to all,
THO

On January 20, 2009 THO said:- Ah, but Elminster has fetched both into the Realms, courtesy of Ed's generous nature (and the poor locks on his barn doors). And both have been copied and adopted by guilds in Waterdeep and some far-travelled and sharp-eyed merchants in Sembia and Westgate. Extension ladders have recently been seen in Suzail.

Wooden, all of them, mind you, not aluminum like Elminster's borrowed original.

I can attest to this because seeing extension ladders during our Realmsplay became a running joke amongst the players in Ed's "home" Realms campaign. One of many running jokes and little private "gotchas" that we enjoy.

love to all,
THO

On January 20, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. A very short Realmslore reply from Ed this time, in response to Asgetrion's seventh Thunderstone-and-vicinity question:

"7) Can you give any details about the Realm of Wailing Fog?"

Ed replies:

No.

So saith Ed. Heh. He's not trying to be nasty or flippant, however; he's smitten with a firm NDA on

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this one, and is investigating to see just what he CAN say to you, to provide SOMETHing. I've suggested he give you a "well, if I was DMing the Realms right now, and wanted to head the PCs off from this feature but describe approaching it and experiencing its verges, I would handle it this way" reply, and he agrees that's a good way to go, IF he can get clearance.

love to all,
THO

On January 20, 2009 THO said:- Bakra, I do mean in the 1360s.

"Filfaeril Bound And Willing" started to make the rounds in 1369.

I LOVE your imagined conversation between Alusair and Filfaeril; it's one that (given their characters) they could easily have when Alusair was old enough (how old is that? That I leave to Ed; Alusair was both uninhibited and aware of the facts of life at a very early age, but as to how long it would take her to overcome her instinctive revulsion/reticence at discussing such matters with her mother, I'm not sure).

love,
THO

On January 21, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, scribes. Heh, keep those guesses coming!

In the meantime, here are the latest lore-words of Ed of the Greenwood, this time in response to Asgetrion's last (thus far) Thunderstone-and-vicinity question:

"(8) Does Stag's Skull Bridge have any sort of barracks/buildings for the Dragons stationed there, or do they just march to guard the bridge in shifts? Does it have any other buildings, or perhaps even fortifications (such as a barbican)?"

Ed replies:

Stag's Skull Bridge was recently rebuilt to make it stronger and wider, fuelling speculation that perhaps, just perhaps, the Crown was finally going to permit large-scale logging in the Hullack Forest, or even permit the building (or undertake the building) of a long-locally-dreamed-of road right through the heart of the Hullack, beginning at the Bridge and ending in a moot with the East Way.

The Bridge is now wide enough for two wagons to JUST pass abreast without the wheels of either straying up onto the walkways (like modern-real-world North American sidewalks: continuous paths of smooth stone slabs raised a little more than a handspan above the level of the central "wagon-way" path). These walkways, which are "the height of a shortish man, lying down" across (about five feet), run the length of the bridge on both sides of the central wagon-way, and are bounded by continuous stone parapets four feet high and a foot thick (with a flat top "edge" much used by local youths to leap or dive into the Thunderflow in the warmest months; the Thunderflow is apt to be rather cold for such activities the rest of the year). Fishing from the bridge is forbidden, as is loitering on it "with intent to talk or meet with others," or blocking it - - and the Dragons guarding it have strict orders to keep anyone from forming the habit of breaking these decrees. (So divers from the bridge have formed the habit of striding briskly onto the bridge, fully clad, then suddenly veering to a parapet, mounting it, and leaping off, without hesitation or delay. Guards tolerate that, even enjoying the entertainment, so they won't stop a dripping-wet repeat diver from starting across the bridge, even if they know full well what he or she is going to do when they get to midspan.)

From below, the bridge is a high arch (allowing a man standing on the deck of a barge on the Thunderflow to pass under the bridge without ducking), but from above, the wagon-way has been

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built up and lengthened to minimize the “hump” or grade in the center that wagons must negotiate in slippery weather. There is one drainage-hole in the “deck” or “bed” of the bridge (the wagon-way), usually covered by a circular metal plate, that is wide enough to allow a slender man (or anyone smaller) to pass through it if they raise their arms, though it would be hard to fall through it accidentally. This hole is located just below the high point of the wagon-way, on the Thunderstone side of that crest. It is rarely uncovered, except when during rare torrential rains and when ice or snow are being cleared off the bridge in winter.

The bridge does not yet have any barbicans, gates, or “end-houses,” fortified or otherwise, although there have long been plans for a small barbican at the Hullack Forest end of the bridge. What exists instead, in a straight line north from the wagon-way and about forty feet away from the north end of the bridge, is a small stone “hump” with ground-level firing-ports let into it, and a rusty forest of “thrusting out in all directions” spikes on top (to prevent any wagon, mount, or person from standing atop the hump).

The firing ports have heavy “swing up to the ceiling” metal shutters on their insides (reinforced by locking crossbars), and let into a small “ready room” where Purple Dragons can man multiple-fire heavy crossbows that are mounted on swivel-tripods, loaded (very rapidly) by means of racks, and cocked (fairly rapidly) by means of “master” winch-windlasses operated by turning large “wheels” of open spokes. Intended to repel an invasion in force out of the forest (e.g. by orcs), this small pillbox enclosure (known to the Dragons as “the Sunken Keep”) has never been used “in anger,” and is generally regarded as a mistake (though it has proved useful for private meetings, military initiations, and even trysts). It is accessed by a stone-lined, arch-topped tunnel that runs along the north bank of the Thunderflow for “four long bowshots” and then hooks north into the Hullack, where its hidden (by a screen of woven, living forest plants, and a smaller “mat” of them affixed to the door itself) access door emerges between the roots of an ancient shadowtop stump the size of a small cottage.

As the Sunken Keep is rarely even inspected, there’s little sign of any trail or disturbance at the tunnel entry. Food and water is cached all the way along the tunnel, and it has “sleeping niches” let into its north wall every so often; enough to hide twenty armed and equipped Dragons in comfort, and to “stash” forty of them for short periods in discomfort.

There is a small wooden “keep off the rain” pavilion on the west side of the south end of the bridge. (I call it a pavilion because it’s a steeply conical roof around a central flagpole that a lantern can be winched to the top of, for better visibility around the bridge in times of attack; a flag has never been known to be raised on it, that roof being supported by a ring of eight pillars, with no walls, a flagstone floor, and one solid and very uncomfortable log bench, to discourage any on-duty Dragons from dozing off. The word “pavilion” isn’t used in Cormyr for permanent buildings, only for elaborate tents; Cormyreans call this shelter a “rain-roof.”)

The Dragons DO have a small, simple walled compound consisting of a stone barracks, stables, haypile, underground stone-lined “pit” holding-cell with wall-manacles (six sets), well, and armory at the west end of Thunderstone (just outside the built-up area), and an identical, empty, locked-up “spare” compound at the east end of Thunderstone, beyond the built-up area. The western compound is known as Westhold, and the eastern one as Easthold (ah, the ever-poetic military mind), and Dragons moving between Stag’s Skull Bridge and either compound are encouraged to always vary their routes and the times they make the journey (and change bridge-guarding shifts).

So saith Ed. Who wants to know if there are any more Thunderstone-related questions, while he’s still thinking about the place and has his notes out.

love to all,

THO

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On January 23, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I bring you again Ed's latest message, this time a hearty "You're welcome!" to Kajehase, a "good guesses but sorry" to The Sage (Dimswart) and ranger of the unicorn run (Thone) and a "I'm not counting Storm as one of your guesses, George," being as Storm had already been revealed as a "no," to George Krashos, a confirmation that Garen Thal's sword reply (directly above) is "right on" as far as Ed is concerned . . . and the hoped-for Realmslore, too.

This time, Ed's lore-response concerns two of the questions asked by crazedventurers. Ed promises that the rest of Damian's questions WILL be answered in later messages. I've interspersed the queries with Ed's replies:

Q: Wizards of War: More than the normal contingent for a village of its size given the dangers of the Hullack? Any unusual spells used to blast the enemies in the woods without destroying the place? (general description is fine)

A: No, War Wizards operating in the area come to Thunderstone only to investigate suspicious matters reported in Thunderstone itself.

Otherwise, they work up and down the Cormyr side of the mountains to the east, and probe into the Hullack from the north, avoiding Thunderstone except to occasionally "lie in wait" for brigands, smugglers, Zhent agents, or monsters flushed out of the forest, whom they believe will cross the Stag's Skull Bridge in departing the Hullack on its southern edge.

The only seldom-used spell popular among War Wizards operating against foes in the Hullack is the "loft" spell, which is a swift, long-range cone area of effect spell that levitates warm-blooded, living mammals of the same size as the caster or larger precipitously twelve feet straight up into the air, and then (caster's choice, made during incantation) ends abruptly, dumping them back down again in a fall, or ends in a feather fall (possibly leaving them a visible target for longer). The fall and crashing up into branches might cause minor damage (1-2 hp), but the main purpose of the spell is to "flush out" persons in hiding, so archers and other Purple Dragons can act against them (a lofted target can't run away until they are back on the ground, though they CAN grab hold of tree boughs and get up into a tree). The spell is sometimes used on "friendlies," to boost them up into a tree beyond their reach, or to extricate them from thorns or a bog.

Q: Purple Dragons: Rangers, druids, scouts in the ranks? Do they 'patrol' the Hullack much or just keep the critters north of the Thunderflow? Do the locals lads and lasses enroll in the Dragons?

A: The local Purple Dragons have a handful of trained scouts and rangers in the ranks, but they are primarily used to track horse-thieves and smugglers, and to watch suspicious movements in the foothills of the mountains, not to make forays into the Hullack (though moots "just inside" the forest, or frequent forays into the Hullack, will be investigated). This is because, yes, they tend to work to keep critters north of the Thunderflow rather than patrolling the Hullack in any strength (forays into the Hullack are made by larger forces organized and brought in from Arabel and elsewhere for specific missions). Druids are almost unknown among the ranks of Dragons. Local lads and lasses enroll in the Dragons, some out of interest and some because they find it their best chances of good employment, but they tend to find themselves swiftly reassigned to elsewhere in the realm, with only a few veteran Dragons stationed locally as "local experts." This policy is to keep corruption among the Dragons to a minimum (young recruits may come in with hidden obligations or debts, or be too eager to make "big coin" quickly, and so be susceptible to bribery and just "looking the other way" when faced with malfeasances by longtime friends or family).

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So saith Ed, who will return with more replies on the morrow.
love to all,
THO

On January 26, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. Ed returns from judging a round of the current RPG Superstar Challenge going on at Paizo (Villains), and from some frantic days of writing and doing annual library budgets and legal negotiations (the reasons for his short silence) to answer this recent query from Gomez: "End of 2006, Ed gave a lengthy reply concerning the war on Sessrendale and the nature of the Dusklord.

I was thinking to rework that reply into a hand-out (to be added as an appendix to a future adventure), suitably reworked (remove rule refs, possibly add some ambiguity) into a scroll that could be found in the Leaves of Learning in Highmoon.

I would like to attribute it to a writer, and my question here is who that writer could be.

Note that the adventure is set Year of the Ageless One, but the author can be from any time in the preceding 200 years."

Ed replies:

One can invent any number of sages or Cormyrean courtiers who could write such a brief historical outline of the fate of Sessrendale, of course, but I myself would choose Anlathur of Saerloon, who wrote a series of chapbooks on various locales in the Heartlands during the 1360s and 1370s (DR), including LOST DALES AND VANISHED NAMED PLACES OF THE MOONSEA VICINITY (1364 DR), which became briefly popular among adventurers and treasure-seeking investors in Sembia (and Westgate, and to a much lesser extent, Cormyr) when a (false) rumor spread that the text concealed encoded directions to a treasure hoard.

So saith Ed. Who will return with more Realmslore for us all, as soon as he can. Gomez, expect that report late tonight (it's midday here as I write this) or early tomorrow morn, okay?

love,
THO

On January 28, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. Ed has just come in the door from driving his wife to the local hospital for routine tests, through the usual perfectly-timed nasty blizzard (unploughed roads), to give us a brief Realmslore reply, this time to Amarel Derakanor's post (directly preceding this one):

Caladnei is a great guess, but (sorry) not the right one. :}

(I MIGHT give hints later on, Sage, but not yet. Right now, this is too much fun, watching fellow fans of the Realms try to think who the author might be, playing "most likely/least likely" logic chains.

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So saith Ed. And as for your questions to me, Amarel, my answers are:

1. Not as long ago as you might think. (And for playing in the Realms without Ed: two nights back.)
2. Sorry; can't tell (I've signed my share of NDAs, too, and have done more "playtesting" for the Realms than many; just because neither Ed nor any of his veteran players tend to get listed in WotC-product front-matter playtest credits doesn't mean we haven't been involved, just that we tend to get forgotten and left off repeatedly). I can tell you that when Ed is the DM for a long-running campaign (as opposed to a one-shot pickup session), there are NEVER RSEs involved, because there are always a dozen or more subplots active at once; even if PCs went looking for RSEs to prevent, they'd never get the time or the freedom from distraction to find any, except by sheerest accident/literally stumbling into the middle of things.

love,
THO

On January 29, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. This time Ed's latest offering of Realmslore is directed to Darkmeer, who posted: "Greetings Ed, THO, and all, I have a question regarding the Tashalar's cities and villages. Outside of Narubel, the ruined city of Procalith, and Tashluta, there are no other real villages or cities mentioned. Are there more, or is it all just vineyards & farmland constantly watching for yuan-ti? Many Thanks"

Ed replies:

Well, the first thing you should know about this is that the term "the Tashalar" used to be loosely applied to Lapaliiya, too, and by some to Sheirtalar whilst others used it to mean "everything south and west of Sheirtalar along the coast, until settlements peter out and it's just the wild jungles of Chult." Some people in the Heartlands and Sword Coast north of Baldur's Gate, who've never visited this area, still use it to mean that. (A few distant outlanders even include Tharsult when they say "the Tashalar," though that has to be considered wrong, considering that no one from Tharsult, Tashluta, or the coastal areas in question would ever have agreed that Tharsult should be included.)

With that cleared up, let's say "the Tashalar proper" includes Narubel, Procalith, Tashluta, and the southern coast of The Shining Sea between the mountains west of Narubel and the mountains just west of Sammaresh (the western boundary of Lapaliiya), south through the Tashan Gap to where cleared (farmed and ranched), rolling uplands end and unbroken jungle starts. (Jungle is often burned or logged or both to keep it from swiftly reclaiming cleared areas.)

This defined area is rolling terrain crisscrossed by many nameless, winding dirt lanes. Near the coast it flattens into very gentling rolling terrain, traversed by a good coastal road (that for mysterious reasons seldom appears on published maps, but that parallels the coast pretty closely, about half a mile inland, and links Tashluta and Narubel).

The upland (southern) ranches of the Tashalar are unfenced areas patrolled by mounted ranchers, that have boundary cairns and tiny woodlots (called "thouks") of jungle where vines, flowers, trees, birds, and small jungle creatures flourish. In part they flourish because all snakes (not just monstrous ones, or yuan-ti) are slain on sight (except by a handful of ranchers who eat serpent eggs and train house-guardian snakes or fashion snake-constructs or are in league with

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nagas).

Ranchers and farmers alike leave certain fields “fallow” to reseed themselves from time to time (they quickly become overgrown and can be grazed, and edible peppers and mushrooms are one crop that flourishes amid the chokingly-thick jungle vegetation, growing huge specimens for trade and the table even when untended).

Shifting back to the coast, one finds almost no ranches but many farms and vineyards.

Along the coastal road and along lanes reaching out in all directions (except into the sea) from cities like the “rays” of a star, one also finds two sorts of settlements that don’t make it onto maps, and so don’t have recorded names.

One sort are the truly temporary and nameless “tent cities,” clusters of travelling merchants’ tents that change as trade dictates, as various merchants move toward or away from specific cities, take part in caravans, shift to take part in livestock markets or trade at ports where many ships are docking, and so on. So the size of a tent city and the precise location of particular tents can change daily, especially as spring really “warms up” or fall really “draws down” or “chills.”

The winter season, where local edible crops are lightest but most valuable elsewhere (and so are almost all shipped out from the docks of Tashluta and Narubel whilst locals make do with pickles, preserves, and “meat meals” from hunting and of livestock whose owners don’t want to pay to feed their beasts through until spring [and so keep only the best breeding stock]) is a lean time for these traders, who tend to seek Var the Golden and similar places to trade, or return to bases in the Vilhon, Lantan, and elsewhere to work on crafted goods for sale NEXT season. At such times, the tent cities disappear, and only a handful of tents (often housing those who trade in poisons, potions, prostitution, monster procurement and body parts, and other “somewhat shady” professions or goods) remain, around the cities.

The second sort of unmapped, unnamed settlement is permanent housing: walled “haelaers” (pronounced: “Hail-LAYERS”) that are collectively known as “the Haeloot.” The first word roughly translates as “home ground,” and the second means “all who dwell within walls, outside city walls” (in this context, “within walls” means within a walled compound, not just in a house or hut of some sort. (A modest one-family walled compound of the same sort would be called a “stead” or “steading” in the Sword Coast North, and a “hold” if it was larger and home to multiple families.)

The term “Haeloot” is usually used in everyday conversation to mean the great mass of people who dwell in haelaers, in either a disparaging or a social sense (assuming they make up a discrete “class” of folk, or seeing them in a collective sense as consumers or those privy to information or slower to adopt fashions than city-dwellers or as having a shared opinion among themselves that differs from the opinion collectively held by city-dwellers).

In general, those who live in haelaers are wealthier and enjoy better lives (better and cheaper food, more space and more quiet and privacy, more fresh air) than the poorest city dwellers or the ranchers, but are looked down upon as “gold-shy” (we might say “country cousins”) by the wealthiest city-dwellers, who believe that haelaer-dwellers are too poor to afford grand city lodgings.

Haelaers are actually of two sorts: the abode of a wealthy family who dwell with their servants inside a walled compound owned and (in practise, though Tashlutan laws do in fact formally apply) governed by the wealthy family (some of whom style themselves as nobles); and a walled compound shared by more or less equal families (sometimes related by blood, by shared ownership of a business, or even because their elders were once members of the same group of employees or band of adventurers, and have now retired together).

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Both sorts of haelaer tend to have similar features inside the walls: wells (or springs) and ponds (or both), orchards, stables, carriage sheds and/or workshops, food and herb gardens, and dwelling places, with most buildings being erected along the inside of the encircling wall (and sometimes having "back doors" out through it, or overhanging balconies that allow entry or departure by means of rope ladders or lines let down to the ground outside on a temporary basis. Some haelaer walls are banked with earth on the inside, and fall away as stone-clad walls only on the outside (where those earthen banks exist, they are usually grass-covered and contain various small, stone-lined "root cellars" where barrels of vegetables and fruits (in straw) are stored, as well as herbs and drinkables, meat being smoked or salted in barrels, fish in brine, wax-coated wheels of cheese, and so on). Cats are frequent pets (to keep down rodents who might otherwise devastate stored foods), and hobbled or tethered (or both) goats or sheep are often kept a-grazing, to yield milk, cheese, and occasional meat.

Where haelaers differ is in the dwellings they contain. One owned by a wealthy family will usually have a grand mansion (and sometimes a grand detached guesthouse), a gatehouse to guard entrance and egress, and much smaller, more spartan servants' quarters.

A shared-among-equals haelaer sometimes means sharing a grand mansion (with young boys, or older women, or nursing women with young children, or other subgroups using the outlying former servants' cottages), but far more often was built as a shared haelaer, and lacks a mansion, instead having multiple modest dwellings.

Haelaers are also found in Lapaliiya, so one should think of the coastal areas of that land being crowded with them, in between the named cities and towns (generally, any good port will be a city, and the towns develop around river fords or bridges where the plentiful water makes possible long-established livestock markets, around which permanent market-moots grow).

Here are the names of a few of the haelaers around Tashluta: Bhaelongarr, Chellyth, Dalauntrel, Eskoun, Farrat, Hazlurel, Jarrabar, Laelont, Moraunglel, Skalat, Vaerlont, Yallanth, and Zimzrel. Here are some of the haelaers around Narubel: Angahlel, Baerazh, Cirindyr (note: pronounced "SEER-in-deer"), Dathrel, Felpharel, Gasiz, Halamarokh, Imdrel, Nebrynth, Toraunna. Here are a few haelaers found along the coast, not very near any city: Asbrinth, Djathynth, Ilingolorr, Larzrel, Lollonth, Lyrelont, Marelhaummur, Nanryth, Olophyr, Olosstel, Ssantrel, Taenthaun, Uoovralat, Velantrat.

Feel free to coin your own names; they can sound like just about anything, thanks to the varying origins of (and tongues spoken by) the builders and founding owners. In long-established local dialects, the suffix "el" means 'abode of' (whoever's name precedes it in the name); "alat" means 'place of' or 'well of'; "rrat" means 'grave of'; "garr" and any ending that includes "th" or "yth" or "ynth" means 'place flourished in.' So these suffixes appear often in haelaer names (another note: only very recent haelaer names will refer to "tower" or "keep," and a haelaer name never evokes "Castle" or "Fort," even if it's built like one). The prefix "Olo" denotes good fortune.

So saith Ed. Who first imagined the Realms oh-so-vividly some forty-odd years ago, and continues to do so with every passing day.

P.S. Daviot, thank you, and your request is already on its way to Ed.

Kentinal, Ed chuckled at your guess, wondered why it had taken someone so long to suggest that particular candidate for authorship - - and wants you to know that this time, Volo isn't guilty.

Guess again.

love to all,

THO

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On January 29, 2009 THO said:- Ah, one more thing.
Reading over Ed's reply, it occurs to me that he neglected to mention one thing: that caravans have been trade-blood for this region since it was VERY sparsely settled by humans, so all market-moots (towns and cities) always have a "shadow" of commonly-owned grazing land right around them where caravans have traditionally assembled, merchants set up tents and stalls, and so on. This is where the tent cities go; it's only rarely (in cases of extreme crowding) that they spread onto someone's farm or ranch and must pay rent.
love to all,
THO

On January 30, 2009 THO said:- Well, now. At the time of the assassination of Lorna's affianced, there are almost twenty minor noble families whom he could easily have been a member of. I'm going to choose just four, and to make sure I don't hamper any plans being hatched by anyone else (and to accommodate the necessary assassination of a son, AND to please Cormyr fans here at the Keep with new lore of the Forest Kingdom), I've made sure to pick families I KNOW haven't been mentioned in official Realmslore before (or in the extensive lore-notes I sent to TSR, back in the day). So what follows is literally ALL that has thus far been seen by anyone about these families.
Take your pick, and feel free to use the others for other purposes.
I'll send details of one family at a time to THO to relay to the Keep (hopefully one every evening for four evenings, if nothing trips me up).
So here's our first candidate family . . .

House Arcantlet: [badge: a black side-on dragon's head (bronze dragon in basis shape, only with a longer, thinner snout) looking to the viewer's left, on a gold field. From the base of the dragon's neck, at the bottom of the badge, a black line curves up and around in an almost-complete circle to enclose the gold field, but ends in a point just before joining the neck]
With a modest townhouse on a quiet street in northwestern Suzail, farms south of the Way of the Manticore not far east of the Wyvernflow, and Cantergates, a small but fortified country mansion (in the midst of a private hunting forest or "chase") southeast of Hultail, the Arcantlet family is comparatively impoverished, unknown, and few in numbers.
Ennobled in the reign of Duar for "valiant personal service to the King" (saving his life in battle more than once, and fighting at his side as a competent and trusted warrior), Lathlan Arcantlet was a quiet, studious, and cunning-in-battle knight who as Lord Arcantlet (given the land where Cantergates now stands and two small adjacent farms that had fallen into royal hands after Duar killed their traitor-owners, but nothing more) set out to found a family and die happy, respected, and rich.
He managed all three, building a slightly smaller Cantergates and adding three more farms to his Wyvernflow holdings before his death, at the age of ninety-six, surrounded by his wife, seven daughters, and three sons.
By royal assent, Lathlan's wife Paerelle became Lady Arcantlet in her own right, and she shrewdly watched her offspring, trying to decide who would make her best successor. Death took two of the sons and one daughter not all that many years later, another four daughters married into other families, and an elderly and ill Lady Arcantlet named her daughter Raedaunra her successor as head of the house. This enraged her surviving son, Tersarren, who murdered her - - and was promptly executed by the Crown for doing so.
A saddened Raedaunra dwelt in Cantergates with her two sisters for more than a decade, but eventually fell in love with a commoner named Hareth Blacksheath. They were wed, and their son

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Croenel, a handsome, upstanding and "kingly" man eventually succeeded Raedaunra. Croenel's weaknesses were gambling and fair lasses, but he was a shrewd merchant trader with an eye for trends and strategic purchases, and died very rich, having replaced the Arcantlet rental accommodations in Suzail with a grand mansion, built a large fleet of merchant caravels busily plying the waves of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and been not too proud to enter scores of business ventures with common-born Suzailan merchants (many of which were successful). However, Croenel's love for chasing longskirts led to him marrying late. He sired only one son and one daughter - - and the daughter, Nendiira, proved to be a dangerous, murderous madwoman who covertly slew scores of people before she was suspected, confronted, and died under the spells of three Wizards of War after she'd killed a fourth.

Croenel's son, Thandivurr (a quiet, scholarly man who withdrew from most of the family merchant ventures and had the misfortune to lose much of his fleet over the years in storms, remorse keeping him from adding any ships to replace those lost), also had only one son, Fendrel, an amoral rake and lover of sly schemes and thievery whose shady business dealings impoverished the family and lost them their Suzailan mansion. Fendrel had two sons, Asgreth and Thandurl - - and from that day to this, no Lord Arcantlet has sired more than two sons (and three daughters), and most have managed only one of each.

The family has stayed small and fairly poor, living within its means but as a result having a low profile among the nobility of Cormyr and little influence at Court.

In 1349, a weak and ineffectual Lord Thurcastle Arcantlet died (having spent the previous six years so wandering in his wits that the family's kindly house wizard [yes, a Wizard of War], Brestor Narbridle, had really run the family, propping up Thurcastle's saddened wife, Lady Adbrooke). The sole son, Helgrath, became Lord Arcantlet, and proved to be the "brokemirror" (antithesis) of his father; Helgrath was a hearty hunting, riding, brawling, wenching sort, burly, darkly handsome, and jovial.

Helgrath sent Narbridle packing and faced down Vangerdahast, telling him to "send any young novice, as we love the land yet have no love for Court scheming or conniving, controlling mages here!"

Strangely, Helgrath survived saying such words to the Royal Magician, and found himself saddled with an everchanging succession of young, inexperienced, mild-mannered house wizards - - which suited him just fine. He was busy marrying and wearing out wives, taking Nalrue Rowanmantle as his bride in 1351 DR and remarrying (Lalustra Thornstag) in 1357, within months of Nalrue's death in childbirth. He sired sons Talryn in 1351 and Nesgarl in 1355, and daughters Oromelle (1353), Jathra (1357; her mother died birthing her), and Helbra (1359). Helgrath died in a suspicious hunting accident in 1360 (it was almost certainly murder, but the identity of the murderers - - Helgrath died with four arrows through him, all fired from different directions in the thick forest and all piercing him before he fell - - was never uncovered, despite a "storm-scouringly diligent" investigation by the Wizards of War).

After Helgrath's death, the true mettle of the surviving Arcantlets was revealed. Oromelle was a spiteful, brilliant woman and a superb actress, who may well have been no more evil than that (she withdrew to Suzail, survived several attempts on her life that were almost certainly made by "hands" hired by her family, and then "disappeared" with the assistance of the War Wizards and Crown permission, changing her appearance and name and being held "in reserve" to keep this noble family from becoming extinct if the Crown is ever forced to execute the rest, or their misadventures kill them all), and Nesgarl was an easygoing, gentle scholar [this is Lorna's guy, if you want to use the Arcantlets], but Lalustra, Talryn, Jathra, and Helbra were "pure twisted poison," to borrow War Wizard Laspeera's description of them.

Talryn became Lord Arcantlet when young and headstrong, and set about trying to become rich and powerful by scheming with every Sembian cabal and illicit thieving group he could find - - soon running the family deep into debt to his shady allies when slaving and drug-running ventures crumbled in the face of War Wizard-led attacks and surveillance. He began ruthless, and has rapidly become embittered and a cold, tireless foe of many.

Lalustra tried to sleep her way through "every available noble bed" she could worm her way into,

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seeking a new husband with wealth to keep her pampered and a weak enough character to be dominated. She left a trail of unhappy noblemen she'd stolen from and fought with, and eventually gave up husband-hunting (running out of suitable candidates, and not yet ready to lower herself to "Marseman nobles, or commoners with much coin but no noble blood") and ended up back under her son's roof, unwanted and untrusted.

Jathra and Helbra are superb actresses, poisoners, and wantons who used their bodies and promises to work their way through a succession of men (yes, despite Helbra's young age; she was born with stunning good looks, matured into ripe beauty at about age nine, and watched and learned "wiles" from her mother and older sisters). Jathra likes rough, strong men and wealthy commoner merchants, preferably both; Helbra prefers lonely noblemen, often the unmarried, unhappy "uncles" of other families.

All of the surviving Arcantlets can be civil to each other, and even work together for common advantage, but none of them trust each other as far as the thickness of a dagger-blade. Moreover, Talryn, Lalustra, and Jathra all actively hate each other so much that any such cooperation between any two of them is going to be short-lived indeed.

As of 1369 [the time of Nesgarl's murder, if you choose this noble house], the family is in debt and up past its collective eyebrows in shady dealings, though very few commoners and only a handful of noble families and courtiers know this. Some nobles personally know the cavils and worth (not much) of individual Arcantlets, but in general, if nobles or courtiers or the wider Cormyrean public have any attitude at all toward House Arcantlet, it's to overlook them - - and if faced by the fact of their existence, to pigeonhole them as "one of those minor noble families; no coin, few in number, probably deservedly so."

Nesgarl would have very seldom visited Suzail (perhaps once a year or so) and spent much of his youth at Cantergates, being transferred to one of several expanded farmhouses somewhere in the farms east of the Wyvernflow once his brother Talryn became Lord Arcantlet and wanted Cantergates to himself (mainly to remove witnesses to his carousings and shady dealings).

These farms, by the way (their actual number and extent have expanded and shrunk over the years, in accordance with family fortunes), are collectively known as "the Windcoast" to the family, though that's a name anyone else will search for in vain on any maps (yes, the country is windy, and it's near but not on the coast, though seabreezes - - and mists, blown ashore - - can often be experienced there). The farmhouse Nesgarl was installed in can have any name you want it to, but yes, he would have been surrounded by bodyguards charged with keeping him safe, keeping the farm and its crops safe - - and keeping watch over Nesgarl and his doings.

Nesgarl having a woman (Lorna) would (although it would originally have been Lalustra's plan, also with an eye to controlling her son without having to openly seem to do so) be viewed with approval by Talryn because, in his thinking, it would keep Nesgarl busy. That is, keep him from perhaps getting restless and starting to do things on his own (such as relocate to Suzail, where he might draw attention to the wider family and cause War Wizards or others to peer at "what the Arcantlets might be up to").

Now, if Lorna had been the "take me to the bright lights and feasts of Suzail right now" sort, rather than the "train me to arms, bodyguards of the house" sort, Lalustra or Talryn might have "taken care of her" early on . . . but as it happened, she served her purpose until Nesgarl's removal became necessary.

So that's our first possible noble family. Houses Bryarn, Haldoneir, and Sorndrake should follow, in the fullness of time (though I am tearingly busy right now, and the fierce winter weather locally isn't helping matters, eating up spare time with difficult driving and shoveling, shoveling, and more #\$\$@%! shoveling). We'll see.

So saith Ed. Worldbuilder extraordinaire.

And Zandilar: Hi, and a good guess. Off to Ed it goes, to see if it's right (I'm not thinking so,

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myself, following the same misgivings you have, but . . .)
love to all,
THO

--

And this just in, from Ed:

Amarel Derakanor, you're very welcome. Don't be shy about asking more questions, though it can sometimes take me literally years to get around to answering them.

Zandilar, great to hear from you. Sorry, Myrmeen Lhal didn't pen that particular work. Though I can certainly picture her enjoying a perusal of it . . . :}

So saith Ed. The Rapidly Tiring Tireless Snow Shoveller.
love to all,
THO

On January 31, 2009 THO said:- althen artren, your questions are on their way to Ed for definitive answers, but I can tell you from Realmsplay experience that the Standing Stone safehold is a small sequence of individual rooms linked by "automatic" portals (step into the right spot at one end of the room and the portal whisks you onwards, into the next room - - or in the case of the last room, back to atop the Standing Stone again). Not all of the portals are strictly one-way, but carrying certain sorts of items prevents some of the portals functioning "in reverse," so until a creature carrying such items figures out what's happening and drops the items, they can only move in one direction through the sequence of rooms (six or seven chambers, as far as I can recall, supplied with fresh air through "micro-gates" that pulse in and out of existence, and move around in the uppermost areas of each room).

love,
THO

On January 31, 2009 THO said:- The correct answer for armor is ALL sorts of armor one can imagine - - but sparsely used.

Or to put it more precisely: the "low" Netherese of the forests occasionally used bracers, shields (including bucklers), and sometimes a back-and-breast or just a breastplate, but the only common sort of armor they wore was a gorget or war-collar (meant to protect the throat, in the case of a gorget, or the neck, throat, underjaw, and their joining to the torso, in the case of the war-collar). Guards in the floating cities (or other domains of the archwizards) might be found wearing anything the ruler of their domain fancied, up to and including glass armor very like the modern-day Flying Hunt of Nimbral - - but usually far less, typically being limited to "show" armor of greaves, bracers, helms, and breastplates over flowing robes and with flowing cloaks. Sometimes huge gauntlets were also worn - - and as with the "low" Netherese, gorgets were common.

It's not correct to say that the Netherese hadn't thought of plate armor; it's that they never used such heavy, all-encompassing armor. They'd thought of, created, and tried out EVERYTHING, mainly for the entertainment the crafting afforded them.

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In fact, the "ultimate" fashion in Netherese armor is flexible metal cladding for the entire body, including a full-face helm (spired), and shoulder-guards (two spires, rising from either shoulder, to protect the helm), that was worn by guards who rode various aerial steeds.

However, it is correct to say that the Netherese didn't use coat-of-plate or full plate or plate mail. The reason Netherese armor tended to be light, or for show, or was avoided altogether, was magic. Specifically a now-lost, common low- (2nd) -level spell that allowed electrical and fiery spells to transform the armor worn by a target into molten form, destroying it and doing great agonizing (and typically fatal, flesh-melting) damage to the wearer all at one stroke.

Like real-world cannon making castles obsolete and pistols and muskets that could shoot small iron balls making personal armor largely obsolete, this spell (which went by such names as Avarde's Ulgaunt, foebite, and searstrike) made the wearing of armor generally more dangerous than beneficial - - because darned near every Netherese spellcaster knew and could readily use the spell; many of them had 4th and 6th level equivalents that (like chain lightning) could arc from armor-wearing target to armor-wearing target, and disable or slay multiple foes at once.

It's always a stylistic mistake to try to link the Realms to specific real-world ancient cultures - - but if it works for you, in your campaign, go right ahead. I should note that the armor of the inhabitants of the city of Shade is just that: the armor worn in ONE floating city out of dozens whose inhabitants wore vastly differing styles of (mostly light, for the reasons given above) armor. All of which means you can literally use any look, type, or style of armor you want to, for Netherese armor found or used today. Please note that Netherese armor surviving into the Realms of "today" will have preservative magics - - and that almost all Netherese armor of any sort bore many enchantments, from feather fall to everbright to ironguard and many, many more magical effects now seen in modern spells. Go wild when creating your own, because the Netherese sure did.

Netherese weapons were likewise loaded with magic (among the wizards, who used scepters most of all, with rods, wands, and orbs being their other favored "forms" for enchanted items (including orbs and rods that thrust forth blades when properly manipulated). Rapiers and daggers having multiple magical powers were also popular; almost everyone carried tiny "fang" daggers that had a few magical powers (the ability to glow with an intensity varied by the will of the wielder, feather fall, minor healing, short-term invisibility and/or dimension door, dispel magic, and so on).

Outside the cities, in the wild forest, Netherese used spears, daggers, handbows (hand crossbows), and various sorts of swords; sickles and scimitars (curved, hooked blades) were popular among the easternmost-dwelling Netherese.

So saith Ed. Creator of the Realms and of course Netheril (I know; I've seen his original design notes).

love to all,
THO

On February 1, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. Herewith, I present Ed's second candidate Cormyrean noble family for Daviot to use as the villainous family in the backstory of Lorna . . .

House Bryarn: [badge: an oval, long axis vertical, of thin black thornbranch, zigzagging gently from joint to joint, with a single red thorn protruding outwards from each joint, the lowest two thorns having large teardrops of blood about to fall from them, and the thornbranch framing a four-pointed blue star, long points vertical, all on a steel-gray field, or a steel-gray symmetrical shield shaped like the shield in the arms depicted on page 73 of POWER OF FAERUN]

House Bryarn is small in numbers but notorious among the nobility of the Forest Kingdom and

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well-known to courtiers (though not to the wider circle of Cormyrean commoners) because of their propensity for dueling rival nobles and just slaughtering (or hiring killers to dispose of) commoners who cross them, even in small ways.

They are cold, calculating “get-even” foes, not fiery-tempered, and often wait years for the best opportunity to arrange an “accident” to befall an enemy. However, they have come to the notice of War Wizards, Highknights, and Purple Dragons over the years because just so darned many deaths occurred to persons who disagreed with Bryarns, fought or competed with them, or spoke out against them or their views at revels, feasts, or Court dealings.

As a consequence, House Bryarn has quietly become shunned by other nobles, and dealt with by Purple Dragons and courtiers with careful, exacting politeness (and as little as possible).

At least two Bryarn nobles (Esklelt in 1356 DR and Morgram in 1364 DR) have been murdered by Highknights to stop them repeatedly trying to assassinate Obarskys and Truesilvers who - - in their minds, at least - - had offended them. Curiously, Bryarns do not apply this ‘get even at all costs’ policy to non-Cormyreans, and so have carried on a flourishing trade in slaves, gems, fine furniture, and fashionable wines and spirits with various partners in Westgate and several Sembian cities for almost a century, deriving much of their wealth thereby.

House Bryarn was ennobled in 1262 DR by Azoun III after the head of the family, Sellorn Bryarn, the founder and leader of the Black Rose mercenary company, rescued an outnumbered and trapped band of Purple Dragons from a large and organized monster force attacking out of the Stonelands, destroying that “band of beasts” (though there were many rumors as to who had organized and controlled the monsters; most everyone agreed that wizards were involved, and paid by a backer either outside the realm or among the nobles of Cormyr - - but some said the Black Rose band were initially part of the force, and turned on it when the backer refused to pay them, or even that the Black Rose hireswords repudiated that backer just to make their own fortunes).

Sellorn’s son Siard (“SEE-ard”) is rumored to have become a procurer for Salember even before he succeeded his father as Lord Bryarn (secretly fetching him willing bedmates from Sembia and installing them at various Crown properties for dalliances, in latter days bringing them to the Palace itself - - and enabling the Rebel Prince to stay aloof from all Cormyrean noble families by keeping distant from all the willing and ambitious daughters thrust at him). The family rose in wealth and influence during Salember’s Regency—only to be “cut dead” by other nobles when Salember fell.

Siard fought several duels (in all of which he slew his noble opponents), and is thought to have murdered three other nobles who’d challenged him in the wake of those duels, only to mysteriously die by misadventure (castle parapets twice collapsing onto heads; a horse rearing and apparently triggering a fireball-inducing magic item carried by the victim; and a charging “ghost” causing a terrified and fatal leap from a high balcony) before the duels could occur. As Crown agents and officers were sent to search for Siard, to compel him to answer royal justice for the duels, Siard hustled his family to various of their country holdings.

Then, as now, the Bryarn properties consist of a modest “northwestern, near the wall” townhouse in Suzail, some rental properties in Marsember, an inn in Arabel, two small farms not far east of Hilp, and Bryargates, a keep (and, curiously, half a dozen fortified stone warehouses) on a large wooded horse ranch and home farm just east of The Way of the Dragon, not far south of the King’s Forest) - - and then vanished. The Crown agents and officers hunting for Lord Siard Bryarn never found any trace of him.

Rumors place Siard almost everywhere in the known Realms, some even insisting he’s still alive today, and whisper that he’s behind any number of plots against the Crown or the realm.

War Wizards thoroughly mind-reamed the surviving Bryarns, and found no hint that Siard’s eldest son Blakann liked or trusted his father, knew of his whereabouts, or held any antipathy towards the Crown, so after Siard was formally stripped of his title and grace in absentia, Blakann was royally confirmed as the next Lord Bryarn (in late 1288 DR).

From that day to this, the Bryarns have kept a low profile inside Cormyr but a higher one outside it (in the easternmost cities of Sembia in particular, which is where various Lord Bryarns - - or

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their factors [trade agents] go wife-hunting for them). Bryarns never marry other Cormyrean nobility, generally choosing wives for their family wealth, their beauty, and their willingness to be loyal to the succession of strong-minded, ruthless ruling lords of the family. Several Lady Bryarns have proven to be more scheming, farsighted, and ruthless than their husbands, and the family hasn't hesitated to kill its own members if they showed signs of cooperating too closely with War Wizards or other Crown agents or investigators, romancing nobility of the Forest Kingdom (Lord Vaerend Bryarn infamously told his sons, "You can look at them, even bare them and mistreat them - - but if you ever spill your seed in any of them, I will remove the instrument of that spilling with my most notched and blunt blade, have it cooked for your dining pleasure, and it will be your last meal").

One such family casualty - - though for too-careful cordiality with suspicious and repeatedly-visiting War Wizards, and to seize his goods to pay family debts, not for dalliance with any noble Cormyrean lass or lady - - was Lyonard Bryarn, quietly killed in 1369 DR by family agents in Maeravelposts, the family-owned Suzailan townhouse (named for its builder, the briefly-famous sculptor and stonemason Maerevel Bryarn); a death they sought to blame on Lyonard's companion (Daviot, that would be Lorna, if you choose this family).

At the time of Lyonard's killing, his kin consist of:

Lord Boarrevan Bryarn, Lyonard's father and the ruling patriarch of the family, an icily self-controlled sadist who loves torturing young commoner Cormyrean lads and lasses in private and then selling the maimed remains into pot-making and item-painting slavery in back shops for owners in Westgate. He's burly and pot-bellied, clinging to the remains of the devastating dark good looks of his youth, and sports an everchanging array of close-trimmed beards. Boarrevan secretly pens torrid "ardent young love" chapbooks for young ladies in Suzail, under the pseudonym "Darra Delanther," and is gaining fans as his works spread. His driving interests, however (after opportunities to indulge his sadism), consist of manipulating public opinion to slowly turn Cormyr against its ruling family and the Court they govern through, plus all "too rich, too prominent, too haughty" nobles . . . as opposed to "good" nobles. Quieter families, such as (ahem) House Bryarn.

Lady Jeleskra Bryarn, who knows very well what her husband is up to with his whips and brands and knives, and backs him to the hilt so long as he largely leaves her alone to rut with their loyal house bodyguards and to hunt in the woods at Bryargates - - except for her spring and fall visits to Suzail to take part in the rounds of feasts and revels, where she plays the part of a bored, timid, neglected noble wife to a gentle, quiet lord nothing like his disgraced predecessors; a man lost in his hobbies of painting and reading (a fiction she can maintain with some success among the nobility because Boarrevan NEVER leaves Bryargates). Lady Jeleskra has a small but well-paid band of spies in Suzail, Marsember, Westgate, and Sembia, who keep watch over her husband's small and better paid band of factors [trade agents] who see to the family businesses, shady and legal - - though Lady Jeleskra in truth gives the orders and ruthlessly advances the family fortunes.

Lord Melivur Bryarn, the eldest son and heir of the house (Lyonard was the second son), a sardonic, softly-purring, superior-to-all sort who curbs his insolence only when dealing with his parents. Genuinely brilliant and possessed of a never-failing memory, even for faces seen fleetingly and scraps of conversations overheard in passing, he is educating himself by reading Lyonard's library and by seeking out all sorts of people on his frequent "gambling and wenching" trips to Suzail (during which he shepherds shipments of goods to and from the warehouses of Bryargates) and paying them handsomely to answer his questions and show him how things are made, how certain trades work, and what's in fashion. He considers his parents less than sane and his family headed for self-courted doom, and is quietly building himself various small coin caches, a side-identity complete with a disguise, and a sideline caravan business, for the day he might have to flee in a hurry.

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Unless, that is, he becomes head of the house first (whereupon, if his mother isn't dead already, he'll dispose of her as brutally as swiftness allows, and set about framing his brother Nuljalak for all family misdeeds and treacheries to the Crown).

Lord Nuljalak ("Jalak" to one and all) Bryarn, the youngest son of the house, a bored and splendidly handsome fair-haired hunter and rider of accomplishment, who enjoys fencing, drinking, and the bed-company of his pick of all young, wealthy, non-noble Suzailans who are interested in knowing a noble. Jalak loves pranks, swindles that make him and his "fast friends" casual coin now and then, and a life of indolence, luxury, and haughty scorn of "oldcoin nobles," Court officers, and the ruling Obarskyrs alike. He's good with a sword and learning to become competent with hurled daggers and with handbows (hand crossbows), likes to wrestle the most muscular bare-bodied and oiled lasses-for-hire he can procure in Suzail (he doesn't bed them, he pays them to pit their strength against his, and cheerfully hires dwarves, half-orcs, and the largest and strongest human women he can find for this), and has a weakness for strong cheeses and exotic liqueurs. He's recently discovered a wrinkled old crone in living in squalor in westside Suzail who was once a very active poisoner in Amn, and is paying her well to teach him all about poisons, procure their antidotes for him, and dose him with carefully-limited amounts of the ones he can thereby build up an immunity to.

Lady Alazgrelle ("Laz" or "Lazgrel" to family and friends) is a fun-loving, irreverent hard drinker and dancer who can outdrink many men, loves acrobatic pranks, and covers a vicious get-even nature behind a hearty, husky laugh, a willingness to play the fool and bare her skin in public and private, and a seemingly endless flood of curly, golden-hued tresses that reach to her ankles except when she binds them up - - or carelessly hacks them off. An accomplished rider and breeder of horses, she takes daily charge of the Bryargates horse ranch, except when she's off carousing in Suzail, which is often. She enjoys bedding partners of either gender, but they must be human; elves, dwarves, gnomes, halflings, and crossbreeds (of any of these races with humans) disgust her. Strangely, half-orcs and orcs do not, and she bears several scars from lust-bites suffered in moments of extreme passion when abed with such partners. (There is no truth to the rumor, popular among the Bryargates guards whom she never looks at, that she "ruts with the horses.")

Lazgrel is tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, and buxom; her uppercut has sent more than a few startled men off to enjoy dream-visions from the gods for a time. Yet of all the Bryarns, she's the least likely to hold a grudge or want to get even at all costs. Get her own back when she can, yes, and relish it . . . but she's having FUN in life, and finds nursing hatreds and taking stock of slights and single coins owed to be tiresome, even obsessive.

Lady Alanstel is the youngest daughter of Boarrevan and Jeleskra, and is a bone-thin, sly, often silent echo of her mother. Swift with sums and shrewd at judging people, she is her mother's faithful business assistant and understudy, learning all she can from Jeleskra (and taking careful note of all slights and wrongs done not only to the Bryarns, but to her personally). She anticipates the day when the family will meet with disaster, and is positioning herself to pick up the pieces, distancing herself with false documents and the like from the misdeeds and anti-royal deeds and sentiments of her parents.

Right now, she's quietly seeking out wizards who visit Suzail, seeking to buy some form of mind-protection (or better yet, several forms that she can use at once) from the Wizards of War. She needs to be able to conceal her true self from EVERYONE, and let them see only her chosen role of timid, quiet loyal daughter and loyal subject of the Dragon Throne.

Inwardly every bit as cold-blooded, calculating, and malicious as her mother or her aunt Yaraela, Alanstel is far more rigidly self-controlled, hiding her cruel thoughts and stilling her tongue. There will be plenty of time for paying back and settling scores later . . .

Lady Yaraela, Boarrevan's aging elder sister, is a wrinkled but man-hungry, malicious onetime

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beauty whose longtime lover, a senior Purple Dragon commander and onetime gallant commoner knight, was slain years ago. This broke her heart and turned her first to piety and then to malice, wherein she became a spectator for the lives of her kin and everyone else in Cormyr, deriving amusement from their ploys and delight from their misfortunes. Her reach, as a master manipulator, now extends only to the house bodyguards (who adore her, despite her petty cruelties, and enjoy lovemaking with her despite her age-faded beauty because she's good at it and briskly enjoys it as physical release for both sides, nothing romantic at all) and Bryargates servants, and Alanstel - - who increasingly sees through her and refuses to play along. No matter; she vicariously enjoys meddling in lives from afar, and is enthusiastically manipulating the family factors [trade agents] into rivalries with each other, ever-harder service to Bryarns, and into themselves manipulating those House Bryarn trades with and against. Just for the malicious fun of it all.

The eldest daughter of Boarrevarn and Jeleskra, Lady Noenel ("NO-en-el") Bryarn, was a tall, quiet, rather plain young woman with a kind side and a love of maps and books, who was close with her brother Lyonard because of his similar character and interests. (They liked and trusted each other, but they were fast friends, NOT lovers.)

Noenel died in a fierce winter storm in 1366 DR, so ill with fever (that made her "as hot as a roaring forge" inside) that she wandered outside, slipped, split her head open on frozen cobbles, and died of her wound and the cold, being found frozen in the morning.

Although there were some suspicions of foul play (largely thanks to the family reputation), Noenel's death was a genuine accident, not an arranged one. Jeleskra shrugged off the loss, almost entirely disinterested, but Boarrevarn was saddened (he had secretly begun forcing himself on his daughter, and found her an attentive and gentle lover, the likes of which - - given his habits - - he's not likely to find again).

And there you have it; our second candidate noble family. House Haldoneir is up next, when I can find some relief from all this shoveling (another two feet of snow fell last night and so far today, and it's still swirling down, as pretty as a Christmas postcard and gently deadly, as we speak). Then it's back to Thunderstone, and the questions posed by Damian and Asgetrion. Then it's back to the ever-accumulating mound; THO has passed on some quite interesting ones in this first month of 09, but I musn't neglect the vintage ones (2004, 2005 . . .), either.

So saith Ed, creator of the Realms, Cormyr, and a slowly-increasing roster of ah, interesting noble families. Delicious NPCs for a deep, rich Realms campaign.

love to all,
THO

On February 2, 2009 THO said:- Hi, all.

Zandilar, I checked with Ed, re. this: "I think use of the word lover trivializes Noenel's violation completely and implies that after the first time he forced her, she folded and then began to enjoy his "attentions"."

Ed says that was EXACTLY his implication (Noenel did begin to enjoy his attentions, which is why she kept things secret rather than fleeing the family or running to the Crown). Neither Ed nor I agree that "use of the word lover trivializes Noenel's violation completely," unless you take the sentence out of context (separated from the rest of Ed's entry).

The entire House Bryarn entry is illustrating what twisted people most of these nobles are. Human, yes, so not all bad, but willful in the extreme because of their wealth and noble status . . . they can grow to be the monsters they want to be, or are driven to be.

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And yes, khorne, it is tragic.

The setup Daviot gave us all requires a noble family that (in 1369 DR, at least) is less than, ah, "noble," and that's what Ed's giving us.

Ed completely understands that his use of the word "lover" in that context is going to upset some scribes. It was meant to.

The nobles who treated Lorna and her man (one of their own) so badly ARE villains, though some of them are truly evil and others are more weak "go along with it, or vainly/slowly try to find some way out of it" types. Ed is setting them up as villains a DM and players can hate, as well as presenting whatever good traits they have to make them seem real and not one-dimensional.

Powerful writing and design is seldom politically correct, and as a wordsmith Ed's probably not going to choose words by accident, or avoid using words because they may offend (as an editor, I can attest that one CAN'T always avoid using words that offend, because different words offend different readers, and you can end up throwing out every word for a particular situation out of your "toolbox").

I certainly understand WHY Zandilar has reacted this way, though, and Ed does too. In his word choice, he was trying to "say more than he stated baldly" about a situation. Now if Zandilar has a problem with either Noenel or her father behaving like that, that's legit, but Ed is describing what has happened in the past between two fictional characters, in a fictional rather than real-world setting, in order to establish villainy (not Noenel's!).

To shift this discussion away from matters sexual or gender-related, many people end up coerced into doing things they don't want to do, and still try to derive some enjoyment out of doing them; it's one way of dealing with life (one example I know Ed is personally familiar with, from his volunteering: seriously physically handicapped children and middle-aged people in an institution undergoing regular physical pain during their physiotherapy, to try to develop some muscles in wasted, maimed limbs . . . who try to turn their sessions into a social club, trading jokes and the like, to try to make it more bearable.

Some, of course, are going to see things differently. Zandilar, feel free to ask Ed any questions you like, about this or anything else. The welcome mat is always out.

love to all,

THO

On February 2, 2009 THO said:- I agree with you, Zandilar.

Ed and I chatted about this relationship when I was gleaning lore to reply to you earlier, and I, too, suspect he would have become tired of her. Noenel probably wouldn't have fled in time, once that happened, because (as Ed saw it) she derived some sort of comfort(?) from the first personal attention anyone had really paid to her. And her father would probably then have wanted her "accidentally" dead to protect himself from any possibility of their shared secret getting out.

What Ed hasn't decided is what Lady Bryarn's attitude would have been to her husband killing her daughter over an affair Ed thinks she knew about (but pretended not to). Not because she was upset by the incest or the adultery, but because she would then "know" that her husband would probably murder her, too, the moment a young, new, beautiful, non-blood-related replacement for Noenel happened along.

Of course (as they say), we'll never know . . .

love,

THO

On February 4, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. Herewith, fresh from Ed's pen, the third candidate noble family for Daviot to employ as the dastards who butchered cohort Lorna's loved one (who was one of their own).

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I give you . . . the Haldoneirs, in all their tainted glory!

House Haldoneir: [badge: the black silhouette of an upright, stylized (not recognizable as any particular known breed; it has a long, slender, almost crocodile-like snout) dragon's head, facing to the left and with jaws parted to show the tip of a forked tongue and a ragged jet of flame spewing out of the mouth, that ends in a severed straight line at its bottom, said line having three teardrops of black blood depending from it, and a horizontal sword, point to the left, right underneath it; this device has always been known in the family as "the Wyrmdeth," so the sword is clearly meant to have just severed the head from an unseen draconic body]

A very old human family of Cormyr, the Haldoneirs have tended to be tall, slender, and strikingly handsome, and have always been associated with warfare; hardy and long-lived, but few in numbers due to battlefield losses.

An archer, farmer, and sometime hiresword named Ryneth Haldoneir was part of Ondeth Obarskyr's fledgling "farms by the shore" settlement, on the site of the future Suzail, and although the Haldoneirs were never leaders or particularly staunch loyalists, and weren't ennobled for centuries after their arrival in what became Cormyr, nowadays they proudly claim to be one of the "founding families" of the Forest Kingdom, with "blood as regal as any family of the realm" (which of course carefully falls JUST shy of claiming to have blood as royal as the Obarskyrs, while trying to give the impression of that very claim).

Haldoneirs fought on behalf of the early Obarskyr kings, but it's clear from the hereditary family height and build—plus occasional family members whose features look very elven—that more than a few early Haldoneirs reached their own "separate peace" with elves, taking elves as mates and bringing "much elven moonbright" into the family bloodlines.

There are also old family legends of dragontaming, but these are utter fiction (though the Haldoneirs of today may genuinely not know this), spun by minstrels of the family households centuries back because more than a dozen early Haldoneirs had suits of scale mail made for them that had dragonhead helms, barbs at their elbows, and other "dragonlike" stylings and accoutrements.

Haldoneirs have been members of the Purple Dragons down the centuries, and at times reached high ranks and positions of trust; at least three male Haldoneirs (Amandras, in the reign of Galaghard III; Baerlon, in the reign of Proster; and Galard, in the reign of Palaghard I) have served as Highknights (or equivalentents; that is, knights who were trusted personal agents of the monarch).

One widowed Haldoneir, Lady Vaerestra, was a trusted advisor of King Dhalmass, (rightly) entrusted with secrets of the realm and as highly regarded by Jorunhast, the High Wizard of the day, as she was by the reigning monarch. She died deliberately shielding the king's body, taking a poisoned dagger meant for him. (In recognition of this, Dhalmass ennobled the family, making her "plain soldier" son, Mreldon, the first Lord Haldoneir.)

Although almost every generation of Haldoneirs have sent sons into the ranks of the Purple Dragons (some rendering distinguished service, and some not), most latter-day Haldoneirs enjoy lives of ease, kept in abundant coin by the rents from their many urban properties (scores in Suzail, but hundreds in both Selgaunt and Urmlaspyr). They tend to maintain very haughty manners, literally sneering down their noses at most commoners they meet, and serve as the living epitome of the ridiculously overblown "proper highnoses" (that's the Realms term; we might say "snotty noble"), exhibiting arrogance without any accomplishment—or in some cases, even basic competence—to back it up.

That's not to say recent Haldoneirs have been entirely idle. This is a family whose members like to entertain themselves with mistresses or "brightlads" (male lovers set up in their own Suzailan houses just as mistresses are), dabble in various cults, conspiracies, and businesses (usually fads that fail, but including the occasional moneyspinning "hit"), and covertly giving coin to every merchant or noble cabal that seeks to curtail or circumvent royal powers.

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Since early in the reign of Rhigaerd II, House Haldoneir has bitterly resented the demotion of Lord Esmarl Haldoneir from the post of Royal Privy Advisor (though Esmarl richly deserved his expulsion from power and favour at Court, being as he was supposed to be finding out truths for the king and instead had started taking bribes in return for passing the lies of the briber's choice into the royal ear as "thoroughly-investigated and attested truths"). Since Esmarl's disgrace, the Haldoneirs have been among the most energetic whisperers (in private, among nobles) of the view that "the Obarskyrs are not rightful rulers, they're just the old-blood family that grasped the throne most ruthlessly, and have long since become so decadent and self-absorbed that they've lost all moral right to retain the Dragon Throne." The royal family, thanks to Vangerdahast and his War Wizards as well as the personal reports of certain loyal nobles, are well aware of the views of the Haldoneirs, which is why they remain "shut out" of Court and largely ignored by the Crown. The Haldoneirs, as a group, aren't energetic enough to do anything active against the Crown; they merely bankroll others in small seditions and obstructions. Nevertheless, they are not far from being stripped of their noble status and exiled, though it's rumoured that no less than two Lady Haldoneirs in a row begged Azoun IV not to disgrace their house in this manner, seducing him to give their pleadings great force. (This rumour is true; Azoun became VERY fond of Lady Aglathna, and came to regard her successor, Lady Ulandra, as a good and trusted friend, and did "stay his hand" at their behest - - though it's also true that he allowed Vangerdahast to enspell him so that he'd father no Haldoneirs during his dalliances with either lady; something he very rarely allowed the Royal Magician to do to him.)

Throughout their history, the Haldoneirs have had some violent family quarrels, usually kept VERY quiet to keep "wider Cormyr" from gaining any hint of them, and several family members have been quietly murdered by kin.

Recently, a charismatic and clever family heir, Marluke Haldoneir, was slain slowly and painfully (dismembered over a period of days, with all his joints broken and the severings cauterized to keep him from bleeding to death and escaping all the suffering they had planned) by the rest of his family sometime in the summer of 1367 DR, in a Haldoneir-owned Sembian hunting lodge, because he'd gambled away (or lost in foolish business deals) many of the family properties in Sembia, leaving the freely-spending Haldoneirs suddenly very short of funds. The surviving Haldoneirs took to shadier business dealings in Sembia (with the Fire Knives and others) to try to swiftly make a lot of coin; for a year this made them profits - - and then plunged them into deeper debt the next year, which was when the most ruthless Haldoneirs decided to sell some of their family members (notably four daughters and two nieces) into slavery, and let the Fire Knives kill others (including the bookish, "hopelessly upright" second son, Flaernd [Daviot, if this family is your chosen one, this is Lorna's guy] and two wealthy and successful Sembian-resident uncles) and take their property to offset much of the family debt.

As of the deaths of Flaernd and the two uncles, Baerand and Thruleon, House Haldoneir consists of an unknown number of "vanished" members down the years (most killed by misadventure or in battle, but some merely fled their family and Cormyr for better lives elsewhere, under new names - - or were sold into slavery, like the six young Haldoneir women who vanished in early 1369 DR: the daughters Asmrella, Dorlarra, Feaenrelle, and Paerelle, and the nieces Borlatha and Daunameire) and the following:

Lord Daeromur, the coldly sardonic, elegantly-moustachioed, wine and liqueur "aeravair" (we would say "connoisseur") and patriarch of the family, a man driven by his cold, ardent hunger for various revenges, and opportunities to indulge his sadism (horsewhipping servants or family members when they've erred or displeased him is a common practice).

Under iron self-control when in public, he is oh-so-correct in his Court etiquette and remarks about the Crown and the royal family, but will spend coin and whisper suggestions and rumours in a flash if he believes he can create difficulties or "incidents" to make courtiers, War Wizards, or the Obarskyrs look bad or be exposed to danger.

Daeromur believes the Haldoneirs, as "true" nobles, have the right to do just as they please; laws are for lesser Cormyreans. Yet with another family on the Dragon Throne and their spies the War

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Wizards prying everywhere, he recognizes that his house must obey laws and royal authority in public, or pay the final price.

Daeromur would cheerfully kill any weak, foolish, or disloyal Haldoneir without hesitation, believing he can always sire replacements - - and he secretly believes the Obarskyrs should have long ago taken up the same view and habits (which would have served Cormyr far better).

Lady Taerenthe is a strikingly-beautiful, clever, swift-tongued and swifter-witted woman who is utterly ruthless, but believes the path to shining success is to endlessly entice and bewitch her lord husband and support his every whim, so that he values her above all other beings (besides himself).

In this she has succeeded, though she has spent small fortunes on various potions and magical procedures (often involving the lives of young, beautiful kidnapped females) on trying to retain youthful-looking beauty. She has ankle-length, glossy and wavy jet-black hair, large and liquid brown eyes, and ivory-white skin - - and she has Lord Daeromur wrapped around her little fingers, manipulating him so skillfully that he's scarcely aware of it. When rage rises to consume him in the privacy of a Haldoneir home, she doffs her garments in an instant and offers herself to his whip until his arm is tired, whereupon he always thanks her for "knowing him so well," and professes his love anew. Lady Taerenthe always carries healing potions with her, usually in chased metal containers hidden in her boots or worked into her belt or pectoral jewelry - - and she always carries a spare whip for her lord's use, usually attached to her belt.

Taerenthe has some small natural sorcerous talent, which she keeps utterly secret from everyone. She has cached disguises, wealth, and even small useful magic items in dozens of places, in case she needs them in an emergency to flee her husband, her family, or even the realm.

She hopes to end her life wealthy and happy, either sharing the Dragon Throne with her husband or with the two of them holding high Court posts and the gratitude and trust of the ruler of Cormyr - - but she suspects the days of House Haldoneir retaining its noble standing in the Forest Kingdom are numbered, and is prepared to carve out a new life of luxury and status somewhere else.

Along the way, she is perfectly prepared to poison, stab, manipulate, lie, and otherwise glibly and unhesitatingly eliminate all impediments to her desires or House Haldoneir.

Lord Raskrel is (he believes) the sole surviving Haldoneir son, and the heir of the House. The laziest and most spineless of a family without scruples, he was a tirelessly wenching, drinking, prank-playing wastrel until his parents recently told him in private that he would die in agony if he didn't become their loyal, diligent tool to further the family fortunes. If he would become utterly loyal to them, concealing NOTHING from them, and doing as they told him, he would inherit all. He agreed - - and was then plunged into helping to slay Marluke and watching Flaernd and "all the laughing ladies" of the family disposed of, leaving only himself. It was a sobering lesson, and ever since he has been VERY careful to obey his parents. This has led him to do more real work than ever in his life before, and made him glance over his shoulder every breath or so; he doesn't even drop coins on a bed-lass for the night without obtaining his mother's permission.

Although a handful of ruthless, carefully diplomatic factors (trade agents) hired by his mother do most of the family's business deals (legitimate and otherwise) these days, Raskrel has several times been sent to murder or frame factors his mother wants to be rid of, and has done so, with ever-increasing confidence and competence.

If the Haldoneirs flourish for another six seasons or so, and he continues in his newfound roles of service, Raskrel might just become a formidable foe in his own right, rather than just a frightened wastrel doing what he's told.

Lord Eldaun is "the hidden Haldoneir." He vanished in a house fire when young, and all of his family except his mother Taerenthe (who spirited him away to be raised ignorant of his true name and heritage by a commoner couple in Westgate who believe she's a fell mage named

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"Aumtelarra" rather than a Cormyrean noblewoman) think him dead and gone. Even the War Wizards don't suspect Eldaun Haldoneir is still alive.

To Taerenthe, Eldaun is her "heir up her sleeve," to restore the house if anyone tries to exterminate it, or even to lead an army to claim the Dragon Throne if the Obarskys strip the Haldoneirs of their status or execute the male Haldoneirs. If in time to come Daeromur should die and Raskrel die or turn against her, Eldaun will be Taerenthe's replacement - - she'll even marry him if she thinks that will be the best means of controlling him. She's thought of many schemes for the future involving him, but of course circumstances will suggest the best one, if any.

As of 1369 DR, the Haldoneir family holdings are much diminished (what with Marluke's losses and what the Fire Knives took after the death of Flaernd and the grand houses the nieces had dwelt in), but they still retain Wyrmdown, a large country estate and mansion in Cormyr (due northeast of Immersea; on the foldout colour map that came with the 2e CORMYR sourcebook, it's straight north of the "R" in the "Immersea" tag on the map, about a third of the way between the Immer Trail and the oval denoting Blisterfoot Inn); Ormvraezel Keep, a small castle with a hunting forest and extensive farms, in upland northwestern Sembia; Boarhunt Towers, a hunting lodge in upland central Sembia that has its own expansive wild forest; High Oronel, a grand Suzail mansion; and also secretly maintain at least three more modest townhomes in Suzail (plus more than a dozen abodes of mistresses and brightlads) as well as two apartments (in their own rental-quarters buildings) in Marsember.

And there you have it; our third candidate noble family. Enjoy, I hope.

So saith Ed. Tireless crafter of villainous noble families.
And nicer ones, too.
love to all,
THO

--

Heh. I can answer you, Blueblade, on this one. (Why? Well, as it happens, I already asked Ed about this.)
After Asmrathan Lharfeld's murder, House Haldoneir SEIZED Boarhunt, because they were his principal creditors.
Oh, and Menelvagor: Ed laughed uproariously at your guess, said it was GREAT - - but, sorry, wrong, too.
Ah, well. NEXT time.
love to all,
THO

--

Hi, all.
Whew; off all these queries go to Ed.
Wooly, I can say up front that there are several Realms words for "mistress," and "brightlass" is one of them, but it has broadened over the years to also mean something like "good time girl" (or "party girl" or "fun-loving girl"), too, so it probably wouldn't be the appropriate one here (as both the mistress and the noble patron would probably prefer to use a word meaning something like "dignified lady of refinement who's romantically involved with one patron, NOT every willing

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person who happens by").
So we'll see which word Ed opts for.
Words, words . . . there's a reason "words" can be rearranged into "sword."
love to all,
THO

On February 5, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I come bearing some replies from Ed, this time in response to the first few of divers House Haldoneir questions from interested scribes. Herewith:

Blueblade: "Ed, I sat in on a game you ran (set in the Realms, of course) as an observer, at a GenCon in Milwaukee not long before the con relocated to Indy - - and the setting was the forests belonging to a certain Boarhunt Towers!!!

The same place, right? Does this mean the Haldoneirs bought it after the murder of its Sembian owner, that took place in your adventure? Or - - -?

It's GREAT when you see the vast tapestry of the Realms being woven together, right in front of your eyes.

Thanks!"

Ed replies: You're very welcome. And yes, this is the same Boarhunt Towers, and as THO posted, the Haldoneirs seized the place after Asmrathan Lharleld's murder, in lieu of his repaying some large loans they'd made to him (because his coin was seized by relatives and minor creditors in Selgaunt, despite the greater Haldoneir claim).

Wooly Rupert: "So do they use the word "mistress" then? Or is there a Realms version of the word, perhaps "brightlass"?"

Ed replies: As THO posted, "brightlass" COULD be used, but probably wouldn't be, thanks to that more prevalent "good time girl" meaning it has acquired. The "ultra-polite" term is "confidant," which of course has a long-established no-sex-at-all meaning, so the word is usually spoken with a wink to denote the second meaning.

The more often employed term is "my lady of the hearth" (meaning: someone I can relax and be cozy with, spending the night, with the unspoken addendums of "and have sex with" and "I pay to keep her in this haven I see her in"). Note that a "lady of the hearth" can be shared by three patrons or less (more makes her a prostitute, and I've already related some of the great array of Realms terms for that profession), but always implies someone installed in living quarters, and fed and clothed well, by those patrons.

There's an old Cormyrean word, "saerla," that means "unmarried wife," but this means not just a mistress but "someone I've fathered children with," who remains a friend (if a man says, "She used to be my saerla" it means we're no longer on friendly terms, NOT "I'm now married or she's now married so she can't be called a saerla anymore").

A new term, gaining popularity in Suzail, is "nightskirts," which used to mean "sophisticated prostitute I can pass off as a lady of high breeding," but is now starting to mean something like "bedmate I treat as a lady of breeding, paying for her bed and the walls around it - - because she's worth it."

The Sage: "Any chance you can provide some further info on the holdings of House Haldoneir?"

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Ed replies: Certainly. Read on . . .

Wyrmdown: I've given you its location, but it's reached from a long dirt road that winds between the Immer Trail and Calantar's Way not far south of Blisterfoot Inn. This road is known as Elclantar's Ride, and Wyrmdown greets it with a small, square tower about sixty feet tall with a "swept-spired" roof, on the north of which the twenty-foot-high stone wall of the estate is pierced by an oval arch and stout front gates. Beyond them, a curving dirt lane sweeps through gardens, curling "back upon itself" several times around stands of trees, to reach a hidden-from-the-road oval courtyard onto which front a sprawling stone mansion expanded many times by various owners from a small, square, squat and defensible stone keep; a large stable block; three large barns; and a guest house. From this center, lanes run out like the anchor-strands of a spiderweb across about two hundred acres of rolling farmland, ranch meadows, and woodlots, crossed by at least three small and nameless streams. There are several clusters of cottages and smaller barns at various spots across Wyrmdown, and it's quite easy to "put up" a lot of folk in the estate without any crowding or the neighbours seeing much evidence of their presence.

Ormvraezel Keep: Picture a stone mansion with small, round, seventy-foot-tall crenelated towers at either end of it and a steep, wood-stakes-filled dry moat around it, and you can picture Ormvraezel Keep. Across one arc of the moat lie a stables, a barn, and a carriage shed, with fields planted with vegetables beyond them in a large pie-shaped wedge stretching for about half a mile into the woods. Across the facing arc of the moat is a grand entry bridge to the Keep, and a winding dirt approach road wide enough for two large coaches to easily pass each other, that runs out to large wooden gates (no guardhouse, but the gates have tree-trunk latch-bars hung with many bells, and linked to other bells hung in trees, so opening the gate WILL make noise; the gates are flanked with deliberately-planted thornbush tangles that stretch for a bowshot or more on either side) onto Olandur's Way, a dirt lane winding through upland northwestern Sembia. Off that lane run several side-lanes, each leading to its own triple-rings-of-fence enclosed clearing in the forest. One is a camping-place for visitors, one a paddock for horses, another has sheds and is for several hundred goats, and another has sheds and is for about forty sheep; the uses are rotated as the years pass. Around all of this is a wild "hunting forest" of about eighty acres that has no fences (only trails that serve as boundaries between it and adjacent hunting forests belonging to others) but does have a LOT of trees, several ponds, and at least one spring.

Boarhunt Towers: Picture the same set-up (and size of grounds) as Ormvraezel Keep, except that there's no farmland, no fenced clearings, no moat, and no stone mansion with towers - - instead, a rambling wooden hunting lodge with stout shutters, a moss-covered wooden shingle roof, and huge stone chimneys (at least six of them) rising here and there amid the many-winged structure. About thirty guests can be accommodated with ease (there are sixteen bedchambers and an extensive kitchen with cellars beneath it), and there's a stables on one side of the lodge, and a pavilion (roof on pillars, without walls) on the other for slaughtering and hanging "kills" taken in hunting, with a small smokehouse beside it.

High Oronel: Directly south across the water from Truesilver Castle in Suzail is a smallish "building block" of two connected buildings. That's High Oronel, a stone mansion dominated by huge, high arched windows and a central hall that sports many of them, that enjoys splendid views. It stands in manicured grass lawns and gardens, and its eastern balconies overlook the great spread of the Royal Gardens. Six floors tall in some places but five or even four in others, it consists of series of "great rooms," with very few of the odd corners and poky servants' chambers found in most Suzailan mansions. It's too small for a large family, but is perfect for entertaining "select" parties of guests. Many wealthy and rising merchants of the city would give their left arms (and a lot of their wealth) to own it.

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Townhomes: of the tall, narrow, touching-neighboring-abodes sort, these structures are all near the Horngate, tend to be four storeys tall (with a rear "two-stall-stables" on the ground floor itself), and are used by the family as havens (that is, places they can go to for trysts, or to hide from society or Court officials, or each other). Ownership of these havens isn't advertised, and isn't widely known (and being as many of the neighbours are other noble families doing the same thing, and by tacit understanding turning their backs on whatever they may see next door or of comings and goings, "nosy neighbours" are not a problem). They are well-built and comfortable, with perhaps one luxuriously-furnished room (for meetings) and one nice bedchamber (for impressing bed-guests) each, but are more "everyday" than grand.

Favor Residences: this is the polite term for city lodgings maintained by a wealthy patron for mistresses and brightlads. They are essentially the same as the family townhomes, though they vary in size and grandeur by their location and origin, and the Haldoneirs keep fourteen such places, two of them currently empty (that is, rented out on a "short-stay" basis, usually a tenday at a time, to wealthy visitors to the city, such as factors and successful merchants from Sembia) and a dozen housing partners of various family members. It should be noted that nobles who own such residences tend to keep hiding places for certain items, and "side wardrobes" for themselves, in locked or even "secret" areas of the homes, with the rest being furnished more or less as the occupant (the mistress or brightlad) desires.

The House Haldoneir favor residences are distanced from the family townhomes, and so tend to be scattered throughout the eastern half of Suzail, south of the Promenade. Of these, two are "fairly rough" (as are their occupants), and are near the harbor.

Marsember holdings: just west of the gate connecting the naval base to the rest of the city, House Haldoneir owns two large, five-storey townhomes (near each other but not adjacent), though it doesn't advertise this fact, and uses hired local citizens as "doorlords" (the local term for landlords) who won't readily admit the identity of the owner they work for.

Both of these buildings are fairly luxurious (by the damp, cramped standards of Marsember) are divided into rental suites of two or three linked rooms. All of these suites are permanently rented out, under various long-term agreements, to wealthy local citizens - - except for one suite in each building (mid-floor, on the rear, "away from the street" side), kept for family use.

Both of these tall, ornamented stone buildings have their own attached stables, and so are thought of in the city as very desirable addresses.

So saith Ed. Who will return with more House Haldoneir replies ere he details House Sorndrake, and then moves on to replies to some followup Thunderstone-and-vicinity queries.

love to all,

THO

On February 6, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, scribes. This time, one of those lightning-fast Ed replies, this time to Aysen (see above):

Idly planning, yes. I'm not sure more Darsar novels will ever see the light of day, however. I loved doing them, but they suffered the classic "drop-off in chain orders, so drop-off in sales" pattern of too many fantasy series, with darned good sales for THE KINGLESS LAND but fewer and fewer for each title thereafter; hence the new Tor series (the Niflheim books). So it's not looking likely . . . just now.

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However, I've been at this game far too long to say "never" (ahem: Never Say Never Again), and yes, I was setting up those stag-headed folks for "something" in the future. There's a preque-to-KINGLESS short story of Hawkriil and Craer, published only as a chapbook in 2002, entitled "Where Only Madmen Hide."

I'll try to think of a way of getting it into mass market form, probably with a book-full of newly-written Aglirta stories, somewhere and somewhen.

Thanks for asking!

So saith Ed. Who, just to make this Realms-relevant, is busy on new Realmslore as I post this (what new lore? Ah, no, that would be TELLING!)

love to all,
THO

On February 7, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I bring you Ed's latest replies to scribes' follow-up Haldoneir questions, as follows . . .

Zandilar, re. Lady Taerenthe: "From which family did this 'charming' lady come from originally?"

Ed replies: Lady Taerenthe Haldoneir was born Lady Taerenthe Goldsword. Yes, THOSE Goldswords. :) She was the youngest of three daughters (Belldrara and Lysandlithe are her older sisters, Belldrara the dark-haired, big-boned, subtle-as-an-axe eldest, and Lysandlithe the smirking, soft-voiced, cynically superior epitome of idle, sophisticated noble beauty and malice) of Aundarra Goldsword - - and there have always been rumors that Lysandlithe or perhaps Taerenthe herself might just possibly have been sired by a certain royal Obarskyr (yes, THAT one).

Zandilar, re. this lore: [[Lord Eldaun is "the hidden Haldoneir." He vanished in a house fire when young, and all of his family except his mother Taerenthe (who spirited him away to be raised ignorant of his true name and heritage by a commoner couple in Westgate who believe she's a fell mage named "Aumtelarra" rather than a Cormyrean noblewoman) think him dead and gone. Even the War Wizards don't suspect Eldaun Haldoneir is still alive.]]: "This is a big risk. Does she have some way of ensuring he grows up to meet the standards of the family? Otherwise, she could well end up with a son who doesn't care for nobility or have a taste for intrigue and scheming, or one who cannot be easily controlled (for example - he becomes a paladin of Torm). Nature only accounts for so much in a person."

Ed replies: You're quite right. It IS a big risk, and he could well turn out to be less than suitable as her pawn or tool. However, he's very much an "ace in the hole" to her, and she hopes never to have to use or unmask him. In the meantime, aside from the occasional scrying (via magic items she stole from one of her conquests, Talander Cormaeril, just before House Cormaeril got stripped of their standing and possessions) to check on his health and whereabouts, she has no contact at all with Eldaun, who is entirely unaware of his origins. He's grown up as "Loryn Naliver," by the way, and is contentedly apprenticed to a cabinetmaker in Westgate, one Molvur Hallowrand.

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Ashe Ravenheart: "Wow, one family generating so many questions! And, not to be outdone, mine's in regards to Lord Eldaun. Being raised away from the family, I'm wondering what he's like. Away from all the politics, is he untainted from the machinations of his blood? Or has hereditary influence reared its ugly head?

Also, I'm assuming that Lady Taerenthe keeps a couple of eyes on him to make sure he stays healthy. Does this mean secret bodyguards and such? Does he suspect anything of his birthright?"

Ed replies: See my answer just above. No, Loryn has no suspicions of his birthright, but he's beginning to dimly remember grand rooms in his dreams, and certain faces (of his Haldoneir family, of course, plus the eyes - - JUST the eyes - - of the Selgauntan mage [one Ontan Kheloedrikh, who is a secretive, wealthy, VERY discreet, and quite powerful wizard who casts spells for pay, but never hires himself out as an adventurer] who cast three powerful spells on Eldaun, to suppress his memories and self-awareness). These dream-visions are recurring, but unless he accidentally gets caught in some spell-backlash or dispel magic effect, he's not going to remember much that's useful about his past.

Like all adolescents, "Loryn" is a bundle of raging hormones, and is increasingly restless . . . and he has always longed to see Cormyr, the Forest Kingdom, where he imagines himself galloping along on a splendid horse with his cloak flowing behind him, a sword at his hip, and Purple Dragons saluting him as he rides by.

Loryn is essentially a nice, honest lad who believes in family (the commoners who raised him), friends, loyalty to both, and following rules. He doesn't much like what he learns of of the politics of Westgate, but does take personal comfort in thrilling to the notion that he may someday have secrets - - valuable, important ones. Other than that, he hasn't yet shown any signs of inheriting a love of intrigue. He certainly has no liking for nastiness or willful lawbreaking or family feuds. And no, there are no family bodyguards. He's on his own; it's not even clear what Taerenthe will do if she perceives a threat to him, because she doesn't know.

So saith Ed. Great questions, scribes (Rinonalyrna Fathomlin, he's not forgotten yours, just held it over until he can deal with it properly; hopefully tomorrow). I'm just thinking what a wonderful Cormyr sourcebook could have been published, if Ed and other interested Cormyr experts could have collaborated on pages and pages of lore like this. Ah, the might-have-beens . . .

love to all,
THO

--

Zandilar, I know there are many tales of Sune taking lovers of both genders, of most intelligent races and their crossbreeds (e.g. half-elves). Ed will of course furnish a definitive reply in the fullness of time.

love,
THO

On February 8, 2009 THO said:- With pleasure, Lady Rinonalyrna. :}

The background first, and personal spotlights on the missing six next time.

In early 1369 DR, Lord and Lady Haldoneir drugged their nieces Borlatha and Daunameire and sold them into slavery, seizing their Suzailan residence and property, and renting out the townhome after selling off most of its contents. The story was spread that they'd eloped, stealing much coin from their kin, with "rakes from Sembia." This explanation worked so well that less than

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a month later, they repeated the process with three of their own daughters (Dorlarra, Feaenrelle, and Paerelle), using the same story. This caused more than a few cutting comments along the nobility about how badly the Haldoneirs must treat their daughters, but no outcry - - and more importantly, no Crown or War Wizard investigation.

Lady Haldoneir had already prepared for the latter by purchasing some mind-cloaking magics from a Chessentan wizard known to the Goldswords (and other nobles, wealthy Sembians and Chessentans, and rising folk of Westgate) and used by them to conceal their inward thoughts and schemes for decades; the cost of these small worn items is staggering, but well worth it to wealthy persons planning treason or murder, and keeps their maker (the mage Aldonasker of Airspur [a reclusive, sardonic, well-guarded by gargoyles and worse wizard rumored - - correctly - - to have come from Halruaa], who warns all clients that when he dies, the mind-masking spells he's cast on the items will abruptly end, a fiction that keeps him safe from treacheries planned by clients) very wealthy.

A short, quiet War Wizard investigation was launched when the eldest daughter, Asmrella Haldoneir, apparently followed her sisters into flight from the arms of her family, and the realm, but ironically, veteran Wizard of War Nolbrand Tharnsilver so understood that anyone would want to be rid of the Haldoneir name and the current heads of the house that he believed the lasses had done just that, taking their cues from each other. His fellow War Wizards, to the highest levels, did not think the matters being investigated were grave enough to warrant forcibly taking Lord or Lady Haldoneir into custody, removing their magical cloakings, and mind-reaming them - - with all the uproar among other nobles that would cause . . . or the further uproar that would attend the possible execution of the senior Haldoneirs and stripping the family of its grace. Certain Highknights were asked to check with Harpers they knew, operating in Westgate, Sembia, and some Inner Sea ports, to watch and listen for any trace of the Haldoneir lasses, but thus far none has turned up - - and, as they say, weightier matters have occupied the eyes and ears of the Crown of Cormyr.

So saith Ed. Who will return, as promised, with a look at each of the missing six Haldoneir females, on the morrow.

love to all,
THO

On February 9, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all.

Zandilar, I'm going to have to disagree with you about this:

"I also can't help but reflexively think that had the five missing been nephews and sons the whole thing would have been treated differently. (Cormyr is patriarchal enough for me to think this.)"

Now, if THE sole heir of a noble house, male or female, disappeared, the War Wizards would be all over it, yes.

However, the way Ed's explained (and showed, in play) Cormyr to us, over the years, sons and nephews OFTEN go missing - - gallivanting, adventuring, "finding themselves," sowing their wild oats; whatever you want to call it, AND, yes, rebelling against parental authority - - during their youthful years. So the "treated differently" would probably have only been to ignore the whole thing (again, unless a sole heir or by far the most likely heir, like an elder son when the other children are more than a decade younger, or children who are Azoun IV's bastard offspring, are involved).

In this case, Ed's clearly said that the eldest child (the older son, and heir) has stayed put, so you can be darned sure the War Wizards are watching him VERY closely now. If either Lord or Lady Haldoneir ever talks or even hints too freely about what they've done, they'll do more than just "watch." Of course, I'm suspecting that Laspeera (and Vangey first, Caladnei later, but Lasp's the

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continuity, here) is waiting for House Haldoneir to take that one step too far, so she can catch them in something that disgusts even the most ardently anti-Obarskyr of their fellow Cormyrean nobles - - and THEN the Crown will strip them of their nobility, arrest and probably execute the heads of the house, and so on.

Of course, Ed will probably say more. Especially about why simple magical tracings weren't done (or weren't effective). So off your post goes to him, for THE expert's testimony . . .

love,
THO

On February 9, 2009 THO said:- Hi, Zandilar. THO sent me your last few posts - - along with the missives from everyone else these last few days, too, and to Rinonalyrna Fathomlin: you're VERY welcome. I'm probably going to be delayed on the Haldoneir lasses reply for a day or so, thanks to a family emergency, but I WILL reply. Promise.

Zandilar, you posted: "There's a difference between going off gallivanting and going missing without a trace. The former implies several things, most importantly, they left a trail that could be followed, and also that they eventually come back, repentant or unrepentant. They're not just there one day, gone the next."

and you also posted: "Going back to a point I made in a previous post, surely House Haldonier would had to have offered some authority some proof that the girls had eloped with Sembians before they'd be allowed to take their property?"

Now, these are good points, but they're rooted in modern-day thinking; the way things happen in our real-world, "enlightened" societies. I'm afraid they don't hold true for Cormyr.

In some cases, there ISN'T any difference between going off gallivanting and going missing without a trace, except in hindsight, after the fact (as you say, "they eventually come back, repentant or unrepentant").

First off, who's doing the tracing? If the family doesn't care to, and the overstretched War Wizards don't already have the particular noble under watch because they've done something suspicious, and the departing nobles don't WANT to leave a trail, they don't - - and NO ONE does any tracing.

If you're the head of a noble family and you want to trace your departed kin, you send out servants or hire adventurers. Or you can ask your factor (trade agent) to tell the trade agents he or she customarily deals with, in various places the departed one is suspected of heading to, to keep an eye out for them. The effectiveness of this last approach is best illustrated in real-world terms: how many visitors to, say, Melbourne did you personally happen to notice arriving or leaving again in the last month or so? Or how many people who passed through your neighbourhood did you notice and get a good look at? None of them felt the need to seek you out and "check in" with you, did they?

One impression often unavoidably left by all the attention on Vangerdahast's machinations in discussions here and in the novels I write, and elsewhere, is that Cormyr is some sort of police state wherein the War Wizards SEE ALL. Nothing could be further from the truth. Vangey certainly WANTS to see all, but even at the heights of its power, the War Wizards, Highknights, and various "open and official" Crown agents are all far too few to watch a quarter of what they want to watch, let alone conduct in-depth snoopings they "know" need doing. They are frantically busy, and falling farther and farther behind on watching over things with each passing day. Not to mention that nobles don't like being watched and often have the resources to do things behind quite a few layers of closed doors, and some rights to privacy that no one else in the realm enjoys.

So, let's face it, the disappearances of six non-heirs of a low-profile noble family, NOT happening all at once, just aren't going to attract much attention . . . until long after the disappearances, when folk start to realize they haven't see this or that person, and wonder where they went. Then

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and only then are casual questions going to be asked, by those same folk. There ARE no authorities demanding full answers to pointed questions, or demanding proof. You posted: "surely House Haldonier would had to have offered some authority some proof that the girls had eloped with Sembians before they'd be allowed to take their property."

Nope. First of all, it's FAMILY property, under Cormyrean law, not the property of the individuals - - because the deed to that townhouse was acquired by the grandparents of the two nieces, and never transferred to the nieces. It customarily isn't, unless the family owes them a debt and they agree to accept a building as payment. It's retained by the family, because occasionally such transfers will attract tax or need to be registered, and it's easier to just avoid all that. So the Crown really has no interest or say in the matter. For ANY noble family. Until a dispute arises - - and even then, the Crown's first move is usually going to be to try to get the disputing parties to work something out between themselves, rather than step into the fight; the Crown is trying NOT to rile all the nobles, remember?

Secondly, nobles have rights and privileges other Cormyreans don't - - and one of them is the right to move around as they please. The realm has no customs or border agents per se, although cities have guards at their gates, ports have inspectors on the wharves, and border areas have Purple Dragon patrols - - but they're looking for brigands, monsters, and armed invaders or raiders, not to pick fights with nobles. Ship cargoes face tax-collector inspections (a few of them, usually only during wartime or when someone's suspicions have been aroused), but no one is going to keep tabs on the comings and goings of nobles (and a "usual" amount and number of accompanying servants and belongings) except curious War Wizards or Highknights (again, when their suspicions have been aroused). Nobles travel within the kingdom, and into and out of it, far more than most other citizens. Many Cormyrean nobles go to Sembia to do business and to "play" (pursue amusements they don't want to be seen pursuing at home, or can't enjoy in Suzail as much as Selgaunt, or are tired of doing in Suzail with the same old faces), often and sometimes on a regular basis. So noble lasses going to Sembia just isn't something all that remarkable.

If a friend of one of the vanished nieces asked, Lady Haldoneir might say in a bored tone, "Well, dear, off they went to Sembia - - YOU know why; oh yes, I've heard some of the tales about Faerdorn and his well-oiled handsome lads - - and this time decided they wanted to stay for the time being, or at least a season or two, and we couldn't just let the house go to WASTE, now could we? They said they were tired of it all, mind, so they'll not be wanting to step back into the same old house with the same old furnishings. When they return - - IF they return - - we'll settle them in something. It's not as if we don't have DOZENS of suitable residences, right here in Suzail!"

Some nobles depart with great fanfare, and send messages home; some just go. Some are impulsive, some are very private and don't WANT nosy family-paid spies or retainers following them, some have done something unlawful and get scared and just want to get far away, fast, and some have quarreled violently with their parents. (Some nobles become "remittance exiles" who stay away for years or even forever, in return for their families sending them funds so they can live idle lives elsewhere; "stay away, out of sight and out of family affairs, and we'll go on paying you." I've used this particular circumstance repeatedly for PC adventurers, by the way; it gives them an income but prohibits them from entering certain areas of the Realms - - meaning that if they DO want to "go where they shouldn't," they have to wear disguises or sneak in, or both, to avoid losing the flow of coins they live on. A few receivers of remittances even get sent missions or tasks they have to do for the family, or risk getting shorted or cut off in future remittances; building in adventures for a PC remittance receiver.)

So in short: no, the disappearances aren't being treated unusually.

If all six lasses vanished at once and the Haldoneirs went shrieking to the Crown, YES; the realm would be turned upside down looking for them.

If lads rather than lasses vanished, and the family raised no outcry, the disappearances would simply be ignored; it's EXPECTED that young noblemen want to "see the world" before being forced to settle down into overseeing family businesses and the like.

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If a family heir was noticed to be missing, War Wizards would be interested, BUT (and here's the last point) they can't just go mind-reaming everyone. For one thing, doing so is illegal in most circumstances, unless royal permission is received (and Azoun wasn't in the habit of freely giving it). For another, many nobles have acquired mind-protecting magic, some of which "slaps back" at anyone trying a probe (the War Wizard) and some of which either foils probings or so damages the mind of the protected person that they are driven (permanently or temporarily) raving mad. As in, so actively mad that it can't be concealed from the public. Again, other nobles will collectively take a VERY dim view of this, and there are many nobles who dislike the Obarskys or the powers of the Crown already, and won't miss an opportunity to hamper them. To say nothing of nobility in Marsember and Arabel, with a goodly part of the commoners in those places backing them to the proverbial hilt, who are watching for excuses to rebel or protest or demand War Wizard or Crown powers be stripped away.

Faced with balancing civil war against possible (not even likely) bad fates of six spoiled, barely-heard-of-them young noblewomen, the average courtier or War Wizard isn't going to come down on the side of the Haldoneirs, other than to murmur, "I wonder if it's time we took a closer look at the House of the Wyrmddeath . . . hmmm . . ."

Heh. I'm sure this is going to spur further questions and possibly debate on your part, and that of other scribes. Feel free; you know where to find me (just the far side of the lovely Lady Hooded, which is generally a pleasant place to be :}).

So saith Ed. (And nudge nudge wink wink yourself, old friend and Realms creator.)
love to all,
THO

On February 11, 2009 THO said:- You're very welcome.
gomez and Zandilar, while we're waiting for Ed's proper answer to gomez's request for terms for transgendered, I came across this in my old Realmslore notes (i.e. from Ed, during play, years back):

A warrior of either gender who dresses as the other gender (usually to get a job as a guard, bodyguard, or just plain soldier) is called a "winkhelm" in the Sword Coast North (as in: under the armor waits a surprise, to most; the term has NOTHING to do with behaviour, e.g. flirtatious, effeminate, or whatever, and is not pejorative; it's used with about the same casualness as saying, "He be a left-hander with a bow, sir" or "a bit shy on hearing right now on his right side, after that knock on the helm he took a tenday back, but 'twill come back, no fear; has before").

So saith Ed, years ago.
love to all,
THO

--

Yes, a good coining.
As it happens, Ed uses "swordlass" to mean "lesbian female adventurer, unattached by choice."
(The reason for "sword" should, of course, be obvious.)
love,
THO

Edit: not used in printed Realmslore for two reasons: TSR didn't deal with sexual matters of this sort, and "swordlass" also had an "innocent" meaning, too: young (not veteran) female adventurer.

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On February 12, 2009 THO said:- Heh. Zandilar, I'm thinking it's a reference to the sort of sword that's spelled D-I-L-D-etc. Ahem.

The sense I get from Ed is that Aluzair as Regent VERY MUCH was changing (or trying to change) the "rights" and influence and roles of nobles, with a LOT of support from "her blades" (the young nobles who'd ridden the Stonelands with her [yes, in all senses of "ridden"], knew and trusted her, and saw something of her vision of what the realm had to become . . . either her way, or a bloodier way, through a commoner uprising in which a lot of nobles would lose their heads), and that these changes, albeit with backlash resistance, would continue after her regency ended. Red Walker, the sequels to both DARK LORD and DARK WARRIOR RISING are out, or very soon will be, and there should be a third book in both series, though I have no idea when the third Niflheim (that's the Dark Warrior series, from Tor) will appear.

Here's a quicky overview for each series:

- - the Falconfar trilogy from Solaris/Black Library (Simon & Shuster in the US) consists of 1. DARK LORD, 2. ARCH WIZARD (out very soon), and 3. FALCONFAR (probably out in the fall). It's the story of a fantasy writer in our world who is startled to discover that Falconfar, the fantasy world he thought he created, seems to be real - - and he's thrust into it. He's an ordinary guy, NOT an action hero, but people in Falconfar seem to think he's . . . the Dark Lord. I won't ruin it by saying more. Much of the action takes place tramping across a medieval-era fantasy world.

- - the Niflheim series from Tor Books consists of 1. DARK WARRIOR RISING and 2. DARK VENGEANCE (with a possible future sequel). Far more than the Falconfar series, each book in this series can be read as a stand-alone novel. They concern a subterranean world dominated by cruel dark elves who are NOT the drow of D&D (no spider goddess), but who take human slaves by raiding the surface world and snatching children. As the first book begins, one human slave, Orivon Firefist, sees a chance to escape his captivity and try to take revenge on his cruel captors AND get back to the surface world . . . and the fun begins. Orivon IS a grim fighting hero, and several reviewers have seen this as very Howard-like action fantasy. The action takes place almost entirely underground.

So I hope that tells you enough to choose, without revealing too much. I liked them both, for very different reasons. (Amusingly, Ed's usual detractors trashed them, but one detractor often directly contradicted another in their stated reasons for doing so; read into that what you will.)

love to all,
THO

On February 12, 2009 THO said:- As for your first sentence, I'd LOVE to reply directly and in detail to this, but I'm afraid it falls into NDA territory, for reasons that I hope in time to come will enrich us all.

To answer the rest of your queries in a more general sense: yes, all of Cormyrean society has been shifting in its attitudes, as generations pass, and the "Devil Dragon War" (like the two World Wars in our own real world) really jolted the status quo; not only did a LOT of nobles die, everyone else (of the surviving populace) saw that the nobles, for whatever reasons, didn't "protect the rest of us" with their wealth, power to hire mercenaries and fortify their own properties and equip their own servants (and militias) properly with enough arms, armour, and horses . . . so a lot of the "automatic" obedience to nobles evaporated. Which meant the far more numerically superior commoners were no longer "almost entirely inclined" to obey or stand aside for nobles, and instead would tend to stand up to them, openly disagree with their crazier ideas, and "neglect" to obey them if not confronting them openly. As a lot of the younger nobles already thought their parents' and older relatives' behaviour was disgusting, and they didn't want to be tarred with the same brush, they started openly breaking ranks with the older nobles (something "just not done" in earlier decades) . . . and the ostracization done to those who did break ranks by the older nobles just didn't mean much, anymore.

So, yes, there WAS a large generational change, and it did happen fairly quickly - - though it had

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in fact been "brewing" for quite some time.

Now, all of this doesn't mean there aren't still some incredibly arrogant and/or authoritarian nobles; having lots of money gives individuals the freedom to indulge themselves, and inevitably some of them do so in such ways.

Yet a DM can easily have nobles who sneer at commoners or ignore them (except to curtly snap orders at them, when absolutely necessary, e.g. wave riding crop threateningly and snap, "Out of the way, curl!"), nobles who try to deal with commoners as equals ("Well met. I am Daerold Wyndstone, of House Wyndstone. And you are - -?"), and nobles (generally younger ones) who want to be thought of as commoners ("Well met. I'm Raerold Wyndstone, of Cormyr. Still seeking what I want to do in life. You?"), all in the same family.

So saith Ed. Who hopes to resume regular Realmslore replies very soon.

love to all,
THO

On February 13, 2009 THO said:- ASMRELLA ("Az-MRELLA"), the eldest daughter, was probably the smartest Haldoneir of the last century. Dutiful, quiet, and under iron self-control at all times, she watched her parents at work, growing up, and thought them fools for being so open in their misdeeds, hatreds, casual cruelties, and arrogance. Far better to become the most superb actor possible, hiding all behind a façade of attentive kindness. Asmrella became that master player-of-roles, and was already a good judge of people.

She became the willing servant of her parents, seeing that as her best defense, and grew up into a taller, thinner, slightly plainer echo of her mother Taerenthe.

Although what her parents did to Borlatha and Daunameire startled her, Asmrella knew right away that it was a fate that might well eventually be hers, and swiftly made preparations - - notably buying a tiny vial of imvris, a contact poison that causes paralysis, from an alchemist on the Suzailan docks, one Rhegrest Marlambar. The vial was small and flat, and attached to an ear-hook wire, and Asmrella took to wearing it constantly under her hair, hooked over her right ear.

When she was "taken" and bundled off into slavery, she kept her calm and patience - - and was eventually rewarded with an opportunity to paralyze a sleeping captor, slit his throat with his own dagger, and make off with his purse, weapons, and cloak into the streets of Westgate. From there, she impersonated a prostitute about to entertain a drunken regular client, snared that merchant's much fatter purse, and bought herself passage "out" with the next caravan.

She now dwells in Amn, where she managed to drown the dutiful wife of an old, rich, and nigh-blind retired merchant without being seen or suspected of anything (a river obligingly carried off the body), took the wife's place, and is enduring the merchant's fumbling caresses as she learns how to invest and reinvest his fortune, buy and sell his properties, and build herself into true formidability before the inevitable day she becomes the widow of Aundemann Haethmur.

Whereupon "Marustine Haethmur" intends to sell out before the vultures swoop down to try to seize Haethmur's worldly goods, relocate to Sembia, and become the doom of the Haldoneirs - - or at least of her parents. If she can manage their deaths in a way that both lets them know who's killing them AND avoid being blamed for the murders, she will gladly reveal her true name and heritage, step forward to claim House Haldoneir's wealth and properties, and swear any oaths of loyalty the War Wizards or the Crown want her to. If it benefits her, she may even keep some of them.

DORLARRA ("Dor-LARRA") was the nastiest, most spiteful of the four Haldoneir daughters, and the least good-looking. Thin, sallow, and seldom to be seen without heavy cloakings of cosmetics and scent, she led a life of lounging, gossip, shopping for the gaudiest of gowns and furs, and been rude to all but handsome, eligible young noblemen at the endless round of feasts and revels she attended.

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She enjoyed lovemaking, but believed it to be something to be passively experienced, and so gained not even the most basic skills of pleasing a partner. Which left saying spiteful things to be her sole accomplishment, beyond the ability to read and write.

Lazy, graceless, and utterly untrained, she became the sort of slave known as "empty meat" to slavers (that is: hardly worth feeding); not maimed or diseased, but worth little more than whatever minimum offer she attracted. Bought by a merchant who needed cargo-coffers filled by someone able to sort and handle fragile items with reasonable care (someone chained in place and worked for seemingly endless shifts, being paid only in bread, water, leftover table scraps, and old cheese), she was whipped or just kicked and punched when she worked poorly - - and has become emaciated, scarred, half-mad with fury at the world and grief at her own plight. The warehouse where she's long-chained to a sorting bench and left to labor alone, following written packing notes, is somewhere in a Sembian port, but she knows no more than that, and as the unnumbered days pass, cares less and less about anything at all.

FEAENRELLE ("FEE-ain-rel") was a dark, slender beauty with very pale skin, very black hair long enough to reach her ankles, and much silence. When she spoke, her croaking frog-voice made the reason for her customary silence obvious. Clever with numbers and mechanical things, and blessed with not just the wits to reason but the ability to see consequences and likelihoods that were less than obvious, she could make a very good merchant - - and that's just what she's become, albeit as a slave and bed-partner to a constantly-travelling merchant, Klardabreir of Airspur, who primarily deals in wines, spirits, and physics (medicinal or purportedly-medicinal drinks). Usually confined to the aging, kindly, stout, white-bearded Naumble Klardabreir's rooms or ship cabin (he owns three merchant caravels that ply the Inner Sea), she is increasingly trusted and loved - - and is so glad to be rid of the parents and kin she so feared that she's beginning to return that love and trust, though she longs for Klardabreir to free and marry her, or better yet sell her to someone her age and handsome, who will free and then marry her. Her diligence in matters of trade and her skills have played no small part in the rising fortunes of Klardabreir of Airspur, and though she's not been paid a single coin for her service, she's been well fed, given treats and gifts when Klardabreir's been especially pleased, and although she now has a key to the manacles she wore for so long and a dagger hidden where she can get to them, she no longer dreams every day and night of using them to seize any good chance to escape, when one should come along. If she never saw Cormyr again, that wouldn't bother her one whit, she thinks - - but finds herself dissolving into tears and excitement whenever she catches even a glimpse of the distant coast of the Forest Kingdom.

So saith Ed. Who will return when he can to describe the last Haldoneir daughter, and the two nieces. Hang in there, scribes; Ed is "on the job."
love to all,
THO

On February 14, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. I just sent the last few posts on this page off to Ed, and got this back from him, lightning-swift:

No, Gontal isn't a nod to Gondal. I have hidden more than a few "Easter Eggs" in the Realms, but nothing so overt or large-scale. Mine tend to be small details. :}

So saith Ed. Who, as we all know, LOVES small details.
love to all,
THO

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On February 15, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. Well said, Malcolm. VERY well said. (And of course Uzzy and createvmind, too; your thinking concurs with Ed's, all of you. That doesn't mean you're wrong, Zandilar; she probably could have destroyed her parents very effectively - - IF she'd wanted to pay the price of doing so.)

Now, Ed returns to the Keep, via me (fresh from the gala opening of an exhibition of caricatures in Port Hope, Ontario, of 42 local celebrities, including Ed himself; he is, of course, "The Wizard"), to describe the last Haldoneir daughter, and the two Haldoneir nieces, for us all:

PAERELLE ("PAY-er-el") had from early years an unearthly beauty; golden rather than straw-yellow hair, a perfect complexion (nigh-pure white), large dark imploring indigo eyes, and extremely sharp, delicate features. She was small of bone and stature, sleek and curved rather than muscled, and although she'd learned no hand-work skills, she had perfect pitch, spot-on mimicry with a great range in voices (from deep male to faerie-bell clear) and a great natural talent for singing, and could read and write superbly. Blessed with an exacting, exhaustive memory for smells, faces, names, and dates, she might make the perfect witness.

Growing up very much in the shadow of her sisters, she learned to stay mute and challenge no one, even when treated with great cruelty. However, she never forgot ANYTHING, and was quite a shrewd judge of character.

She suspected what her fate might soon be after the "taking" of Borlatha and Daunameire, and quietly made preparations, approaching Lelrard Dorryn, a young male stable servant of the Haldoneirs whom she knew was smitten with her, to follow and rescue her in return for her hand in marriage and what wealth she could snatch.

Unfortunately, he wasn't present when she was taken, and could only follow her. When the slaving trail led from Marsember to Westgate, Dorryn sought out a Harper he knew in Marsember, revealed all he knew, then bought passage to Westgate - - where he was soon murdered by the slavers when his clumsy pokings and prying led them to notice him. By then, Paerelle had been bought by a brothelkeeper and had "entertained" hundreds of clients who paid extra to "violate a noble lady;" many of them returned often after they'd seen and felt her beauty.

A tenday later, when Dorryn had failed to leave word with Harpers in Westgate, they set out to find him and Paerelle Haldoneir. The result was a messy little private war that went on in the streets, back alleys, upper rooms, and secret passages of Westgate for the better part of a month, ending with a handful of Harpers dead but a slaving gang nigh-exterminated, a certain brothelkeeper murdered, and his brothel emptied and set afire by desperately-fleeing "working lasses."

Given refuge by a Harper, Paerelle Haldoneir proved to be as wise as her eldest sister Asmrella; she refused to return to Cormyr or use her own name ever again. She had discovered she quite liked lovemaking (even receiving pain, so long as it was on HER terms), and discovered she liked manipulating men (and women, too) even more.

Local Harpers offered her a deal; if she would join the Harpers, gathering information and providing a safe haven for traveling Harpers, they would set her up in her own "brothel-of-one" in any city she desired . . . and relocate her whenever she grew bored or felt unsafe. She agreed, began work in Alaghôn, has enjoyed it, and is busily learning all she can of other places in the Realms (from clients and Harpers alike) so she can choose the "best" next place she'll dwell. She has become the lover and fast friend of over a dozen Harpers, and is heartily glad to have put her Haldoneir heritage "forever" (in her words) behind her.

BORLATHA ("Boar-LATH-ah") was a fat, jovial-mannered but deeply unhappy lass some seven summers older than Asmrella. More fond of food and drink - - for which she has developed a prodigious capacity without seeming to be drunk - - than of anything else, and feeling trapped in "the body of a rosy, cuddly SOW" (as she put it more than once, disgusted and despairing) she had gradually withdrawn from feasts, revels, and all other public appearances. Her life became a

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matter of staying in her home eating sweets, reading endless racy chapbooks, hearing the latest gossip of Suzail from tale-tellers who visited her for talk, splendid meals, and fine wine whilst she conversed with them from behind a curtain, and making love with her sister. Bored and jaded with idle luxury, she had begun "investigating" various faiths (shady cults in particular) seeking some way out of her body into a new life - - or failing that, some thrills to pass the time.

Sold into slavery as a unlovely, talentless, overfed weakling (literally for a lone copper coin), she was intended to be killed and served up as food to jaded wealthy folk of Westgate seeking illicit thrills. However, she soothed and cuddled the cage full of weeping, shrieking, and self-harming slave children she was thrown in with, and a grateful slavemaster put her to work as a "den mother" for his slave pens. Starved, she has lost most of her fat, though much of her skin hangs in loose folds, and gained a lot of energy - - but can see no way out, and is clinging to her "mothering" role as her only purpose in life. Raped by several male slaves, she is best described as "resigned" to her new life rather than happy, but she's decided to live for the moment, try not to think about her ultimate fate, and to forget that she was ever noble.

DAUNAMEIRE ("DON-ah-meer") was as tall, thin, and slender as her sister Borlatha was fat. From birth to now, she has had a build that shows all her ribs for counting. She has a large nose but striking beauty, with severe black brows and curly, honey-hued long tumbling hair - - though she has always preferred the company (and intimacy) of women to men, and was happily her sister's lover for years until they were snatched into slavery. Daunameire has a sultry, smoky purr of a voice and an unconscious allure (her graceful movements are always just shy of provocative poses, and she's entirely unashamed of her body and quite likely to casually bare parts of herself to show anyone a scratch or "where it hurts." Neither stupid nor clever, she has always paid little attention to the world around, and so is by far the most naïve of all the Haldoneirs.

Being taken for slavery and separated from Borlatha caught her completely by surprise. Her arm was broken during her abduction (by accident, not as a result of her putting up any resistance), and one disgusted slaver thought it best to casually strike her senseless and toss her overboard in the Neck - - but she begged the other slavers to spare her life, promising to be their drudge and bedmate and willing slave, never seeking to escape or to harm them, if they'd give her a place to sleep and food to eat.

They took her up on the deal, and from that day to this has labored in a slaver's kitchen in a low neighborhood of Westgate, cooking, keeping house, and warming the beds of half a dozen cruel, hardened slavers - - who now regard her as family, and will and have scrambled to protect her when the need has arisen.

Her arm healed with a visible irregularity and a recurring damp-weather ache, but is serviceable, and Daunameire herself is content with her new life. She misses being noble not at all, and is only wistful for her former idleness and luxuries on rare occasions, but she would very much like to see her sister - - whom she unconsciously regards as her life partner - - again.

Her owners not only have come to love and value her, they never tire of watching her dance, read them aloud chapbook tales in that loins-stirring purr of hers, and coming to their beds (and after a difficult first few tendays, they made a pact with each other never to fight over who "had" her on this night, but to be generous with each other and with her; if she wanted a night alone, or felt poorly, she would get it - - though to their delight, she prefers sleeping with men, even more than one, to lying in bed alone).

So saith Ed. Who has provided us with another trio of interesting characters; as he's said many times before, the Realms isn't geography so much as it is people.

Me, I hope he'll bring us scores more fascinating characters in the years ahead. I KNOW he'll bring us more Realmslore replies here to Candlekeep, one by one, as soon as he can get to them.

love to all,
THO

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On February 16, 2009 THO said:- Hi, Damian. Various sorts of horses are bred for both the plough and the saddle, with most of the latter being sold to merchants who come out from Suzail to inspect the trained "stock" and to Purple Dragon buyers (who rely on the constant observation of local animals by the resident Dragons, to make their picks).

Most of the locals who do ride tend to use old, retired plough horses to plod around on, often pulling small work-carts in which non-riders can travel as well as purchases and items they're transporting. However, there are locals who own and ride horses bred and trained for the purpose, as well as nobles and wannbe-nobles who enjoy hunting (see my next answer, coming soon), and have horses trained for galloping across country, leaping obstacles, fording streams, and the like. I would judge that about 4 in 10 locals can ride, about half that number doing it well, and that perhaps 8 out of 10 have been on a horse (however clumsily and/or briefly : }) once in their lives.

So saith Ed. Who will, if he can, follow up with details of House Sorndrake, last of his four candidate "nasty noble families" for Daviot, then turn to more in the series of Thunderstone questions posed by crazedventurers, probably starting with hunting.

Not to mention Asgetrion's followup Thunderstone questions!

If time presses in the next few days, Ed warns, he'll deal with smaller, swifter lore queries instead, for a bit.

After all of that, there are some nice queries posed recently that I know Ed is itching to tackle. Keep 'em coming, scribes; I'm sure it reassures Ed that the advent of 4e hasn't caused longtime scribes to abandon the Realms.

love to all,
THO

On February 17, 2009 THO said:- Borlatha's world-view and horizons have "broadened" greatly since she was snatched from idle luxury in Suzail (thanks to her enforced contact with so many more individuals, and her loss of weight), so she doesn't "need" Daunameire as much as she formerly did. Yet Daunameire is "family" to her, and she would be wildly excited at an reunion - - just as Daunameire, with her own deeper feelings for her sister and the excitement she would feel at seeing the "new," slimmer Borlatha, would be wildly excited at being reunited with her. So, yes, they would probably try to resume a life together, if at all possible. I have no idea how long it would last. They would both begin it happier than they were (bored and drifting) before they ceased to be "pampered but ignored Haldoneirs," but they have also both begun to really grow and change as people . . . and they might well "grow apart." Only time (and the choices of individual DMs running them) will tell.

So saith Ed. Giving us a glimpse of how he views and handles fictional characters, there. (With a lot of respect, be it noted.)

love to all,
THO

--

Heh. Looking back over years of Realmsplay, I can tell you that Ed does that to all of us, all the time. He's pretty subtle about it, though, with so many subplots going on and we as the "heroes" having so much of a say in where we go and what we get caught up in, that we scarcely notice it.

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We're just "living our lives" in the Realms - - character lives that happen to involve a lot of bold, dangerous adventure.

So yes he does, but no, I rarely stop and step out of character to notice it. The Realms just seems real and we deal with things as they come along. Ed NEVER pulls you out of character to impress upon you that the character you're playing is about to make an Important Decision.

For which I'm heartily glad; I get to do enough facing of Important Decisions in real life!

love,
THO

On February 18, 2009 THO said:- It varies wildly, with both the individual servant and the accent of the outlanders, but in general, folk from really distant locales (you said "far away") won't be correctly placed by inn staff in the Dales more than ten percent of the time at most, UNLESS they by chance share an accent with a caravan merchant on a local run (meaning, they see him or her at least twice a season, for a stopover), who comes from the same region.

In Suzail, a cosmopolitan seaport of goodly size but not as bustling or seeing as wide a variety of visitors as most of the Sword Coast ports, I'd double those chances (to twenty percent, at most). Selgaunt, Scornubel, and Alaghôn would be twenty-five percent, with Crimmor, Athkatla, Memnon, and Calimport thirty percent, and real "crossroads" places like Tharsult, Baldur's Gate, and Waterdeep rising to as much as forty percent (again, at most).

So saith Ed. Who's been known to adopt an accent or three himself, when roleplaying (hearing him do sultry young females is a treat).

love to all,
THO

On February 19, 2009 THO said:- Calaunt (which I most fully described in the 2e FORGOTTEN REALMS ADVENTURES hardcover), Tantras (which got much shorter shrift in my Avatar adventure module of the same name, and talked about briefly here at the Keep, much later), Ravens Bluff (which I described, pre-destruction, in great detail in THE CITY OF RAVENS BLUFF 2e sourcebook) and Procampur (which I've touched on here and there, including here at the Keep, but which was a campaign focus for the RPGA for long enough to keep my treatments of it skimpy, at best) are all very different cities.

To put things very simply, Calaunt is a nasty "police-state"-like port that's no friend of anyone's. Tantras is a worship-of-Torm-dominated, generally law-abiding port that is a traditional rival of Calaunt, Ravens Bluff is (or was) a colorful, crossroads, generally lawless port, and Procampur is a law-abiding port with many intrigues brewing under the surface, that has more to do with other Inner Sea ports than with the cities of the Vast.

They are all independent of each other, Calaunt sends spies into the other cities and occasional raiders into the lands between it and Tantras to skirmish with the Tantran patrols, Tantras warily watches both Calaunt and "wild" Ravens Bluff, and Procampur regards all of the cities of the Vast as generally dangerous backwaters.

The laws of one city don't affect the others at all; there's no cooperation between governments and their enforcement arms, little overlap in actual laws, and a natural inclination to resist or dismiss claims made under the laws of the other cities.

To deal specifically with the two examples you give:

1. If someone commits a crime in one city and hides in another one, the criminal would not be sent back to face justice. A bounty hunter (or hired adventuring group) might privately travel to

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another city to find and apprehend someone, but their own actions in capturing the fugitive might well not be seen as lawful in the city they're operating in. News of the crime could quite easily travel from city to city with all the merchants moving about, but might not have reached the authorities - - and if it did, would at best alert them to watch an individual they deemed dangerous (such as a wizard who murdered someone in the first city with spells). If they got word in Tantras that "Garlaustras is wanted in Calaut for butchering sixteen city officials," the response might very well be "Well, good for him!" (but also a note to the effect: "If we're going to collect a fee or tax from Garlaustras, send three men, and make sure they're armed").

2. If an official representative of the offended city entered another city to try to apprehend a criminal, it could only be an envoy requesting cooperation from the "other city," and this would only be given in extraordinary circumstances. If he tried to "arrest the criminal" himself without obtaining that unlikely permission, HE would be seen as a criminal for making the attempt. Heh; the folk of Procampur just could be right: the cities of the Vast ARE, by and large, dangerous backwaters.

So saith Ed. Who created all of those places except Ravens Bluff (which was plonked atop his original settlement of Sarbreen, and was originally called "Ravensgate," until someone discovered that a romance already published by another company prevented "Ravensgate" or "Ravens Gate" being trademarked by TSR).

love to all,
THO

On February 20, 2009 THO said:- Hi, fellow scribes of the Keep. I bring you once more the words of Ed, this time in swift response to Afet bint Tuzani:

Your reasoning about the location of Irythkeep is correct; it is only a very short ride north along the Dagger Ride (better known as the Tethyamar Trail) from the North Ride, on the east side of the Trail (and increasingly overgrown). About a third of a mile ("just over one hill" from the North Ride), no more.

Centuries ago, it was built by a trading company headed by Garskran Iryth, a trader from Turmish who established a small hold here (a keep surrounded by a subsistence farm) from which he could trade with the dwarves of Tethyamar (cloth, leather, clothing and leather goods, drinkables, and medicines brought from the Vilhon, in return for smelted metal and forged tools). Here he intended to make his home, far from enemies back home and the taxes and laws of rulers he disagreed with.

Iryth's small band of warriors held the keep well enough, but took heavy losses trying to get caravans to and from the keep, until they were just too few to defend the keep in a harsh winter. In the end, Iryth and his folk perished to the last hungry, chilled, and terrified goodwife fighting orc raiders and hungry monsters, notably persistent packs of wolves.

The keep then passed through a succession of owners, mainly knights who set themselves up as local lordlings. Most of them perished in monster raids or at the hands of underlings who turned on them, with the keep and its attached stables standing empty until the next would-be lord came along. Few of them did much to the keep beyond replacing its roofs and doors when necessary, and it started to crumble.

It was little more than a ramshackle barracks-fortress guarding the southern approach to Daggerdale by the time Zhentarim started backing orc bands in an all-out attempt to conquer Daggerdale and scour out all inhabitants who wouldn't bow to them - - and one such band blasted

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the keep to get at a small band of dale defenders taking refuge in it.

So saith Ed. Who has just sent me another, longer offering of Realmslore, I see. Coming riiiiight up, scribes!

P.S. When Ed mentions your "reasoning," Afetbinttuzaní, he means what you posted in your thread querying Irythkeep's location, elsewhere at the Keep (I sent it along to him).

love to all,
THO

On February 20, 2009 THO said:- Some time ago, Gray Richardson asked in this thread (or rather, an earlier year's incarnation of it) for more orc lore. At the time, what I'd worked up was firmly NDA (as Rich Baker and Bob Salvatore were both at work on Obould, and might well take things in different directions than all the details of clothing, cooking, customs, and the like that I'd done), and I regretfully had to remain silent. Some of that lore is still NDA, but I can now say this much:

Orcs recount great victories and defeats and heroics through long chants uttered in unison over fires by elders, and learned by the rest of a tribe who are expected to echo all they know of such chants, until they learn them "entire," themselves. Here's a typical snatch of an orc chant, rendered into Common:

"Well remembered is Grishnakh, who first bore the Black Fang/Founded our tribe and fathered bold Halrak/Then came Great Halrak, four-armed, four-fisted, tall as small mountains, who made Black Fang feared, and fathered many/Regrarl Blackhide, who slew his sire Halrak, then killed many brothers to lead us, but fell to poison/Orglul, son of Regrarl and sly in battle, who turned to dark magic/Then skull-faced Lularleg, servant of shamans, who took us to new crags . . ."

Orc history is indeed hampered by its oral nature. Not only do different tribes contradict each other constantly in their chants ("We the Cloven Skulls beat the Black Fangs!" vs. "Then did we crush the Cloven Skulls, we Black Fangs, as we always do!"), but whenever many elders die - - in hard winters, in a horde sweeping down into human-held lands, or when a tribe is nigh-extirminated by another tribe or a greater foe such as a hungry or angry dragon - - the chants are either lost, or get so distorted because only a few are left to continue them that they become utterly unreliable as historical record (sometimes, it only takes the faulty memory of just ONE old, loud, stubborn orc to get an entire section of chant shifted out of place in the chronology, and if this happens several times over the "life" of an ancient tribe or clan, the mixing up "who came before who" can be very thorough). Moreover, deciding who was REALLY important or dominant can be hard for any later historian, because every tribe has its own self-centered viewpoint.

I'm dancing around something here, because I'm trying to avoid giving you the names of long-gone historical dominant orcs (thanks to the surviving NDA), so here are a few currently-active orc heroes (adventurers, war leaders, and "chiefs" [I've put that last word in quotations because actual orc ruling titles vary so much from tribe to tribe]):

Narrgh Longtooth, Glorundoun, Ahrkragh, and Ruglukh.

Details of these "hukrym" ("bold tusks") will follow in later posts.

So saith Ed. Who's hard at work on many things, scribes; please ignore his mutterings and pacings . . .

love to all,
THO

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On February 20, 2009 THO said:- Pre-Spellplague, Ed tells me. He's treading VERY carefully re. 4e lore right now, and I suspect [note: SUSPECT; Ed hasn't told me specifically why, and out of respect and my own understanding of NDAs, I haven't asked] it's because of two concerns:

1. Ed doesn't want Candlekeep to get any cease and desist notices because the site has 3e AND 4e material, and therefore gets deemed to be violating a Gaming Licence (if and when the company gets around to releasing the wording of a licence).

2. The style or approach of 4e is to avoid imparting lots of specific lore that can hamper DMs in crafting their own plotlines, and Ed is a professional who tries to work WITH the copyright holder of the Realms. This we have discussed, re. what's said at Candlekeep, and Ed has pointed out that providing detailed late-3.5e-era lore allows DMs running the Realms in 4e "time" to extrapolate from it (for example, inventing the "future" of House Haldoneir through the century timejump, building on what details Ed has given here) in many different ways. It provides a direction rather than specifics.

Ed hopes to have some face-to-face discussions with Wizards management soon (at GenCon, if not much sooner) about these matters, to make sure he knows where they stand on this, but he and they are both very busy, and hooking up via phone or e-mail has proven difficult. RPGA behind-the-scenes advice is a little different, but still "wary" territory.

The primary goal is to avoid having the doors of Candlekeep slammed shut, or Ed fall silent, or anyone else being hampered in posting about the Realms . . . so we can all go on enjoying this sandbox.

love to all,
THO

--

Oh, and Ed adds this:

Red Walker, I hope you like DARK LORD. I had a lot of fun with it.
Ashe Ravenheart, I don't THINK Ahrkragh and Ruglugh had been talked about in published lore before, though I've definitely mentioned Ruglugh at GenCon.
More Realmslore soon, everyone (probably when I get back from my library job tonight).

So saith Ed. Who is as busy as - - well, insert your own colourful metaphor now (e.g. "The village professional when a marching army stops by the inn.")

love to all,
THO

On February 20, 2009 THO said:- Hello, Red Walker. Ed just sent me an answer to you:

To answer your last question first: no, 'twasn't intentional, but (ahem), it happened, didn't it? :}
As for your other question: I'm afraid there's no published map yet. Here's a good way to picture it, though. Imagine a clock on the wall (one with hands, not digital) that has a square face, with 2 o'clock at the top right corner, and 4 at the bottom right. The top of the clock is north.
So Rod and Taeauna appear in Falconfar at about 1 o'clock. There's a mountain range running down the east side of the clock, which also forms the eastern boundary of Galath, and they travel

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down it to about three o'clock, which is where they turn towards the center of the clock and encounter a certain haystack (and barony).

Bowrock is down at about 7 o'clock, and the ruined royal palace is just south of the center of the clock.

The Rauklor (the seemingly endless forest) is west of the larger, fiercer mountain range that runs down the WEST wide of the clock. The Sea of Storms (with the northcoast Stormar ports) lies due south of the west half of the clock (i.e. from 6 o'clock westwards).

I hope that helps. I'll try to get Solaris to put a map on their website some day, okay?

So saith Ed.

love,
THO

On February 21, 2009 THO said:- Narrgh ("NAR-hh") is a grim adventuring warrior, a Conan-like loner who attracts followers constantly but whose deeds kill most of them off swiftly (he never turns on them; he just leads them boldly into greater and greater dangers). Several orc tribes claim that he came from their ranks, but all that's certain is that he was first active near Glister, and has generally ranged east into the Great Dale, Rashemen, and even down into warmer human-held lands, in a three-decade-long career of lurking, raiding, and working with various improbable allies (such as the human sorceress Nlamra of Alaghôn, who cast spells on Narrgh to let him pass for human, several times gave him refuge and nursed him back to health, shared her bed with him on yet other occasions, and benefited from some dangerous slay-rivals-and-seize-valuables missions he undertook on her behalf).

Narrgh is aging now, but is said to be still out there, lurking and pouncing on caravans and lordlings (some say he's in Chessenta, some put him in the Vilhon, and some swear he's in the Border Kingdoms). Orcs who "speak with the gods" swear Narrgh is "doomed" to carry out one last great exploit, some great and violent achievement in which he'll die, yet win victory. ("Longtooth" refers to his longevity, but it's a nickname Narrgh himself proudly uses, and referred originally not to age, but to his improbable survival as his adventuring career grew longer and longer.) Narrgh has a long, flat head and small tusks, is taller than most orcs but very broad-shouldered, and the skin of his head and shoulders (but not the rest of him) is slate-gray. He has a habit of snapping his head around to cast quick glances over his shoulders, often and suddenly.

So saith Ed. Who uncovered his orc lore with some glee.

love to all,
THO

On February 22, 2009 THO said:- Aha. This is one * I * can answer, by accessing Ed-lore given to me directly as a player in the home Realms campaign.

Menelvagor, hearken to these notes from Ed:

Mystra WAS the Weave (a way of accessing the vast network of Toril's natural forces such as gravity, the force of tides and flowing water, winds, convection currents, magnetic forces, sunlight, heat, cold, and so on, and harnessing these forces to work specific effects, or "magic").

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When Mystra says "All debts must be paid," she is really saying: "There is a cost for everything," or "There Ain't No Such Thing As a Free Lunch." She SEES this, constantly (all actions provoke reactions, or have effects; you cannot make the action and avoid the effects, whether you admit this or even know about the effects, or not), and therefore warns her faithful (from servitors and Chosen to the youngest lay worshipper) to live accordingly. In other words, their code to live by includes not acting unless they are prepared to deal with the consequences.

There. So saith Ed. I'll still send your query along to him to see if he has anything to add, of course.

love,
THO

On February 22, 2009 THO said:- The Realms has many different equivalent terms, varying by region and race, for "mothering" (including caring for ailing kin), but specifically to describe someone who nurses non-kin, as a good act but not specifically as holy duty (i.e. for non-clergy rendering care to the sick or injured), the most popular term, in Common, is "those who warm the blood" or "bloodwarmers." (This term is used even if the actual care given has nothing to do with actual bleeding, or necessarily keeping someone warm or sheltered.)

A less popular but closer Realms equivalent to "Florence Nightingale" (as in, echoing the name of a specific real being who acted as a nurse, and was revered for doing so) is "Mondaera the Gentle," and the Faerûnian phrase would be he or she is "a proper Mondaera" with the collective term being "dedicated gentlers." Mondaera the Gentle is a long-ago wandering woman of the Tethyr and Amnian coastal areas, who never married or had children, but traveled the coastal roads tending all she met who needed it. She accepted payment if it was offered, but never demanded it, and was a kindly but very homely woman of great girth, strength, and "blacksmith's build."

So saith Ed. Tirelessly painting in details of the Realms for us all. Myself, I think he's more than a little like Mondaera. (Happy sigh.)

love to all,
THO

--

Hello again, all.

Menelvagor, Ed has (as I suspected he would) added something to the passages I quoted:

THO has, of course, done just fine by way of an answer. I'd just like to amplify that reply with this postscript:

The RESULT of Mystra's "teaching" that debts must be paid is that she expects her Chosen to keep their word, honour their promises, and be true to their bargains - - or the price of NOT doing so will haunt them . . . and all of Toril.

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So saith Ed. Who will return with more Realmslore this evening (for us) and early tomorrow (Candlekeep time), he promises.
love to all,
THO

On February 23, 2009 THO said:- Thanks, Red Walker. Your post brought a smile to my face, and to Ed's, too, when I passed it along to him. He wants you to know that Garfist and Iskarra continue their, er, "careers" in both ARCH WIZARD and FALCONFAR (and, yes, Ed originally called the second book "Archwizard," but the editor at Solaris entered it into the catalogue as "Arch Wizard," probably to match "Dark Lord," so "Arch Wizard" it now is).

createvmind, Ed says begging and pleading isn't going too far - - but your average demon wouldn't hesitate for an instant if they got the chance to lash out at someone who was fooled by their begging and pleading enough to let their guard down.

Oh, and a dollop of new Realmslore from Ed, coming soon . . .
love,
THO

On February 23, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, scribes. Herewith, details of Ed's second hukrym, straight from the creator of the Realms himself:

Glorundoun is that rarest of things; a shrewd schemer, a truly foresighted orc who plans years ahead, spreading rumors and founding alliances and sending the orcs he commands (a rogue band of outcasts and misfits from many tribes, including "misshapen" orcs visibly different from the norm [such as having three left arms but only one right arm, or long, prehensile tails], plus a few humans, half-orcs, and others - - who at his firm and sometimes violent insistence are treated as "full orcs" by the rest) on missions to accomplish specific tasks that will shape the opinions, deeds, and settlement locations of others.

Active in the Vast, Impiltur, and the Moonsea North, and moving about often, Glorundoun has been behind much of the "orc dangers" that imperil human mining and travel away from the Inner Sea shores; he wants to keep humans from settling, taming, and then spreading over all of the region (so as to prevent all "monsters" [such as himself] ever being crowded right out of non-frozen areas where they can forage).

Glorundoun has no interest in ruling any orc tribe or disputing with tribes, but expects other orcs to cooperate with him once they know what he's busy doing; if they don't, he customarily ignores chieftans and warband leaders and speaks directly to the orcs being led by them. If any orc defies him or hampers his schemes, he won't hesitate to destroy them - - but won't engage in open confrontation he'll likely lose, calmly withdrawing to strike at them later.

Glorundoun enjoys eating, drinking, and sex (with partners of all races), but will never let pursuit of such enjoyments lull him into being exposed to the attacks of foes, or distracted from what's afoot right now.

Glorundoun uses the non-orc members of his band in deceptions, so as to deal with humans and others without them (initially, at least) realizing they're "treating with orcs," and seizes and caches items such as weapons and tools, coins and gems, and other useful goods whenever he can, for use later. Over years of successful exploits, he's established dozens of hidden caches that each hold enough wealth to purchase buildings in many human-dominated cities outright, as well as

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scores of smaller caches (if buying a building, ship, or caravan will help a scheme succeed, he'll boldly do so).

Glorundoun himself is gigantic, standing 14 feet tall at his shoulders (which are fully six feet across), and having a flattened, "toad-like" hairless head twice as large as most orcs. His left front tusk is broken off and yellowed with decay, and several wide white scars wander across his features.

So saith Ed, creator of literally scores of interesting and campaign-useful NPCs down the years . . . not to mention a world or three for them to frolic in.

love to all,
THO

--

createvmind, I've checked with Ed, and no, he didn't mean to imply that a demon is incapable of sincerity, especially when pleading for its life - - he meant it will always be alert for some way out, or of turning the tables, or of escape, or of treachery or twisting the terms of an agreement. It could be VERY sincere, and even keep its word, if those it is pleading with are well-prepared and careful.

Menelvagor, Ed tells me that the dying elf woman in question is, to borrow your words, "someone else entirely." Unfortunately, she's also NDA. So we have a battlefield (in the past, Ed hints at least a few centuries, and we have a dying elf female known to EI and dear to him, and yes, she certainly seems to be a Chosen . . .

Ed wishes very much he could say more.

love to all,
THO

On February 24, 2009 THO said:- In the Thunderstone area, deer, mountain goats, moose, hares, and rabbits are hunted for food, their pelts, and to protect crops, and foxes and worse beasts are hunted primarily to protect livestock and people (and secondarily for pelts and/or for food), but such hunts are usually conducted by crossbow, or spears hurled from horseback, or bows (crossbows and longbows) loosed from the saddle. Young lads and lasses sometimes hunt with slings (weasels, foxes, birds, rabbits, and small "wurren" [= varmints]), and visiting nobles hunt with falcons. If a wolf pack, coyote pack, wild dog pack, bears, owlbears, perytons, or other "marauding" animals are seen, neighbours may well gather in large bands to ride and hunt together, but there's no local equivalent to a real-world English foxhunt with rules, a pack of hounds, uniforms, and the like (though warhorns ARE used to signal, during hunts and fugitive chases).

The reasons for this are damage to crops and stock from running packs of dogs, were-creatures infecting farmers' dogs in the past, and dogs running off (to live and breed) with wild dogs or coyotes (English hunting dogs are TRAINED, and there's nothing approximating that training in the Thunderstone region [[full disclosure: in my youth, thanks to being a close personal friend of a young member of a prominent Canadian "horsey" family, I rode in "drag hunts" with the Aurora Hunt Club on two occasions; no real foxes, ever, just chasing across country, on a vast horse farm, on magnificent steeds, risking broken necks]]).

The Cormyrean laws regarding hunting are as follows:

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1. There's no right of way over any tilled or planted field, EVER, unless a state of war has been declared (and if the Crown forces win, eventual compensation for any trampled or foraged crops or stock is expected).

2. The local lord declares and sets rules for any "varmint hunt" ("monster scouring," including non-Purple-Dragon reactions to raiding bands of orcs or the like) or "run hunt" (rare events corresponding to a "run of elk" or other movement of many wild beasts through the Thunderstone farmlands and ranches; this I often correctly taken to mean some sort of monster - - that will soon have to be dealt with - - has arrived in the Hullack and is causing other beasts to flee), including horn-calls, boundaries and when a hunt will end.

By not declaring hunts, the local lord has the right to set "seasons." Those who disobey (except local Purple Dragons obeying their commander, who can ignore the local lord's dictates unless bound by identical orders given from above in the military hierarchy, which in practice usually means relayed by a War Wizard) are forbidden to participate in future hunts until they seek permission to do so and are granted it (usually in return for specific promises and/or payment of a fine). This means they cannot take up weapons and be "out and about" during a hunt; they must be working off their own lands, or on their own lands.

3. ANYONE can hunt at any time on their own lands (usually to protect their crops), unless specifically forbidden to do so, or specifically enjoined not to hunt a particular creature or species (such prohibitions, made by the local lord, are exceedingly rare). Intelligent creatures, such as human fugitives or orcs, cannot be hunted (that is, "sought out") and slain except by permission of local authorities such as the local lord or herald, or Purple Dragons, except when chase is being given to recover family members, livestock, or "valuable goods" taken by such quarry. However, such creatures can ALWAYS be fought to protect self, family, kin, or home (that is, in and around one's own house, stables, barns, wells, and outbuildings).

In other words, hunting for sport is largely unknown in the Thunderstone lands, except in the Hullack and "up in the mountains" (which is where those seeking sport hunting go). So packs of hounds and riders racing across the open country aren't a local feature. Fishing, by the way, is open to all; unlike real-world English practice, there are no "fishing rights" bought and sold that restrict who can try to get fish out of any watercourse (and there also aren't any catch limits, regulations about HOW one gets fish, and so on; if locals prefer spearing fish to hook and line, or drag-nets or buckets to either, that's fine; the law is silent on such matters).

So saith Ed. Doing his usual thorough job on lore-queries about the Realms. More to come in the fullness of time, Damian, but I think he's turning back to describing another orc of note, next. Oh, and Aysen? LOVE that Post-Its gown. You don't think lick-n-stick would be better? (Bats eyelashes.) Or will it make me look fat?

love to all,
THO

On February 25, 2009 THO said:- Just who first coined the term 'holynose' is unknown, though it's thought to be someone in the nobility of Cormyr (of a well-established, influential family, possibly the Bleths or the Dauntinghorns). It was meant as an insult, along the lines of "Don't get above yourself, priest; know your place. We're ALL servants of the gods, so don't be looking down your holy nose at ME."

(A "highnose" in Cormyr, and increasingly anywhere along a trade route in Faerûn where common in spoken, is any arrogant person. It appears in speech in the Knights trilogy, too.)

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In the summer of 1334 DR, "holynose" was a fad word, on everyone's lips amongst the nobility. By the winter that followed, it was common at Court, and by spring of 1335 had spread to nigh everyone in Cormyr (falling out of fashion amongst the nobility, of course, though individual nobles, during moments of irritation, have uttered it from that day to this). By the end of the 1330s, amongst the common folk of Cormyr, the term had softened from a pejorative to an almost affectionate slang phrase for "priest." It still carried the gentle warning of "Don't get high and mighty with me," and it was still considered rude to address any high-ranking clergy with it, but travelling priests were used to hearing it and no longer took offense - - unless they were seeking a pretext to take offense. It has continued to spread across the Realms, along trade routes, and has become a widespread part of Common Tongue vocabulary, though not as popular as "highnose."

So saith Ed. First Linguist of the Realms (I still hope to see his as-yet-unpublished Gnome Talk article, someday. And there's more elven language in his lore-books than we've yet seen, Dagnirion.).

Red Walker, let me think about that. Pennae's passing saddened me at the time, though it was well handled and got an NPC out of the way so the PC Knights could "grow," in our home play. I'm sure Delg's death saddened Ed. I'll get back to you on this . . .

love to all,
THO

--

A quick postscript here, for Ed fans:

For those who haven't heard yet, there's a short Ed piece in the TALES OF ZOBECK hardcover sourcebook from Open Design (Wolfgang Baur, of KOBOLD QUARTERLY fame and onetime DRAGON editor, too), and there's an Ed "4e Realms" article on the Returned Aber city of Tarmalune in the latest DRAGON, on DDI (the WotC website).

Oh, and ARCH WIZARD, his second Falconfar novel, is out in hardcover. Stay tuned, as they say, for more . . .

love to all,
THO

On February 25, 2009 THO said:- Hi, all. I've sent a lot of your interesting posts and queries on to Ed, but whilst we're waiting for his replies, I thought I'd start on some housekeeping. Please note, this post and the others that follow aren't meant as replacements for Ed's forthcoming answers, okay?

First, Menelvagor asked: "So why did Mystra allow Elminster to have daughters at all, and why Narnra specifically? I apologize beforehand if this has already been asked.

Another question: Regarding Elminster's standing in the Harpers. In the raid, the Harpers appear to be willing to attack Elminster by order of Caladnei. Isn't Elminster the founder and head of the Harpers? How could they follow Caladnei in direct opposition to Elminster? If it was because they are 'loyal Cormytes', isn't that an interest conflict? And if so, why does it seem that their standing as Harpers is emphasized?"

Menelvagor, I suspect Ed is going to have dodge VERY carefully around more than a few NDAs when trying to answer you about these. I CAN tell you that your first question was discussed by we Knights, in character and during Realmsplay sessions (with, of course, Ed as DM), and the

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general conclusion, based in part from hints made by Storm and The Simbul, is because Mystra was preparing the NEXT generation of Chosen or other sorts of her servants, and Elminster has "hardy" genes (doesn't get sick often, has high endurance, is stubborn as stone when it comes to patiently achieving goals, etc.). The fact that most of these offspring were reared ignorant of their heritage and with no direct involvement by Elminster means that Mystra was trying to protect them against the agents of divine foes by "ignoring" them, and primarily just trying to breed an ever-growing stock of "suitable to be Chosen" descendants. (It's been said in several places in published Realmslore how few mortals can handle being a Chosen.)

As for all of your other questions, regarding the Harpers: Those Who Harp are NOT a strictly hierarchical organization. Elminster is NOT "Commander-In-Chief. To put it in real-world terms, the Harpers are a little like Israeli politicians, dickering to form coalition governments and jostling for who'll be on top; they may share the same general aims and interests, but may well have very different views as to how to proceed, and what specifically must be done. End of real-world analogy, back to the Realms: many of the local Cormyrean Harpers consider themselves THE experts (within the organization) on local, Cormyrean matters. Elminster is some semi-mythical guy who founded the Harpers, several times, in the remote past. THIS Elminster may be a new fellow using the name of the old one to gain influence, or the old one driven mad by living for over a thousand years, or simply out of touch with Cormyr in his rush to pursue world-spanning aims. I suspect their standing as Harpers is emphasized to remind the reader they are not part of Cormyr's official hierarchy, and may do things very differently than the Crown and its forces, or even work against the Crown and its forces.

love,
THO

--

Hi again.

Aysen, a "gorcrow" is a large, rapacious, aggressive but slow and lazy raptor AND carrion bird, a cross between a large and noisy black crow (hence the name) and a buzzard/turkey vulture. It can hunt as viciously as a shrike when desperately hungry, but is so large, and such a lousy flyer, that a lot of prey can easily avoid it, take refuge in places it can't reach, or (in the case of small children on the ground) easily swat it out of the air, even bare-handed, and jump on it to break its wings (most gorcrows won't even fly within reach of a farm labourer with spade or fork, because they know they'll be hurt or killed with ease). They're not geniuses, but they're not stupid. They ARE impatient, and won't patiently wait for weak prey to collapse or sleep - - they'll fly away to seek something else.

This all comes from Ed's notes; he will, of course, address your other query as soon as he can get to it.

love,
THO

On February 25, 2009 THO said:- And hello yet again.

This last one (for now) is to The Sage, re. TALES OF ZOBECK. It's out now (copyright date 2008), is a handsome "shiny cover" hardback that's actually double-sided (one front cover and an interior 41 pages [plus "front matter" pages] is a ZOBECK GAZETTEER written by Wolfgang Baur, and the other front cover - - flip the book over and upside down - - is the TALES FROM ZOBECK section, written by divers hands, of 105 pages-plus-front-matter; Ed's bit is in this larger section, is a tiny local dockside neighborhood to use in other adventures, and is 9 pages long). The publisher is Open Design, it's OGL, and no ISBN is to be found anywhere on the danged thing. Wolf, Wolf, it's a real book; give it an ISBN so folks can order it!

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Black and white interior art (not much) and maps, with lots of fun content (new monsters, new spells, lots of adventures). For those not familiar with Zobeck, Wolf created a fantasy city on a river, dominated by kobold miners and clockwork innovations. It looks like a lot of fun.

love,
THO

--

Whoops, one update/correction: gorcrows are USUALLY black. They can vary quite a bit, from purple-blue to (immature young) mottled white/beige/brown "blend in with dead woods and leaves" camouflage. Thanks to hungry gorcrow eating gorcrow young.

love,
THO

On February 25, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. A few more swift comments from me whilst we all await ed's next sending of Realmslore.

Menelvagor, re. this: "What year does Silverfall happen in? Its obviously after 1357, as Laeral is with Khelben, and definitely before 1374, as Khelben passes on then.

Also, is the touch of Shar Mystra frees Halaster from in Elminster In Hell happen in Silverfall? That was my impression, at least."

Yes to your second question, and Ed dated Silverfall specifically, but I'm afraid I can't get to my copies or lore-notes at the moment, to check. Expect an answer tomorrow (I hope).

And of course you're very welcome. Yes, picked that Israeli analogy just for you.

Markustay, you're quite right on both matters: the Orcgate rising Ed refers to is much later than the Orcgate Wars, and the dire template on a crow should indeed give a pretty close approximation of a gorcrow.

Red Walker, Ed is a marvellous actor; you just have to "tune out" the beard and obvious male build when he's doing female characters. Also, both the players of killed off or unconscious PCs get to "step in" to play NPCs during a session, and "guests" sitting in on a session, often to learn what D&D is, got to play NPCs for short periods, too. Not to embark on your list of favourite NPCs, but I should mention at least one (aside from Dove as a party member, of course): Jhaele Silvermane, proprietress of The Old Skull Inn.

And yes, Ed can be wonderfully sneaky. Ask me someday about the . . . well, no, perhaps you'd better not. Candlekeep may want to cling to a "somewhat family friendly" designation.

love to all,
THO

On February 26, 2009 THO said:- As for the fate of Randulaith (or for that matter Elaith, and including their possible careers as Lords of Waterdeep), I'm afraid firm NDAs apply. However, your wording ("do you imagine") gives me more than ample wiggle room to answer this query as a personal opinion. So there we go . . . :}

Yes, given the opportunity to assume a Lordship, Randulaith would immediately be more loyal to the City than to his eye tyrant employer (but of course would try to conceal this from the Eye as long as possible, and would try to continue working with the Eye, "stickhandling" [to use an apt hockey term] as deftly as he could to protect the city's interests and not betray the Eye.

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The Hidden Lords don't have any official way of screening new candidates to join their ranks, but unofficially Khelben and Laeral mindscry everyone, FAR more subtly than the War Wizards go about it (Laeral in particular takes pride in the person being examined having no inkling that she's done any probing). Nor does this thought reading end when someone is accepted as a Lord; Khelben was suspicious enough to eavesdrop on the Lords fairly often - - though he and Laeral had several arguments about this; she didn't mind him prying and knowing, but she wanted him to keep back and "Let the Lords be lords and do their own ruling, fall into their own corruption, and make their own mistakes. You can't be 'fixing' everyone's deeds and making up their minds for them in everything, Blackstaff mine!"

Most of the Lords have no idea that Khelben and Laeral do this (rumors in plenty abound in the city all the time about the Lords being the puppets of Khelben or this noble lord or that crime boss, but even the Lords have no hard evidence of their thoughts being monitored often). A few suspect it darkly (and firmly), and Piergeiron "knows" he can call on Khelben to probe someone he himself is very unsure of - - but he believes Khelben does this only reluctantly (because Laeral has badgered Khelben into acting reluctant), when the Open Lord insists on it.

Piergeiron has his own trusted mages he more often uses to pry into the affairs of Lords (though he does so with true reluctance, and as rarely as possible), and certain secret agreements with the Watchful Order (e.g. "If a Lord is murdered, and I confirm to you that the victim was a Lord, you will covertly use spells to spy on, and try to read the thoughts of, certain persons I will then name to you, and report all results back to me in confidence, or in the event of my death will report to the Lord or Lady Mage of Waterdeep") to cast spells in the event of certain occurrences.

And, yes, if the Lords believe a person truly has the best interests of the City at heart, they would indeed offer a Lordship to someone they knew was evil. Of course, that person would be constantly spied upon, magically and otherwise, by the means I've already described and by others (hired guilds and private adventurers who would not be told the person was a Lord, but who would be asked to look for evidence of specific meetings, activities, etc.), from the moment they "took the mask." Randulaith would of course be one such, if chosen, and Elaith would be another.

Now, as to whether or not the Lords would ever agree to Elaith: the Lords as of 1359 DR would definitely reject him (as would the Lords for at least three decades prior to that). As for after 1359, the decision of the Lords would depend on their changing roster (behind the masks) and upon the prevailing conditions at the time his becoming a Lord was suggested. It would also depend on WHO suggested he become a Lord (if Elaith suggested it, the suggestion would come with much suspicion; if Khelben suggested it, the suggestion would be hard to refuse but would be met with some suspicion; if Laeral or Piergeiron suggested it, the suggestion would likely be adopted but amid some misgivings and much astonishment . . . and so on).

Being evil doesn't disqualify someone from becoming a Lord of Waterdeep, but it certainly makes that someone a closely-watched Lord, if they do take the mask. And Lords who turn evil have been swiftly and quietly murdered many a time before . . .

So saith Ed. Who certainly knows how to end on a sinister, antennae-raising note.
love to all,
THO

On February 26, 2009 THO said:- Neither. That was the Company of the Urdragon, one of Ed's 13-episode library campaigns. We Knights heard about the aftermath during play, however, on one of our jaunts through Waterdeep (it's amazing how many gates [in 3e, portals] link the City of

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Splendors with various spots in Cormyr and the Dales).
love,
THO

On February 26, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. To answer Broken Helm . . . not counting gods and groups (monster species, families, power groups, etc.) that get specific entries in that Reader's Guide, I notice these Ed creations:

Alustriel
Dendybar the Mottled
Dove Falconhand
King Harbromm
Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun
Malchor Harpell

And to Red Walker: no, Ed has never met the artist, and deals only with the editor of the books, Christian Dunn (who asks for suggested cover scenes, and then discusses the "draft" or prototype cover art with Ed; I believe the Dark Lord cover first had the hero hooded and a dagger in his hand, rather than the hood pushed back and a magical glow in the hand). So, yes, Ed does have input.

Ed LOVES the covers, mind you. He wishes everyone could really see the Dark Lord cover close up, without the overlying words: among the "bottom front edge" of the monster-head Rod and Taeauna are together on, where it's sprawled along the crumbling wall, are some little hidden jokes like hand calculators and the like (the art on the covers is too small, cropped off too high, too dark, and with lettering laid over top, for you to properly see all that's going on even on the hardcover, but Ed was e-sent a jpeg of the prototype art [which of course for copyright reasons he can't share with anyone] that delighted him with these small details.

(I'd check out on the Net to see if the artist has posted the original anywhere on a website, and hope you can scale up what's posted enough to see some of it.)

For fun, Red Walker, see how many small figures you can see, or see parts of, at the lower left of the ARCH WIZARD cover art. As far as I can I recall what Ed told me, there are four, five, or six in the original, but the scene has been cropped to fit the cover.

This is not a slam at Solaris, by the way; in order to make sure the art "bleeds" out beyond the visible cover, a scene is typically painted "a little too big," and then the publisher scales it up to make the critical elements (in this case, Rod facing a greatfangs) as large as possible and in the best spots on the cover for composition (balance), then adds the lettering that has to be there (title, author, any series attribution and cover blurb "sell copy").

Ed can't wait to see the art for the third cover. Me, I'm really enjoying this trilogy, and can't wait for the last book (Sequels beyond the three tomes? Who knows? Sales will determine).

love to all,
THO

--

Yes, they are indeed. Now, I'll grant you that Bob Salvatore has brought them to life in published Realmslore, from brief Ed descriptions (I recall, back in the days when Ed was reading the original manuscript of THE CRYSTAL SHARD to review and approve it, Ed asked Bob to use Dendybar rather than Grimwald, who was already a standing joke among we Knights [e.g. "Grimwald did it!" or a Knight picks up a rusty, jagged-blade dagger and announces, "Grimwald's toothbrush!" or we come across copious vomit outside a tavern door and another Knight comments, "Another Grimwald art masterpiece, I see!"] and so on; Ed wanted to keep Grimwald

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for our collective immature enjoyment (and his own future sly plans as DM - - boy, we did we later get a surprise from Grimwald!).

But then, from the extensive (FR5 THE SAVAGE FRONTIER, and the three linked Daggerdale modules) to just small lore advice and aid, Ed is behind, or involved in, a LOT of Realms fiction and game lore that bears the names of other writers. He has been known to bury writers and designers who ask for the aid in large files of "gotta know this" Realmslore. Just another of the reasons he's so beloved, by so many.

love,
THO

On February 27, 2009 THO said:- With THO's (obtained) permission, allow me to briefly tell Candlekeep about the Adventure of the Nude Maiden.

Years and years ago, several Canadians (including yours truly and THO, but none of the other regular Realms players; instead, there were three other guys along who were fellow fantasy and sf fans) stayed at a hotel to attend an sf convention in the U.S. Midwest. Though she was completely unconcerned about sharing a room with several guys, myself included, this was years back, and the hotel (once they discovered she wasn't married to any of us) would not hear of it. She had to have her own room, and all four guys had to squeeze into another - - which the hotel pointedly located on another floor, at the far end of the hotel from hers. Being Canadians unused to having strangers decide our morals for us, and the rooms having connecting phones, we decided to get together for an evening of games, snacks, and chat. At the end of it (at about three in the morning), THO strolled back to her room stark naked, silent and jaunty.

Well, I exaggerate. She was in fact wearing shoes, her watch, and a smile, and carrying a paperback book and the nightgown she'd worn down to the room, over her arm.

She got spotted, of course, and darned if the hotel didn't call the police.

And direct them to OUR room rather than hers, because of course the guys MUST be responsible because a "young and therefore vulnerable, naive, weak-minded woman" (in their words and their way of thinking, though we were all at the time in our twenties) must be "in the charge of" one of us.

We told the police, who had arrived with the notion in their heads that she HAD to be a prostitute, that her behaviour was the result of being hypnotized by Grimwald the Great, a notoriously lecherous stage magician and longtime enemy of ours whom we'd encountered in a local restaurant earlier in the evening, and who had entered the hotel and confronted her outside our room - - and they must on no account awaken her because permanent mental damage could result.

They bought the story, and took pages and pages of notes (in those days, policemen carried around notepads and wrote, wrote, wrote every last thing they did on shift), asking us all sorts of questions and pressing us to promise them that if we ever saw this Grimwald again, we would promptly report his whereabouts and doings to them.

We gave our promises, and accepted a mailing address and a police officer's name and telephone number. They never did go to her room.

I'm afraid that once we were safely back across the border, THO mailed the poor (?) guy a photo of herself, lying on a table unclad except for some "runes" drawn all over in lipstick, surrounded by lit candles, with a dagger point-down held in her mouth and another driven into the table somewhere, ahem, lower, staring wide-eyed up at the ceiling.

On the back of it she wrote, in angular masculine printing, "Regards From Grimwald The Great."

I suppose it's still pinned up on a police office corkboard somewhere.

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So saith Ed. Who in this case has toned down a tale that in some ways was rather steamier.
Ah, such a gallant, defending the reputation of a hooded lady . . .

Or not.
love to all,
THO

--

Ahem. Thanks, all.

I should mention that my then-boyfriend was one of the four guys (we'd been planning to either book a suite and all share it, or two adjoining rooms and boyfriend and self bunk down in one, with the three remaining guys in 'tother; no, Ed was not my then-boyfriend). The paperback, as I recall, was a collection of Kipling short stories, and the nightgown was a modest, opaque ankle-length affair with a gathered waist that tried to look something like an Edwardian dress (sleeves ending at mid-bicep, overlap front panels for modesty with row of toggle fastenings, inner slip stitched in, ashes-of-roses hue (that's a becoming shade of something like pink, fellas) that didn't do much for me).

The amusing bit was how the cops were barely interested in a description of Grimwald, but sure wanted an in-depth description of me. I suppose they just wanted to be prepared, in case they encountered several nude females strolling around their city that night, to be able to make a positive ID.

The steamier version, huh? Heheheheh . . .

love,
THO

On February 27, 2009 THO said:- Hi, Jorkens. Ed drew on the World of Tiers series for the "mechanics" of gate operations, not for inspiration. Before that PJF series was published, Ed had already read the William Morris THE WOOD BETWEEN THE WORLDS classic (as mentioned in that Dragon article, I believe) as well as Narnia and many other fantasy classics that use the "stepping from our world into another, and back again" conceit, such as John Masefield's THE MIDNIGHT FOLK. So these far older classics were his inspiration . . . and a later series that was itself in part inspired by Farmer, Zelazny's Amber series (we have Roger's own words "proving" this inspiration, in the old Dick Geis THE ALIEN CRITIC fanzine), "inspired" Ed more in fleshing things out, later. Many modern fantasy authors, from Moorcock to H. Beam Piper, have used various versions of what might be called "the Multiverse" (and has been, by some) as part of their fantasy tales - - and Ed's library holds examples of most of them.

This is a topic that Ed and I (and Ed and lots of others, including many TSR designers) have talked over many a time.

love,
THO

On February 28, 2009 THO said:- Hi, krownhunter. As Daviot mentioned, the best answer to your question about Evermeet's fate is to be found in the 4e Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide. I can say that the "shift" during the Spellplague was interesting, to say the least, because the stresses on the elven magic warding the island created many chaotic, short-lived portals and other effects that hurled persons and magic to many places (including Toril's sister world, Abeir; elsewhere on Toril, primarily in Faerûn; and other planes entirely). Most of these people and things arrived unscathed in their new locations, but of course were in no way "safe" from bad things happening

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to them once they arrived there.

Ashe Ravenheart ably summarized the fates of the blades for you, and sfdragon was quite right to speculate that the Artblade is "likely under a huge NDA." I wish I could say more, but right now, I really can't. Sorry!

So saith Ed. Creator of Evermeet, Faerûn, and the concept of elven high magic.
Who is undoubtedly hard at work writing, as I post this.
love to all,
THO

On February 28, 2009 THO said:- Purrr . . . why, APL, what a delightfully improper suggestion . . . Let's discuss putting things into handy holes. And ending the molestation of pigeons, in that regard. Ahem.

And yes, I can confirm that Ed is familiar with the writings of M.R. James. By the way, DAUGHTER OF REGALS by Donaldson is one of his fantasy favourites. He loved Chalker's works, too, though he said talking to Jack was like "talking to a belching smokestack; I've never seen a man make a succession of lone cigarettes produce so much smoke!" and thought the Well World tales worked best when we were concentrating on Nathan Brazil or the lives of individuals down in the various hexes or worlds, and started to get away from Jack when we were doing the "wars raging across multiple hexes." He LOVED the way Jack was able to make weird aliens (the Diviner and the Rell, for instance) seem vividly real. (Not since James Schmitz has someone done that quite so well for multiple alien species, Ed once said.)

However, I firmly agree with APL - - if we continue down this road, we can fill pages and pages of this thread, drifting farther away from the Realms as we go. I hope by now all scribes are familiar with the fact that Ed has 80,000-plus books at home, a good chunk of them one of the best READING (not collecting) fantastic English-language fiction private libraries in Canada, that he's familiar with a lot of writers and their works (from the famous unfinished story fragment he wrote with Roger Zelazny to the world he designed with Lynn Abbey to his early publishing of Rob Sawyer in a university literary magazine, and so on and on), and that if you can think of an "older" fantasy or sf writer, Ed has probably read them and has some of their books at home. Not to mention most of the newer ones; being a judge of the World Fantasy Awards or (as he's doing right now) judging the Sunbursts means you get box after box of current books arriving at your door - - literally HUNDREDS of books. And of course anyone who has seen Ed shopping at cons, as APL has, knows that Ed can't resist picking up more books whenever something catches his eye. He's currently rereading old John Dickson Carr locked-room murder mysteries for fun, as well as reviewing some new chick lit titles for his local library (and recommends folks check out the new Christopher Moore, FOOL, which is King Lear told from the viewpoint of, yes, the Fool/jester).

love to all,
THO

--

Hi, Jorkens. I seem to remember an Ed fantasy short story from the 1970s that used dream-traveling (and I THINK he's using it in an instance at the beginning of his third Falconfar novel, FALCONFAR, but don't quote me on that), but I'll have to pass that query on to him for a proper reply.

I know he wrote at least one Kadath pastiche (HPL's Dreamlands: "For I have passed the Gates of Deeper Slumber" and so forth) back in the 1960s, just for fun, but I think he may have written

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more substantial fantasies in the 70s and 80s that employed dream travel.
We'll see, okay?
love,
THO

On February 28, 2009 THO said:- Sure, I'd love to. :}
Here are some more "good" trusted and well-known businesses in Neverwinter:

Jathran's Platter (butcher, three locations, sells cut, hung, smoked, and dressed meat, game, and fish; main downtown location also sells marinated meats, pickled spice fish in oilcloth carrybags)

Korvraun's Armour (armour, shields, barding, and repairs to same, plus general "repairs" blacksmithing; also buys and sells used armor, oils and treats armour against rust, sells handmade nails)

The Nightwynd Cloak (shop that sells cloaks, masks, gowns, scents, baldric-pouches [the equivalent of "dress-up purses"] and "adornments" [cheap "feathers-and-buckles" jewelry that uses enameled metals, cut glass false gems, and painted, dyed, and sculpted wire and cloth rather than expensive components; the wares are all for women and men desiring to dress as women, and the shop also brews cups of spiced teas for customers, and has become something of a gathering-and-gossip place.

Pondur's (a general emporium of cheap used goods of literally sorts, from old wagon wheels to used beds to boxes of broken tools and ship "overcargoes" ["too much" of anything brought into port, which usually means salt-stained or bilge-soiled but otherwise perfectly good bolts of woven cloth]. Another place where folk meet each other often, as everyone drops by to scour the rooms full of junk, er, stuff. Adventurers love it for the cheap materials they can use for disguises, traps, temporary outdoor sleeping shelters, etc.)

The Loraun Decanter (a shop that sells wines, liqueurs, flavored waters for bathing or sipping or cooking [add to sauces], ointments, oils, philtres [love potions that may or may not work, primarily herbal rather than magical], and elixirs (for which various wild claims are made but seldom believed; they are bought out of hope rather than certainty)

So saith Ed. Who is obviously jumping around among the questions to be answered piles again.
Lovely loremaster that he is.
love to all,
THO

--

Great questions, Menelvagor. Yes, some have already been answered here at the Keep, in earlier years (the extent of casualties, for example). As for allies, Cormyr didn't have any nearby who were sufficiently powerful to aid her, who got wind of things in time [the Dales can muster few enough swords to defend just themselves, and many of them were "cut off" from Cormyr by the rampaging goblins]. Yet Ed can answer all of these definitively . . . though I must warn you that these "larger scope, larger sweep" queries take longer to get replied to than the narrow-focus, more specific ones like the Neverwinter one answered just above (that is, at the bottom of the preceding page).
love,
THO

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On March 1, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, fellow scribes.

Yes, Markustay, I was serious, though please bear in mind that Ed's 80,000-plus library includes all manner of reference and non-fiction titles, a fair number of mysteries, and lots of mainstream fiction and literary classics, not just fantasy and sf. (And no, youngling scribes, not much more than perhaps 6 percent of it or so is available online, or probably ever will be, Gutenberg Project, Google, and Amazon notwithstanding.)

As for adopting you, why I declarah, every second male scribe done say that, sooner or later! Why ever could that be, I wondah?

Ahem.

Red Walker, don't miss DARK VENGEANCE, the sequel to Dark Warrior Rising.

It sounds like you're really enjoying these Ed-romps outside the Realms; I know I did. Not great literature, just darned good entertaining reads that I can enjoy again and again. As Pierce Watters and his co-reviewer said in a recent REALMS OF FANTASY review of DWR (I'm paraphrasing here rather than quoting): a lot of books promise pulse-pounding action that never flags, but this one really delivers on that promise.

And Ed tells me he's really enjoying writing FALCONFAR, the third adventure of Rod Everlar in the fantasy world he apparently created.

As he teasingly put it:

Watch wizards die! See greatfangs tear apart stone towers to get at the tasty folk inside! Hear floating severed heads talk! Listen as Gar cusses out certain Aumrarr, and Isk tries to tame him! Spy on Taeauna abed with someone, doing something that's decidedly NOT sleeping! Behold, as armies march! Knights bury blades in each other! Villains do villainy! Earth gets invaded!

So saith Ed. Employing the usual calm, quiet Canadian understatement.

love to all,
THO

On March 1, 2009 THO said:- Well met, and welcome. Thanks for your post. When THO sends me such words, it makes me smile and feel very good about all of this, setting aside my constant "publishers aren't paying me the current novel is way behind glorking LATE, how many minutes behind the keyboard can I squeeze into today" mental cares.

It IS all about keeping our dreams alive, crafting a wonderful imaginary place for us all to play in - and making friends through doing so. Although my workload slows me in replying to lore requests as instantly as I'd like to (hey, if * I * was a DM, I want an answer NOW, not weeks or months or years hence), I LOVE working on the Realms, and helping fellow fans of the Realms get specific lore they need, and I'll probably die in the saddle some day happily still doing so. I don't have a website, or a blog. I don't Tweet on Twitter. For one thing, I haven't time, and for another, those too often seem to be "Hey, look at me! It's all about me!" indulgences. The Realms isn't about me - - it's about us.

And yes, I'm proud of being a nerd. I'm happy to be a nerd. I have never followed the herd, or felt I've missed much by not being "up on the latest gossip about Britney or Madonna or Branjelica or Paris or Pamela or whatever the darling (or favourite train-wreck) of the moment is. Nerd-dom is a cloak to wear proudly. As The Hooded One once smilingly told a disapproving teacher in her high-school days, "That's all right, Miss Johnson. I am more than adequately armoured against YOUR disdain."

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My grandparents lamented the loss of the front porch - - or rather, everyone sitting out on their front porch of evenings, chatting with the neighbours walking their dogs or just strolling past. I regard Candlekeep as our front porch. Only a really COOL front porch that's more like a castle, with a chanting choir of monks, flickering torches, and tomes full of wonders guarded by the REAL wonders: the scribes whose brains hold more than the books, and who love that which they guard.

So have my thanks, Knight of the Gate, and my friendship. And hey, ask some questions, so you, too, can wait years for the answers! :}

So saith Ed. Whose sentiments I echo. Welcome! I should add that Ed knows the southwestern rural corner of the Keystone State well, thanks to family friends who live in Perryopolis. And has both gaming friends and one of the original Realms players scattered all over the state (from the Poconos to the hallowed halls of Bucknell). So ask those questions, and flirt with me, and feel at home.

love,
THO

--

Hi, Markustay. No, wemics aren't Ed's creation.

Ed and I tend to forget that many scribes here haven't been along for the entire ride, and so don't "know" when things appeared by remembering sequences and dates. Heck, as time goes on, those things tend to get hazy for we grognards, too . . .

Wemics first appeared on a Monster Card (TSR briefly sold packs of Encounter Cards, like playing cards, that DMs could use for, ahem, "random" monster encounters (shuffle deck, turn up card . . . or put face-down card in dungeon room, not to be revealed until PCs get there), and then made their way into the MM2. That book was actually written by many, many people at TSR but bears Gary's name, just as the Oriental Adventures tome written by "Gary Gygax" is actually by Zeb Cook.

As I recall, there are some Ed monsters in the MM2 (and of course in the early Realms products) that were first published in DRAGON, or even snatched away from the magazine lineup to be used first in various TSR products. There was a REASON Ed was known as "the Monster Man" at TSR even before the Realms was purchased, you know. He has contributed more monsters to various editions of the game than any other single designer. The Realms "bible" turnover contained over 80 beasties, if I remember rightly.

And no, the Realms wasn't purchased in 1987. It started to APPEAR in 1987 (as a game line; it had of course been published in DRAGON from 1979 onwards). It was purchased in 1986.

love,
THO

--

Hi again, all.

This time, a quick response to The Sage about the unpublished Edlore that's lying around. Well, first of all, a then-young Stephen Inniss (a Canadian gamer who lived in British Columbia then, and may still, for all I know; he contributed the lillendi to the D&D game via a DRAGON monster collection article, and an article on trained dogs and dog crossbreed beasts) collaborated with Ed on an in-depth detailing of Limbo (1st/2nd edition cosmology; the planes of the slaad) that was even longer and more detailed than Ed's Nine Hells piece (which he wrote a LOT more about, by the way). TSR asked them to work together, then killed the project a year and a bit later (but of course kept all the stuff).

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Some bits and pieces of Ed planar ideas and descriptions found their ways into Jeff Grubb's first Manual of the Planes, I believe.

Ed did several lengthy and heavily-researched druid herbal magic (and natural substances to be used in spell ink formulae or potion formulae or "village healer" healing magics) articles. All nixed, for the reasons given recently in this thread.

Ed did a terms of ventry article (a parliament of crows, an exaltation of larks) for Realms monsters, and "Dragon Soup," an article on recipes that used monsters as food for adventurers ("baked stirge on toast," for example). That one was killed because a dragon editor had moral qualms about eating intelligent creatures (intelligent IMAGINARY sorts of creatures, mind you). Ed did many ballads of the Realms with full lyrics and fragmentary scores. Never used because "only Dragonlance fans care about that sort of c**p."

Ed did a LOT of Realms fiction, from "To Slay A Black Raven" right up to full-length Waterdeep novels, that were requested but never used. Ed did the gnome language article that's been referred to any number of times, and a long descriptive list of the hin clans for The Five Shires that was chopped through editorial oversight and then dumped rather than being used. On several occasions Ed was asked to generate long rosters of wizard's sigils/runes, and did so; only a handful have ever been published.

And so on and on and on. Including a "Realms Bible" product that was never intended for general publication, but only as a handout guide for licensors (like movie companies) that would tell them what the Realms was, and include enough details to get them excited about stories that could be told in it.

I'm answering this because Ed tends to err on the side of caution when it comes to NDAs, and would probably not even mention the existence of most of these (beyond the ones he's already mentioned). Suffice it to say that there's a LOT of stuff out there, somewhere. Yes, including entire novels. Lots of short stories, lots and lots of unpublished dungeons (Ed tended to craft "mini-dungeons" that were realistic-in-size tombs or castle cellars, and build many stories or subplots around them, only to be used if the PCs went in one direction or another, rather than the classic "linear" published adventures. Though there's the large dungeon of Gauntulgrym, and most of Undermountain (STILL not published), not to mention blah blah blah blah . . . well, I'm sure you get the idea.

love,
THO

On March 2, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. This, from Ed to crazedventurers:

Hi, Damian, welcome back!

No, Mondaera isn't Dove. Dove is tall and muscular, broad-shouldered but not burly, and does NOT have great girth. She does have the blacksmith's build and great strength, though. Dove isn't all that homely, either (though she's "attractive" rather than beautiful), and Mondaera was UGLY. Kindly but ugly.

More Thunderstone lore to come soon, when I can get back to it, by the way. Onwaaard!

So saith Ed. Who once quoth "Onwaaard!" when urging a horse to a gallop. It got so excited that it decided to jump a non-existent fence, and luckily didn't hurt itself. Nor did Ed fall off, though he did curse and laugh and grab at his pommel. (No, no, not HIS pommel; the saddle's pommel. We all know where the other sort of pommel is.)

love to all,
THO

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On March 2, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all. Brief housekeeping time again.

Red Walker: three Ed novels, one set in Waterdeep (with brief scenes elsewhere), one in Silverymoon (again, some scenes elsewhere), and one in Cormyr and the Dales. Only the first one was completely finished.

Gang Falconhand: yes, it's true. NOT "thrown down" the Yawning Portal, LOWERED down that shaft (it's a killing fall). Criteria to come, from Ed.

Sage: NDAs on planar and herbal info, and "Who knows?" re. why the fiction wasn't used. Many of the people involved in decision-making are either dead or gone from gaming for years, and most of the rest are gone from TSR and now WotC.

Wooly: this "Bible" wouldn't interest you much. It was a brief handout for newbies not even familiar with D&D. In other words, the raw basics (VERY basics) of the Realms. Like a 28-page photobook for young kids about just one Star Wars movie. Now, Ed beefed that up a bit with a complete index to power groups, places, and NPCs in all published-up-until-then FR products, for internal company use . . . but even that is now so dated as to be nigh-useless.

And that's it for me for now. Am expecting more lore from Ed the other end of today.

love to all,
THO

--

Hi, Jamallo Kreen. Yes, the dating of Ed's exposure to D&D has been asked (and answered) many a time down the years, often in magazine or podcast or website interviews. If I remember it all rightly (Ed will correct if I haven't), we have: Realms begins in 1966, but not called "the Forgotten Realms" and given global scope until 1967. D&D first published in 1974, general distribution to hobby shops 1975 (when Ed discovers it), continues to grow as a rules set and Ed re-encounters it in 1978 and is vastly more impressed then he was the first time (and "shifts" the Realms to match the game in terms of races, monsters, how spells work, et al at that time). So when Ed starts detailing the Realms in DRAGON in 1979, right up through his "world turnovers" to TSR in 1986, the Realms holds all the races of the D&D game (plus Ed's own species and subraces, many of which were later made "official" parts of the game, as you know). And I know Ed remembers Jack Scruby fondly from sandtable wargaming days... (Proper Ed reply coming later, of course.)

love,
THO

On March 3, 2009 THO said:- Gelcur, you're very welcome. As for me, I enjoyed taking part in that adventure (as I'm sure you could tell).

Ed is incommunicado just at this moment (it's his late night at the library, plus "put out the garbage and the recycling" night, plus pick up the mail night, plus make dinner when he gets home for self and ailing wife), but I've forwarded your queries to him, and from a months and months-ago e-mail to me re. the short stories, can quote this:

...

I LOVE doing these collections, with prefaces to each tale so I can talk lore. I've no idea if future anthologies are in the cards, because (no inside knowledge of Wizards sales here, just the truism you already know from the field) they always sell less than original novels. However, I've got

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stories upon stories up my sleeve, and can always write more for fun, given a month to noodle away on them, so if the good Books people ever ask, there can be another collection on their desks in a month or so.

What I've always hoped would happen is a fan-generated "we want to see THIS moment in a story" list of requests, so I could write key tales to order and then balance out the collection with more humour or romance or intrigue or whatever is needed to "offset" the tenor of the to-order tales. Must suggest this again, and see if it flies.

Hugs and smoochies,
Ed

So saith Ed.

Who really would love to do a series of short story anthologies . . .

Hmmm . . .

love to all,

THO

--

The korontaun, or "mountain korrûn," are shaggy-coated sheep whose mature males have four forward-pointing horns (two longer central ones, and one on either side of the head that curve forward to flank the central spires). Native to the Giantspire, Icerim, and Sunrise Mountains, where they typically keep to high cliff faces (formerly they populated alpine valleys, but increasing orc populations made tarrying in such terrain deadly), the korontaun have been domesticated in recent decades; certain Nars "run with them" across Narfell, and they have become farm animals (for their wool, milk [from which the amber-hued, sharp, crumbly "hearthfire" cheese is derived], and meat, not to mention their use as defenders of mixed-beast farm herds against wolves, coyotes, leucrotta, and other predators; korontaun rams calmly regard all animals they dwell with as "theirs," and worthy of their protection) in Rashemen, Thesk, and increasingly in the Great Dale. Some traders have captured korontaun and established domesticated herds in Murghom, but these are struggling in the climate, falling prey to a variety of afflictions and diseases, and not faring well.

Korontaun cheese and increasingly, smoked and hung sides of korontaun meat, is now beginning to reach Impiltur and is being adopted as a "table staple" in the few locales where it can be bought. If properly treated, korontaun meat travels well, keeping for long periods and harboring a pleasant "smoky" flavour; it may well soon become popular all along the trading-routes, throughout Faerûn.

So saith Ed. So, go for it, Jamallo Kreen! An evening with a ram for your player characters - - now THERE'S a perilous adventure!

love,
THO

On March 4, 2009 THO said:- At the market in Highmoon, in Deepingdale (mainly brought up from Sembia).

The Dales tend to be too cold and have too many birds for good crops of good cherries; crabapples serve that local culinary function in most dales. That said, most of the more southerly and easterly dales have abundant wild sour cherries, which get picked and used in tarts and pies

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and in marinades for meat and poultry dishes (said cherries tend to be small and to get picked green, before the birds want to have at them, by children sent out to do this time-consuming task - - and said cherries get added to lots of other fruits and vegetables for pickling, to yield food in winter to go with the copious venison, rabbit, and onthur (squirrels).

Cherries aren't unknown in the Dales, and are avidly devoured, but they are usually imported, and therefore cost a lot more than wild local fruit that's free for the picking (such as gooseberries, currants, black raspberries, wild strawberries, and the like). BTW, excellent cherry brandy is made just outside Yhaunn and Ordulin, in Sembia, and that gets widely sold throughout the Dales, too.

So saith Ed. Who was pleased by Raelan's question, too, so I suspect we'll see an answer to that ere long.

love to all,
THO

On March 5, 2009 THO said:- Penknight, I know Ed's reply re. Waterdeep will have to include "it depends." Here's the thing: rents are low, but costs of food and drink (and firewood/coal!) go up as the winter wears on and things get scarcer. So adventurers who "lay in" large food stores and can dine on potatoes and pickled things and smoked meat will be able to live far more cheaply than someone who insists on fresh fruit throughout the cold months . . .

But of course, Ed will answer definitively (soon, I hope).

love,
THO

--

Ah, thank you very much, Garen Thal. Aply answered, and sent to Ed for anything he may want to add re. that last point.

Penknight, characters I have played (and the PC parties they have been members of, at the time) have never wintered over in Waterdeep, no, but (thanks to the huge network of secret and not-so-secret gates [3e "portals"] Ed established all over the Realms) my characters have often VISITED Waterdeep in the winter, and stayed there for as much as two consecutive tendays at a time. It's damp, cold, and expensive, so we seldom stretched our visits longer than absolutely necessary . . . though the seasons are very much the same once you get far enough underground (Skullport is nasty-dangerous all year round, EVERY year)

We have overwintered in Neverwinter (despite the name, it gets winter, all right; damp and wet with rain and sleet and ice, snow melting near the docks and seashore, but deep wet snow in the city neighbourhoods farther inland), Silverymoon, Suzail, Arabel, and the Dales (Shadowdale and once in Battledale's Ghost Holds). Usually we're in the Dales or the woods around them.

By the way, Ed is great at conjuring up the feeling of deep, deadly winter, with "the wolves running" by night, as stars glitter ruthlessly in the clear, cold night air, and all is hushed under thick blankets of white snow . . .

love,
THO

On March 6, 2009 THO said:- Yes, whales birth in the warm southerly seas, but dolphins and the smallest whales are the aquatic species that use the Shining Sea; most whales calve just south of

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Mhair, in the Great Sea. Some species tarry for a time, feeding on the abundant life stimulated by the warm flows of water out of the Mhair jungles, and others depart swiftly for the Whale's Flukes (which seems to be a gathering-place of sorts, and got its name from the frequent sightings of whales sporting on the surface or tail-slapping or surfacing and then diving again), to begin their journey north. Which always stalls for a fair amount of time in the Nelanther, for feeding, and only slowly moves - - with the vast schools of fish circling in from the west to feed their own ways north along the coast as far as the waters off Icepeak, ere they circle west again. Whereupon the whales follow them, in a great arc that passes either side of Araksa, and return southeast, to begin the circuit again. Whales often deviate from their usual routes on this circuit thanks to storms, but do keep to a circuit, until they pass beyond the ages at which they can give birth (as one can imagine, we're talking a rare few, here) . . . at which time they seem to become restless, and head off on what can only be aptly described as "wanderings of discovery." Some of their descendants always swim with them, and in this way whales spread throughout the seas to "new waters," constantly replenishing areas where whales have suffered and dwindled for various reasons.

In the Sea of Fallen Stars, increasing undersea activity in the Vilhon has increasingly driven whales that traditionally birthed there north and east, to just off the coast of Chessenta. Whales in the Inner Sea DON'T follow a circuit; they just move north in warmer (summer) months, and south in cooler months, but otherwise wander all over the place like fishermen seeking favourite (or as yet undiscovered) "good fishing spots." (Undersea activities and features tend to hamper whales far more in the Inner Sea than in the seas west of Faerûn, and whales move away from harassment and obstacles as a matter of course, and therefore can be found almost anywhere from time to time.)

One note: dead or dying whales may be beached, and severe storms (especially in the Neck, or the southern mouth of the River Lis) may occasionally drive healthy whales ashore (just as such furious storms hurl ships ashore), but "mass beachings" of whales seem almost unknown in the Realms. For reasons just as mysterious as what causes them, in our real world.

So saith Ed. Who thinks of almost everything, and creates links and stitchings whenever gaps in his thinking show up.

love to all,
THO

--

1. Partially. As in, I don't catalogue spare used "lending out" copies of tomes, I'm woefully behind on cataloguing the "main sections" because of the literally thousands of tomes that arrive in the mail when judging major awards (the World Fantasy Awards two years back, the Sunbursts this year) - - and because I'm just too darned busy dealing with daily living and writing three novels plus game stuff plus short stories plus Candlekeep replies . . . not to mention READING everything. :}

2. It's spread all over the house. I have a study on the upper floor that was at one point crammed to the ceiling with just a tiny passageway through it (sculpted to fit my belly as I edged sideways along it) left "open." I've gradually been emptying this into . . .

My main library in the "new basement," where I work.

Other major book loci are the old basement (that is, the low-ceilinged basement of the original farmhouse, which is linked to the new basement), the dining room (shelves all around the walls and a stack of boxes to the ceiling around which unboxed books are mounded), front hall, bathroom, three bedrooms (bookshelves in all, books hidden in wooden sidetable cabinets in one), the spare room (shelves, piles, books inside a cabinet), gallery (bookshelves beneath the

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paintings and prints), living room, kitchen (the cookbooks, naturally), office (more cookbooks, the gardening books) . . . and one of the bathrooms has the childrens' books, on an easy-access floor to ceiling shelf facing the ceramic throne.

3. Everything. The old basement has white metal bolt-together utility shelving, the new basement is an entire room full of custom-built, crammed-in spruce shelving, and the other rooms have a variety of homemade wooden shelves, assembled wood kit shelves, and cheapie modular (the latter often modified by me to take the REAL weight of books, as opposed to the dried flowers, plastic statuettes, and three nice-looking, artfully-arranged books shown in glossy catalogues . . . which turn out to be the only weight the product can really hold up). Oh, and there are built-in shelves (as in: made by me) above almost every doorway in the house, both sides.

4. I dust them. And I'm afraid I can't get into my French maid costume any more . . . and haven't recently been trying to get into anyone else wearing one, either. I did once have a houseguest who brought and donned one to tease me and get her boyfriend wild with desire - - and it worked (and our dining room table proved up to the strain of their celebrations). And she DID get up on a stepstool with a leather duster to shake her behind in my face . . . but she didn't dust a single book, darn it. (Seriously, I find that electrostatic, frequently-washed furnace filters do a lot to keep the dust down.)

So saith Ed. Providing a behind the scenes look at his house. He didn't even mention the two cottages crammed with books, up in Muskoka, or the reading shelf of books that runs all the way around the sleeping hut deep in the forest of his backyard . . . That many books take up a LOT of space.

Love to all,
THO

On March 7, 2009 THO said:- Zandilar, Ed and I are of one mind on this: the POTENTIAL of e-books is just great, but the practice (thus far) has been anything but. Here's the thing: as you folks in Australia know full well (Weber being a case in point), the old "bricks-and-mortar" bookselling model is badly broken; a lot of books just can't reach the public that wants to buy them. Publishers are losing money everywhere, paper prices are going sky-high artificially through near-monopolies over pulp mills, and the authors (except for the rare few who make BIG bucks) are getting scr*wed as badly as they always were. However, e-books tend to be overpriced (considering they don't involve the printing, warehousing, shipping, etc. costs of physical books, why are they often as expensive or the same price? With the author getting even LESS of a share?) and most readers hard to read (earlier readers even had proprietary formats). More and more, authors may realize that they just don't need a publisher sucking most of the money out of their livelihoods for standing between them and their readers (after all, that's what going with a "big" publisher gains you over self-publishing: access to distribution).

So we are still "on the brink" (as we have been for about a decade now) of a potential explosion in e-book sales.

However, in the long run, consider this: a physical book can attract new readers just by lying around on beaches, bus seats, library shelves, flea market tables, and in doctors' waiting rooms. An e-book cannot.

A physical book needs functional eyeballs and light (like, ahem, sunlight). An e-book needs power, lack of dropping and breaking, and usually occasional access to the Internet (with credit card or PayPal account in hand). Language changes slowly enough that books that are centuries old are still useful. Good luck on playing that wax cylinder recording or even an 8-track, in most

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places; although an e-book has LEGAL permanence (i.e. "always in print"), in practice, it can be inaccessible/rendered obsolete much, much faster than a physical book.

Ed and I both have long and successful careers in publishing (he as a creator, me on the other side of the desk). Both of us have watched the e-book market TRY to develop, and noted the same root problems: publishers, be they traditional or the new Net powers (Amazon, Google, et al), have tried to push various e-formats in order to dominate whatever the future of book publishing might turn out to be . . . and they risk losing control, big time. Which might be great for a lot of writers (those who can attract and hold an audience without good editors, massive publicity, and an active sales force). Writers typically get a VERY small piece of the publishing pie; take away the publisher, and even modest sales can net a writer much, much more cash than some of them "realize" right now.

So the publishers are going to have to tread VERY carefully, and one only has to look at Amazon (with the Kindle and their attempts to control Print On Demand editions), Google (and their current "we'll scan and sell ALL books unless authors opt out" efforts), Facebook (oh, by the way, we own everything you put on your Facebook pages . . . huh? Why are you all so upset?), and countless other examples to know that treading very carefully is NOT something they seem to have thus far been very good at.

Those who push e-sales, e-books, and the like continually belittle the importance of the VAST majority of the bookbuying public who either has no Net access or isn't comfortable shopping online, and WANTS to browse in a bookstore. These readers (whom the Net-savvy love to dismiss as "dinosaurs" or "the fading way of the past") remain over 90 percent (yes, you read that right, ninety percent) of bookbuyers. Grandparents the world over want to buy something TANGIBLE as a Christmas or birthday gift for those they dote on, not "here's a download card." (They may buy the download card if it's demanded, and may even by dumb luck or trying hard buy the right one, but they won't LIKE or be COMFORTABLE doing so.) So we're not yet at the "it's all inevitable, just sign up here" stage, and consumers are very wary at the moment, thanks to the economic downturn worldwide and their suspicions that e-books are going to be like buying movies to watch at home: Betamax no VHS, then competing formats of DVDs, whoops no, throw those old things away you want HD-DVD or no, Blu-Ray. A book they open, turn the pages, and look at with their eyeballs they understand; a welter of new formats, not so much.

There's an interesting old Isaac Asimov sf short story, "The Fun They Had," about kids enjoying these weird old things called books when their electronic "Teacher" breaks down, that points at this mindset from the other direction.

So that's the view Ed and I share on this right now. We're suspicious of publishers trying to push e-books as a format so they can "keep a book in print" forever, and do no publicity (we've both actually - - and separately - - heard publishing execs at different publishers say they're looking forward to e-books so they can fire their salesmen and do away with publicity costs, because "e-books won't need publicity; those kids hear about EVERYTHING on the Internet, so we won't need to do any"). We're suspicious of publishers mishandling all of this badly, and the various players who are interested in e-books to give them "control" over the market doing something that limits access of some readers to some books (many governments heavily censor citizens' access to specific Internet content, and even the so-called Western "bastions of freedom" countries have some heavyhanded new laws in their codes that they could use to censor in the same way; e-books will be much easier to "block" if the market for them isn't "shaped" properly).

We want everything to turn out for the best . . . but we don't yet see clear signs that it's even heading in the right direction to do so.

So we watch. VERY closely. Clinging to hope, and doing what little things we can to nudge things in what we see as the right direction.

We'll all just have to wait and see.

love,

THO

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On March 7, 2009 THO said:- Hi again.

Jamallo, I believe you've arrived at just the right roleplaying stance. Ed had "sorcerers" in the Realms long before the rules did (usually as "wild talents" of the Weave who could block/have immunity to one sort of spells [e.g. fire, lightning] AND could cast or launch one sort of magic. Let me quote Ed's notes (these date from when a wizard was called a "magic-user" in the rules, and there were no official "sorcerers"):

In all cases where someone has a natural aptitude for the Art (a wild talent or someone successfully using non-spellbook "sorcery"), they MUST be able to clearly visualize an "end result" they want to achieve with magic, and successfully think through a way/sequence/method to call on the Weave to achieve that end result.

So a magic-user using a written spell from a spellbook, or being taught how to cast a spell by someone already experienced in its use, is "calling on the Weave" by a particular tried-and-true, already established (by someone else) method of combining incantation with somatic and material components.

In the case of silent "will-force" spells, with no audible incantation, such a magic user is "causing the magic to work" by achieving the right inner mental state - - correctly mentally picturing how to call on the Weave, and correctly mentally picturing what he or she wants the Weave to "do" for them.

A so-called sorcerer, who "thinks of" a magic rather than using a written scroll, material components (and sometimes without using verbal or somatic components, either) must do the same mental work in casting all magics.

If the mind-work goes awry, the magic either "doesn't happen" or magical chaos (a "wand of wonder" effect) results.

It follows that sorcerers who have less than aged, active veteran status will find it vastly easier to cast magics they have seen a magic-user cast, or craft magics to achieve a result they have seen happen previously (lightning striking a tree, a wall being shattered by some force, kindling bursting into flame). If you've seen it, you have a fair stab at duplicating it. If you think fuzzily "I want to be able to knock down yon castle!" you will have VERY little chance of doing that - - but if you can conceive, in detail and correctly, without exaggeration, of forces you have at least some passing familiarity with [a gale-force wind of the sort you've felt, for example], that you can use to make that castle collapse, you have a much better chance of affecting the castle.

So saith Ed, all those years ago (I'd say these notes are from 1981 or 1982). So if your sorcerer has witnessed a successful casting of Spendelaarde's Chaser [that's the correct spelling of the mage's name; "Spendelard" is a TSR simplification], they are far more likely to be able to duplicate it than a sorcerer who's just heard of a sobering-up spell. And a veteran sorcerer will have be more likely to easily and quickly cast a successful Chaser than a low-level novice.

love,
THO

On March 7, 2009 THO said:- Unless someone has added it to the FR maps without my knowledge, Aralent has indeed been a "hidden" town-becoming-a-city of the Realms for all these years. Markustay, I'm not sure what maps you are most comfortable using as a "base," but if you have access to the old Fonstad print FR Atlas (1990 publication, very closely based on my master maps wherever they were available), and you use the projections appearing there rather than the later and wildly distorted 3e maps, you will be able to find, NNW of Assam across the Shining

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Plains, and due west of the southern end of the Lake of the Long Arm, an indentation or "cove" in the eastern side of the Giant's Run Mountains (a long and wide open valley between the eastward-thrusting shoulders of mountains that frame it to north and south). This is rural ranching and farming (and monster-roamed) country, ungoverned by any central authority.

Spang in the middle of that valley is the market-moot and temple-town of Aralent, unwallled and potentially as lawless as Scornubel - - but moderated from its earliest days by various fortress-temples to good- and neutral-aligned deities (such as Ilmater, Torm, Chauntea, Helm, and others) and their various forces of "temple guards," who police the market.

Early on, there were some fierce battles between these holy soldiers, but things reached such a bloody head that the high priests got together and hammered out a firm alliance, forcing their guards to work together (mixed-faith patrols) and trust each other . . . and over time, Aralent started to grow as more and more traveling traders regarded it as "safe." No one taxes you, and no one interferes with sharp business dealings, but the temple guards swiftly stop violence, blackmail, intimidation, arson, brawls, open thefts and robbery with violence, and the like.

Wherefore Aralent is slowly growing larger (as a resupply base, safe haven, and trading-town), despite not having a large populace or industries.

The name "Aralent" comes from a long-dead "prince" of Chessenta (heir to a city-state), who fled would-be assassins who'd gravely wounded him with poisoned weapons, came here, settled into a new life as a stonemason, and eventually built some of the earliest temples. His earliest quarries now form some of the temple cellars.

I mention this because there's a ford of Aralent in Chessenta where he's locally believed to have been murdered by those assassin's, and a tor or crag known as Aralent's Tomb, where a local legend insists a grieving lover buried his remains. Neither of those are on the maps, either, largely because TSR seems to have lost or never received my detailed map of Chessenta (sorry! before you ask, they DO own it, so I can't reproduce it anywhere without their permission).

So saith Ed. Creator of Aralent, the Shining Plains, the Lake of the Long Arm, Chessenta, and . . . well, you get the drift.

love to all,
THO

On March 9, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all.

I bring a reply of sorts from Ed to Zandilar, about the in-Realms word for cocktails:

There are many local terms for mixed drinks, from "brightsongs" in Silverymoon, Neverwinter, and Waterdeep; to "manyslake" in Waterdeep, Scornubel, Iriaebor, Cormyr, and Sembia; to "ralivarthrem" in Amn and Tethyr; to "ravalankh" in Calimshan and the Tashalar; and "drarraval" in Turmish, the Vilhon and Chessenta.

Ed also sent me replies to Jakk's queries. Re. the Cormyr lineage: little progress at the moment. Re. the announcement: not made yet, more snags have arisen. Patience (hey, I KNOW it's hard. * I * want all of this stuff RIGHT NOW, too!). Yet, I say again, patience. Ed's happily immersed in cranking out a novel right now, anyway . . .

love to all,
THO

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On March 10, 2009 THO said:- Well, the bit of gardening I enjoy the most is walking through Capability Brown-style gardens I can never afford, around English country houses, where the entire LANDSCAPE has been sculpted and planted and dotted with follies and so on, marvelling at what can be done, given wealth and space and time and cheap labour I'll never, ever have. I'm not a fan of overly-formal (Versailles-type clipped-hedge knot gardens and the like) gardens, but love semi-wild gardens . . . which is what Jen and I have, on five acres of mostly woodlot and fields let go to wildflowers (sumac and aspen keep encroaching, and I cut firewood and we harvest wild black raspberries and morels), but we tend to cut "rides" [green-grass paths] and let nature take care of the rest. Except tree-planting and wild shrub planting; we order and plant dozens of specimens every year.

Including roses and vines and our "beer plant" (hops), that grow up the posts of our carport every year and up along the railings of the bedroom-walkout deck atop it, to cloak the wood in a nice carpet of green growing leaves.

We also grow herbs (outdoor pots in summer, move them indoors in winter) and tomatoes and a few other sporadic food crops, and have a mature asparagus bed. In general, we plant a perennial bed, have a south-wall-of-the-house summer "garden" of potted plants arranged in tiers, and year round grow indoor window plants, including lots of cacti, succulents, and a giant jade plant. We also have the usual spider plant, mother-in-law's-tongue, and mares'-tail in hanging baskets, plus a dozen or so pots that move outdoors every spring. We feed birds and have butterfly bushes and plantings and feeders to encourage hummingbirds, wrens, bluebirds, and the like - - and get all sorts of birds, including (thanks to having semi-woodlands right next to the house) large woodpeckers, hawks, wild turkeys, and owls on occasion. I should mention that the house is surrounded by huge trees, mostly black spruce, but there's a gigantic white pine and three larger cedars that shelter the nests of dozens of nesting birds.

Sure beats living in the city.

So saith Ed. My own gardening, thanks to my work, has been far more modest, but I do have a small patio "wild bower" garden, and a growing frame that I use year-round for vegetables and some "companion planted, keep off the unwanted insects and pests" flowers, too. Ed didn't mention that as the years pass, he does more and more of the gardening grunt-work, from running two composters to all the weeding and watering to mulching and feeding and raking and carting brush onto an ever-growing pile behind the barn.

Gads, we're so both charmingly domesticated.

love,
THO

--

No, Ed never used any of the published modules with us, though he was asked to playtest bits and pieces of some of their encounters, and did so when he could sneak them into our unfolding campaign so they "fit."

The early players DID ask him to run them through the Fell Pass, an early DRAGON-published, contest-winning adventure . . . with disastrous results, for them. :)

love,
THO

On March 11, 2009 THO said:- Our pleasure!

From visiting Ed's house, I can tell you that he left some book-adorned rooms out. There are even bookshelves on the various landings at the top and halfway up his stairs - - not to mention built-in bookshelves all around the bed in his sleeping hut, down "at the bottom of the garden" (actually

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one overgrown farm field east of the house, beside the woodlot). When we were younger, Ed and I talked about "dream" garden elements, and Ed's was his own small private lake/overgrown pond with an island at the center of it and a "folly" (built-as-a-ruin stone castle) on it.

However, he can't dig one out where he is now because the soil is too sandy, and besides, springs rise on both sides of his property and run down its edges as full-fledged streams. He has a cottage up in Muskoka to satisfy the "boating on the wild lake" urges, when he gets them.

Steven Schend is the only other scribe of Candlekeep to have visited both Ed's home and cottage, I believe. On one of those visits, I'm told, they cooked up many entries for the Roll of Years.

And to Jakk: Markustay's guess is right: "No."

I only wish I could say more . . . but then, this works just fine as a tease, doesn't it?

love,
THO

On March 12, 2009 THO said:- Hi again!

Zandilar, Ed says your thoughts re. elven and human mental toughness, as expressed in your last post, are "dead-on accurate." He also says that the post by Markustay, immediately after Zandilar's post, has got the elven attitudes "exactly right," with just one caveat: so long as scribes bear in mind that when Markustay concludes his Elven Attitudes remarks with the "when an Elf sees a Drow" sentence, the elf may think such things (only) subconsciously, and that these are racial norms, not wholly accurate on the level of each and every elf (or drow, or half-elf) individual.

As for the Roll of Years comments, Ed can't confirm Markustay's suspicions, because he just doesn't know. He couldn't confirm them if he DID know, thanks to (yes) NDAs, but he honestly doesn't know. Ed points out that it's quite in keeping with established Realms tradition (and real life, and many other fantasy novels outside the Realms) to have different faiths believing in, and following, different calendars (and interpreting events differently). Ed does NOT think the Sharran Roll of Years was included in the GRAND HISTORY for anything other than "increasing roleplaying possibilities and interest" reasons.

love to all,
THO

--

Hello again, fellow scribes.

Ed and I have been e-talking over various lore-queries made in this thread, and although he hasn't yet gotten around to penning a proper answer for Nerfed2Hell's February 17th query: "Animal question: do people of the Realms keep anything resembling the equivalent of "glamour pets"? I'm especially interested in the Heartlands, but if there's a notable noble of Waterdeep or elsewhere with the equivalent of a chihuahua on her arm all the time... I'm curious to know what kinds of things people keep just for pets --not just familiars or animal companions-- and whether or not this kind of behavior sets trends or makes others scoff."

. . . Ed did say:

Yes of course they do. Including tressym (as pets, not just as familiars), lurlae (longhaired cats with fluffy smoke-gray fur), and flying snakes (see RACES OF FAERUN). More later, when I have time.

So saith Ed. Tireless (but extremely busy) Father Creator of the Realms.

love to all,
THO

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Hi, arry.

Ed will of course answer you properly in time to come, but I can tell you from playing in his campaign that the sugar maple and hazel both exist in the Sword Coast North and the Moonsea North of the Realms, plus Heartlands.

"Sycamore" is a rather loose term (up in Canada, where both Ed and I are from, a plane tree and a sycamore are definitely different things . . . and neither of them is anything like a maple), so I seriously doubt Ed is saying most maples don't exist in the Realms.

love,
THO

On March 13, 2009 THO said:- Very true, Sage, very true.

Although Ed has something in mind for every last year he named when creating the Roll, and then again in a later session of augmenting and expanding. He can't, of course, reveal any of those events that may or may not now happen in canon lore, but he DID hint this far:

The Seven Sisters referenced in that year name aren't the same Seven Realms fans have already "met." (And no, this isn't a change or a retcon; they never were.)

"Azuth's Woe" is the poetic/prophetic nickname of a being, not a misfortune befalling Azuth in that year. The being referenced caused Azuth "woe" (and earned the moniker) many years earlier.

So saith Ed. Who also reminded me that many of the events anticipated and then commemorated in year names are indeed small, local, little-known things, not necessarily "big" happenings.

love to all,
THO

--

Hello again, all.

Ed is busy with hospital stuff today, but I'll field crazedventurers' question:

"Indeed he does, one of the 'seven' that has been mentioned very briefly in passing is the 'Seven Swanmays of the Kings Forest' (Cormyr).

THO, did the Knights ever encounter these seven? And is Lharave (featured in FRO the Old Gray Box Set) one of those seven?"

Damian, the Knights have encountered various members of those Seven over the years, though never the entire group, formally, as a group. So far as I know, Lharave isn't one of them, but is a friend and ally who has worked with them more than once. Ed will of course elaborate and correct, as the opportunity arises.

love,
THO

--

. . . And to Jakk, I respond:

No, of COURSE you couldn't.

No apology necessary, though if it's around behind me you're interested in, perhaps shortness is a good thing . . .

She observed innocently, looking off from a hilltop across upland Cormyr, to the interesting

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landmark of Angrul's Oak (a massive dead oak that stands where two streams meet, due west of The Dead Well, halfway between it and the Belflow (the stream that runs southeast from Arabel to the Wyvernwater). [Yes, an extremely subtle example of obligatory Realms reference, there - - but one can never have too many useful landmarks, yes?]

love,
THO

--

Heh.

Markustay, there are more "of the six curses" characters than that, though they may not have made it into printed canon Realmslore (and any number of "of the three curses" or "four curses" or fill in the number, too). That's because it was briefly VERY popular to adopt such a nickname, because it sounds grand without being TOO threatening (unlike, say, "I am Marghon the Mage, Destroyer of Thrones").

And, no, she replied sweetly, Dathae isn't one of the Seven, either. She belongs to ANOTHER secretive group, about which only Ed can really say more . . .

love,
THO

P.S. I am SUCH a tease. Time to spank me, someone. Line up, fellas.
AND lasses!

On March 13, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all.
Here's the latest, from Ed:

Jakk, I do hope sometime this year (hopefully before the summer) to be able to announce something more about CASTLEMOURN (no, nothing bad, and nothing about changing publishers for it or anything like that), but the announcement THO has been alluding to has nothing to do with that. Really.

althen artren, Azuth could cut off mortals' connections to the Weave, but no mortal spellcaster I know of ever successfully developed such a spell. Some worked on ways to (imperfectly) "steer" dead magic areas to temporarily achieve the same result, though.

Now, if there are going to be spankings, scribes, surely being the Creator of the Realms should count for SOMETHing . . .

So saith Ed. Whose opinions I always hold dear.
love to all,
THO

On March 14, 2009 THO said:- Sure. :) I'm going to assume that you're completely new to handling beginner players, so please don't be offended by the way I answer this, okay? I'll be happy to say more, differently, if this is too basic.
Here's what I'd do: pick a small rural place in the Realms that's located on a caravan route (like Shadowdale), so you can give Player Characters a "ready road" to cool-sounding other places in

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the Realms, and some means (gossipy travelers/traders, stopping at the small rural place for a night) of hearing about those places.

Give your daughters "young, bored characters who want adventure" to play, let them shape those characters entirely themselves after you give them the stats (I'd say two rogue types who discover a precious long-hidden cache of stainless steel-vial healing potions very early on, and some magic . . . plus an opportunity to discover that they both have some talent for the Art [can work magic]). Don't worry about rules editions or specific rules; as DM, shape the adventure they have like a storyteller or the director of a TV episode, making sure the action moves along, they have plenty of challenges (puzzle-solving, decisions to make as to who to trust or which lead to follow up on), and PLAY the NPCs like a ham actor, building a supporting cast of eccentric travelers and locals.

For the adventure, pick something very simple from any readily-available source (there are plenty of free adventures online as downloads, for example - - again, old ones are fine) and tear it apart. You don't care about following it, you care about giving your daughters great entertainment. I recommend a mystery (find out who the murderer or spy is, among the locally-known people) with lots of cleverly-hidden messages and minor treasures (a stone that glows on command and so can be used as a light, or a dagger ditto), and a very few SIMPLE but scary monsters (skeletons, the crawling claws I created so many years ago just to have disembodied skeletal hands scuttling after people and scaring them, and nasty people). Not hard-to-defeat foes, except for a longer-term villain you'll want to "set up" (perhaps seen once, very early on, when your daughters' characters don't know who this person is, and then just alluded to later on, as they start to hear just how evil and powerful this person is).

Then drop, add, rearrange, and tinker with elements from the adventure(s) you're adapting, to create a fun sequence of events that plans for the choices the PCs will make (if they go here and do this, then Encounter X happens, but if they instead go there and do that, run Encounter Y; both will lead to Encounter Z, but differently, like so) so your daughters will have fun AND feel like they're getting somewhere and achieving something, not running an endless obstacle course. Even if there isn't a real mystery at the heart of the adventure, make things FEEL mysterious (as if there are local conspiracies and spies; perhaps a dying old man gasps out a secret or a warning to the PCs just before he passes; perhaps they witness someone they knew and trusted change shape into a monster, when the someone thought they were unobserved; perhaps both those things happen, and a lot more), and try to make sure you have two to four hours of playing time when the sessions begin, and that in every session there's some sort of reward (even if it's just a piece of information), and some challenge, and some new mystery or puzzle or warning. With that said, don't push it; if your daughters don't want to play that long, or like to "drop out" of roleplaying to gossip or joke or talk about other things with you, LET IT HAPPEN. Without showing them any irritation on your part, over it. Your job as DM is to hand them a fun time (though to be satisfying, that involves challenges, not easy wish-fulfillment), not force them along through "your" hobby or sport. Put various situations in front of them and watch and listen to what they seem to prefer: do they like battle? Or banter? Or confrontational arguments with authority figures or foes? Or sneaking around, spying unobserved? Try to find out, and give them more of that. Not ALL of that, or it'll get boring, but if they enjoy something and are good at it, give them many chances to shine at it. You can teach them life lessons about fairness and "right" ways to behave, of course, but if you do, be darned subtle, or the fun will be ruined. And don't be afraid to change everything, right in the middle of the adventure, if they come up with something really exciting. If they suddenly light up and say, "This guy is selling dragon eggs - - I KNEW it!" then that's what he's been doing, even if you hadn't thought of that until then.

Remember, it's not about "getting through the adventure the way it was written." It's about making your daughters ask eagerly, "When can we play next, Dad? Huh? Huh?"

And don't get upset if they wreck all your best-laid traps and villains, or bypass them altogether. They will. Count on it. NEVER let them think you the DM are your adversary; make sure they always see you as the guy pulling back the curtain to show them this exciting world to play in, NOT their foe who marshals that world against them.

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Oh, and have fun! :}

So saith Ed. In as splendid a swift encapsulation of what D&D is about as I've heard in a long time. Good luck, Bob! (I suspect your daughters are going to be the lucky ones.)

love to all,
THO

On March 17, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all. I bring fresh pearls of Realmslore from the quill of Ed of the Greenwood, but I can't resist answering althen artren before I present them. Specifically, in regards to THIS little comment:

You must be losing your touch, Madam Hoody. There are only three or four scribes in line. I guess I'll have to get in line a second and third time.

althen, dear, the scribes are lining up UNDERNEATH me. To save time, you understand. I'd invite you to reach down and feel around to verify that, but some males tend to be, er, squeamish about that sort of thing. (Muffled scream: "He touched my Rod of Lordly Might! He touched it!")
Ahem.

(Now if you can't behave, boys, then neither can I. I'll be over here with Zandilar.)

Now, on to the words of Ed!

Who, curiously enough, also has words for you, althen. To whit, in response to this query of yours: "Ed, in the area that Larloch has his fortress in, is there any back-history, maybe a dwarven or elven fortress, or a mine, or something there before?"

Ed replies:

Yes, Larloch's Crypt ("Warlock's Crypt") actually began as several gnome "strongholds" dug into the southern flanks of the hills, nigh the seashore. Their numbers dwindled under repeated attacks from many foes (goblin kin prominent among them, but also a short-lived "kingdom" of leucrotta and local elves who believed all above-ground fauna belonged to them, for their feasting-spits, from deer to boar to gnomes who dared hunt sylvan beasties), and they were almost all gone (dead or fled to safer areas, such as the seashore south of Neverwinter, and in Velen Peninsula of Tethyr) before Larloch arrived and slew the last of them.

So saith Ed. Who also felt moved to answer this from althen artren: "How does Elminster like his quiche?"

Ed replies:

Raw, of course. :}

Now to be serious: Elminster likes open-faced, small hand-tarts (palm-sized quiches). Made with strong yellow cheese and meat (ham when he eats my frozen ones, bison or bear or moose when he picks through my larder, in that descending order; he made a quiche with fried Spam once, and loved it, though he added other things to soak up some of the salt). He decidedly does not like commercial quiches that are "All crumbling pastry and nothing much in it, look ye!"

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so saith Ed. Who now passes on to this, from gomez: "Anyway, 'people known at the court of Cormyr' may actually contain a lot of people depending on how well they need be known... How about Lady Tavernant? I just found her in Volo's Guide to Cormyr, and she is an noblewoman (hence would be known at court, I guess), eccentric, and can print her own copies... even if she didn't write it, I am sure she printed a few..."

Ed replies:

Right you are: 'people known at the court of Cormyr' includes a LOT of people. Let me just provide my first promised clue by refining what I mean by "known at the court." It means they've visited it in person and been announced, more than once, not walked into the room as an anonymous servant or been mentioned by some courtier as some outlander of importance - - that is, important somewhere else. It doesn't NECESSARILY mean they're a frequent visitor at Court or well-known there.

And as for Lady Tavernant: what a great guess. Wrong, I'm afraid, but a great guess nonetheless. Almost wish I'd thought of her being the author myself. Right up there with Fee herself as the mysterious scribe. :}

So saith Ed. Who must have been eating his stamina-inducing somethings tonight, because he wasn't done yet. He moved straight on to Menelvagor's query: "Really, because I'd love to see info on this book, and what it contains: 'Why I Ride Men and Not Thrones', by Alusair. What were the reactions? Especially in Cormyr, by nobles, commoners, and family?"

Ed replies:

I'm glad you asked. (And in posts to eventually come, I'll happily talk about many of the titles other scribes are curious to know more about the contents of, too.)

For this particular book, I want to clear up some misconceptions, and this is a handy opportunity. It's NOT a sex manual or a randy "steamy confessions for all" tome.

In fact, the title of this book was almost the most salacious part of it. It was not a (forgive me, scribes) blow-by-blow account of Alusair's lovemaking or what she finds attractive in a bed-partner, it was a frank presentation of why she thought ruling a realm by gaining the trust and support of powerful or soon-to-be-powerful citizens on a personal, individual basis through shared experiences (NOT just lovemaking, but working side by side on shared tasks and projects for the betterment of the realm) was inherently superior to sitting on a throne ruling a populace by decrees, from a distance, through proxies (such as the Purple Dragons, the local Watch, etc.) Her Regency MIGHT have made this book a great irony from cover to cover, but didn't, because she behaved like that as a Regent, too (no, NOT bedding everyone, though she did from time to time couple with "key" persons, as seen in "The Long Road Home," my tale at the end of THE BEST OF THE REALMS Volume 2 - - but rather, establishing personal friendships with individuals of high and low station, all over the land, to, and listening to their complaints and suggestions and acting on them, rather than just manipulating them into being her local mouthpieces).

In fact, this book gained Alusair a LOT of support, all over Cormyr, because it was written in such an open, plain, emphatic style - - like someone standing talking to you, not in courtly "high speech" - - that everyone who dipped into it readily understood it, and because it had the ring of truth (the author really believed what she was writing), and the people liked the message. Some

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conservative nobles were horrified at the thought of "consorting with the lowest and most coarse," and others winced at the thought that THEIR tenants might now expect them to behave like this, too. However, darned near everyone else, from clergy to Purple Dragons to old shepherds and millers drinking in local taverns, approved highly (whether they believed she'd ever "drop her steel groinsheaths" for them or not).

Her parents admired her for writing it, and openly said so, liking her philosophy and praising it. (Tanalasta's reaction would of course have been to wince in private, and say nothing in public.) Courtiers are always diplomatic about royal writings (cue the Muppet movie THE FROG PRINCE, and the dignified announcement: "Prolonged applause").

And of course, the young nobles she rode with were proud and pleased, too, because they now had something to wave at their parents and say, "See? I know you've been hearing about her rutting with all of us - - well, THIS is what it's really all about! Saving the realm in the years ahead, so angry commoners don't decide Cormyr can get along quite well without our heads still decorating our necks!"

So saith Ed. Who's done yeoman service this fair even, dealing with divers queries, and now begs leave to go and sort and take out the garbage and the recycling.

So until next time,

love to all,

THO

On March 18, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, fellow scribes. I bring you another omnibus Ed answer, to the following queries:

First, from Jakk:

Hello, Ed, THO, and fellow scribes. It's me again, trying to tease a little more Cormyr lineage hints from the apparently airtight NDAs...

THO quote, re. a Feb 19th, 2006 Ed response to Nevorick about the Cormyrean kings Belmuth and Arathra: "If you're interested in setting a campaign way back during their times, you'll have to concoct a LOT of information about the wider Realms around Cormyr yourself, and there's a dark shadow hanging over the Forest Kingdom that Ed's trying to avoid saying too much about. If you're planning to have someone or someones around today who's directly descended from either of these, forget it. That same shadow handily eliminated that possibility, although there are "loose end" Obarskyrs from this century who COULD serve that purpose, especially if the descent was illegitimate and secretive. If you were just curious about the stories of Belmuth and Arathra (because of their nicknames, perhaps), I'm afraid that's just what Ed has to be so sketchy about." Okay, now for my question: Can Ed say anything more now about that "dark shadow" hanging over Cormyr? I'm assuming it's not Nalavarauthatoryl or the ghazneths; they're old news when this question was first asked in 2006. Could it be, pray tell, the shadow that blotted out the wondrous illumination that would have been a 3.5E Cormyr sourcebook? If, on the other hand, this shadow is less metaphorical, I'm even more interested... <sigh>"

Markustay then posted: "My best guess on that 'Shadow', Jakk, is that it has something to do with a very subtle curse that keeps the Obarskyr line lite of males.

The 'curse' itself may not be an actual curse - it could be something more insidious... like certain War-wizards 'pruning' the less-desirables from the lot, or even just keeping the numbers down to prevent civil war. I know of at least one War Wizard who killed a Cormyrian King to save Cormyr. And I'm only taking a shot-in-the-dark here because me thinks Ed might have another NDA regarding this one."

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Menelvagor then posted: "Regarding the shadow over Cormyr: could it be that this shadow has anything to do with the current (4e) king's nephew (I don't remember either of their names? It was mentioned in the FRCG that the king's nephew is quite evil. And if he wants to be king, it would make sense for him to kill off rivals."

Ed now responds:

Menelvagor, it would indeed make sense, and that's the obvious "adventure motivator" set up in the 4e Realms for DMs who want the nephew's bid for the throne to drive all sorts of adventuring fun in their campaigns.

However, that's a "modern" shadow. The shadow referred to by THO hanging over the reigns of Belmuth and Arathra is a quite different one.

Markustay, you're right that an NDA still forbids me from saying much about the shadow in question, and I'm afraid your guess as to its nature is wrong (but at least I can go so far as to confirm that).

So, Jakk, I CAN'T say much of anything more now about said dark shadow hanging over Cormyr - - except to once more confirm what it isn't.

It isn't Nalavarauthatoryl or the ghazneths, and it isn't a metaphor (or anything else) about something that may or may not have prevented the publication of a 3.5e Cormyr sourcebook. It IS "less metaphorical," so I'm afraid you are indeed going to be more interested . . . but left frustrated by my inability to say more at this time.

What I can say is that there are obviously future plans (that my even come to pass) to say more about this dark shadow, somewhere and somewhen to come, and that the NDA and my own coy evasiveness center on desires not to ruin that future chance to say more.

Watching Gods above and below, I sound like a weaseling politician. Ale for all, this St. Patrick's Day, and let's hope you all forget what I haven't said! :}

Er, so saith Ed. Who I know is BURSTING to say more, but certainly doesn't want to ruin the chances of a certain someone telling a specific tale about a particular dark shadow at work (at some time or times unspecified) in the Forest Kingdom of Cormyr.

Gads, this cryptospeak is contagious, isn't it?

We'd better (she purred, and winked once, slowly and languidly) switch to more non-verbal communication . . .

love to all,

THO

On March 19, 2009 THO said:- There is a local herald, Bannermere, but this is a new office held by a novice, a young, slender, brown-haired man originally from Berdusk, who is polite and rather shy, and derives most of his income by designing and limning signs and writing letters for locals (he is not a Crown herald). He keeps to Thunderstone, and interested clients come to see him; it's recently come to light (much to his embarrassment) that he secretly writes salacious chapbooks for sale in Scornubel and Waterdeep, including the popular "Rorel the Conquering Blade" series (in which the debonair, swirling-cloaked Rorel beds an endless series of willing women, often after dueling their craven and cruel wife-beating husbands). Interestingly, there's long been a rumour that the Rorel books were penned by the same anonymous hand that once presented the now-banned chapbook "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" to a receptive Suzail and even more eager Purple Dragon posts up and down the Realm, but a blushing and stammering

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Bannermere denies ever even dreaming of portraying the Dragon Queen in such a light. (Another rumour whispers that Filfaeril, who has been officially silent on the work, secretly enjoyed it very much and cajoled her royal husband into acting out the events of several of the encounters therein - - but rumour, like a barking dog, oft makes much more noise and arouses more ire than it in truth should.)

I have mentioned it in the drafts of several Cormyr-set novels, as one of those "in jokes" that the editors used to enjoy reading privately, and then prune before publication. By which I mean: they and I both knew such snippets were never going to see print, but I wrote them for fun (back in the dear dawn days of TSR, and up until quite recently at Wizards, one of the editors would discover such a screed, have a laugh over it, then print it out, stand on her chair in cubicle-land, clear her throat loudly, and then read the said steamy scene out loud for everyone.

It provided a few moments of amusement for most of the Books Department folks, and those who needed to concentrate hard whilst editing and didn't want to hear it were already hooked up to iPods or similar headphone and earbud devices that walled them away from such distractions. In those unpublished ("suppressed" if you will, but with my agreement and expectation that they would be edited out), I mentioned this specific fictitious salacious work as one in which Purple Dragons would laugh over, and then get very red-faced when Queen Filfaeril strolled past them as they stood guard together, AND as something court ladies or noblewomen would gossip and titter about - - and then subside into shocked silence when Queen Fee came upon them quickly and joined their conversation about it.

Publicly and officially, the Crown ignored the work, except to ban its possession by any Purple and Blue Dragon (something deliberately not enforced in private dwellings, only within guardposts, armories, barracks, naval bases, and fortresses such as High Horn) and to send undercover courtiers around the cities of Suzail, Marsember, and Arabel to quietly buy up all the copies they could find, and "disappear" them. The Court Wizard (Vangerdahast) then issued a decree that the said work contained "dangerous hidden magics that would enact a curse upon the reader," and banned its printing or copying out by hand, within the realm of Cormyr.

Publicly (aside from face to face meetings with individual nobles, as described above) Filfaeril ignored the existence of the work. It would be considered a grave breach of Court etiquette to mention its title to any Obarskyr, though personal friends of various royals know when they can ignore Court etiquette and when they should follow it. Filfaeril herself told some (shocked) noblewomen that she'd "quite enjoyed it," and "hoped to read a sequel, and see what further fancies the clever, clever author could IMAGINE." Tanalasta was too embarrassed to ever mention it to any of her fellow Obarskyrs (though a War Wizard reported to Vangerdahast that he found a copy under her mattress during his usual secret "checking for dangers" inspection, as well as finding copies in the possession of several personal maids and ladies-in-waiting to all three female Obarskyrs), Alusair discussed it frankly with both her mother and father (separately), Filfaeril and Azoun do indeed share a copy and have read it separately and together - - and have tried some of the scenes described therein together. Neither of them is inhibited, and as the ruling royals, THEY decide and set the morals of the realm, not the other way round (unlike in our real world, there aren't sole dominant clergies in Cormyr, and therefore the royal family isn' beholden to the opinion of this or that priest as to what's "good" or "proper" or "appropriate" behaviour, because the many differing views of the many differing priesthoods offset each other, as it were. In other words, the rumours that Filfaeril enjoyed the work are true.

The rumor that Bannermere wrote "Filfaeril Bound And Willing" is not true. The author IS someone long known at Court in Cormyr, but I think it's time for some fun; I'll leave it to scribes to guess the identity of the author, here in this thread, and give no hints - - but I WILL confirm when someone guesses right (and say so when a guess is wrong). To avoid repetitive "carpet bombing" guessing, let's limit it to three guesses per scribe. So, stare at all those Cormyrean faces, and ask yourself: who's secretly naughty, with pen in hand?

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So saith Ed, and here we are, many guesses later (but not the correct one, yet). As you know, Ed has very recently begun to provide some clues, and will continue to do so. Of which the next one is this: please bear in mind that the writer of the chapbook, and the person or persons responsible for printing multiple copies of it and beginning to circulate them, may well not be the same person at all.

Let the fun continue . . .

love to all,

THO

On March 23, 2009 THO said:- Hi, scribes. Sorry for the silence yesterday, and the brief nature of this post: I'm on assignment, and borrowing a library public access Net terminal to type this. Menelvagor, this is by no means a "proper" reply, but Laeral's "silver fire" will be sucked into the Weave (either to be lost forever, or to be snared by a god, including the possibility of it "drifting back to Mystra") if she's too long without a body.

And the Knight of the Gate has the right of it: in Cormyr, the Highknights and the War Wizards perform the functions of both "special ops" government military and paramilitary, and not-so-secret police/espionage government organizations. Though they aren't above hiring or manipulating (or even framing) adventurers, during such operations.

Of course, if nobles want to play the special ops/espionage game, they hire adventurers (if they're wise, through several layers of intermediaries, and with their own "house spies" watching over the hired adventurers).

Also, to Knight of the Gate, regarding heralds: very briefly, there are "heralds" (a Court staffer, paid by the ruler who hires them) and "the Heralds" (the Faerun-wide organization of High Heralds and lower "official" heralds under them). The first sort of local herald keeps records, records marriages, establishes seating orders at feast banquets and precedence during ceremonies, makes grand verbal announcements in the physical court, and so on. The second sort keeps the "true" genealogies and register and orders blazons (coats of arms), independent of all rulers, kingdoms, and the like. The Harpers have in the past been an arm of these Heralds, and the two groups still work closely and cordially together on a regular basis.

Or to put it colloquially, the first sort of herald is a ruler's barking dog; the second sort keeps all rulers in line, as far as displaying blazons and claiming inheritances/descent/claims/blood relationships goes.

Heh. So saith me.

(Ed will be back soon; he's been VERY busy these last few days.)

love to all,

THO

On March 23, 2009 THO said:- Purrrr...I love Knights who offer to service ladies. Their swords are always so bright and long and keen ... ohhhhhh... ahhh.

Ahem.

Knight of the Gate, Cormyr has BOTH sorts of heralds. The "lower h" heralds include Court (or Crown) heralds (each "local lord" has one, and there's a backup or second herald for each city [Suzail, Marsember, Arabel], plus a staff of six or seven heralds based in the Royal Court building, who travel to assist in investitures, carry proclamations to nobles, etc.) and private heralds (that is, heralds who work for nobles). These "local heralds" hold offices named for the

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settlement they're based in, so there's a High Horn, an Eveningstar, and so on. These are the sorts of heralds which members of the "court herald" prestige class detailed in POWER OF FAERUN would be part of.

There are also "capital H" Heralds of two sorts: the large, leading offices of that organization, such as Crescentcoat and Old Night (collectively known as the High Heralds), whose holders move around the Realms constantly, as necessary for their duties, and may pass through or even tarry in Cormyr - - and lower-ranking "capital H" heralds who are stationed in geographical areas and "responsible" for those areas (for instance, policing the misuse of heraldic blazons, which is why nobles or brigands have to be shrieking mad before they will even consider using someone else's badge or full coat of arms on their armor, to deceive witnesses as to who's doing nasty things whilst wearing that armor). I'm away from my notes and can't recall the names of these lower-ranking Heralds whose regions include Cormyr or part of Cormyr. Although the War Wizards, the Obarskyrs and most nobles, senior courtiers of Cormyr, and for that matter heralds of all sorts know who these Cormyr-responsible Heralds would be (I seem to recall that Starblade is one of them, covering southeastern Cormyr, but I may be mistaken; Garen Thal?), the general populace generally does not; they keep a low profile except when confronting someone who's breaking the rules of heraldry. They are chosen (evaluated, and dismissed if need be) by the High Heralds, by the way, not by any local ruler or government.

Ed of course has copious notes on the Heralds, both published and unpublished, but likes to keep them mysterious, too; we'll have to see how much he wants to reveal about Cormyr's Heralds (there were or are some long-standing fiction NDAs tied to some of them, which is why he tends to deflect attention to the local heralds and those six or seven traveling Court Heralds).

So saith me, again. Hurr HURR, and so forth.

love,
THO

On March 23, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, all.

Menelvagor, re this query of yours: "Did Alustriel later come to EI, and learn from him for some years?"

EXACTLY. Remember, EI's well over a thousand years old, and most of the Seven are hundreds of years old. Plenty of time for "raising."

love,
THO

--

Hoondatha, good questions all.

I know this is something that Ed and several female TSR staffers discussed in detail over a GenCon dinner, years ago (they were what might be called feminists, and were quite concerned that the POTENTIAL was there, in the game as then detailed, for the concerns you're raising . . . and the Code of Ethics meant the subject could even be alluded to, even if only to say "X and Y prevent Z and A for being used for personal exploitation of students," or something carefully "neutrally worded" as that.

I know that in our roleplaying, as Ed "ran" it, Laspeera kept VERY close watch over War Wizards possibly misusing their positions, and expected them to in turn watch over all other wizards in Cormyr (and, when they could, priests, though THAT was an ongoing cause of problems, thanks to "pushback" from all of the churches involved). What happens elsewhere in the Realms will have to left to Ed to answer, I'm afraid.

love,
THO

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On March 25, 2009 THO said:- Hi again, fellow scribes. Ed has been busy busy busy, but he's also been reading the posts from this thread that I shuttle along to him, and has sent some Realmslore replies, to whit:

Hi, everybody. Markustay, liches wear clothes for a variety of reasons. Zandilar is correct when she says habit, GoCeraf is right when he says many lich garments are enchanted, and provide a way for liches to carry more "ready" magic around on their persons for use (particularly defensive), and Wooly is correct re. both clothing providing a means of carting useful stuff around and for reasons of vanity (partially concealing their wasted bodies). however, there's a "crowning" reason, too: clothing provides a psychological "anchor" for liches, rooted in human nature and in the writings of early lichnee-attainment procedures by long, long-ago mages, right down to Nulathoe (who believed that retaining clothing and footwear slowed the "inevitable decay" of the physical body of the lich). So a lot of them are afraid of falling apart faster, and believe that clothing, however ragged, rotten, or "abbreviated," somehow provides a binding for the body that slows its deterioration. That's also why many liches LET clothing decay: although they may don new clothing OVER the old, rotting stuff, they seldom remove the garments they were wearing at attainment of lichdom, or donned right away after they "rose" as liches. Remember, all: there are no trivial questions, only trivial answers. :}

So saith Ed. Who will have more to say soon, I'm thinking as I look at my inbox.
love to all,
THO

On March 25, 2009 THO said:- Hi, Menelvagor. Zandilar has pretty much "hit it" correctly in her reply. Here's the thing: "feminism," as we know it, is a concept unfamiliar to folk in the Realms. They know all about cronyism and corruption, and all about men who oppress women (as a fact of human nature, not as any sort of "syndrome" or necessarily "wrong for society in general" thing). Wife-beaters are considered bad, and idiots or crazies to boot (if you were a slaver, would you think highly of a slave-dealer who damaged the goods?). Azoun DOES enjoy sex, as often as he can get it. He DOES enjoy the company of women, both spirited intellectuals flirting or disputing with him, and in bed (or on a saddle - - highly uncomfortable, that; I don't recommend any real-world experiments; trust me, I've made them for you :) or handy patch of ground, flat roof, whatever). However, he was by no means following some sort of equal rights or affirmative action hiring process; he was putting into positions the best people he thought he could find (and he was largely right in his judgements). Remember, he can only go by the people he's gotten to know, well enough to see them under stress, test them, etc. . . . and that meant a lot of women, more than men. He needs people who are capable AND LOYAL, and he's satisfied himself that all of these women he put into positions were loyal to the realm (not necessarily personally to him, so he's not a self-serving despot). Male nobles tend to be hostile towards the Obarskys, and male commoners he has a hard time getting to know; he CAN'T take long periods "off the throne, in among the people in a magical disguise, getting to know the real people" without Vangey's help, and he doesn't quite trust Vangey, Vangey won't give that help ("I spent years suffering at your side all around the realm so you'd learn this already; I've DONE it, stay on that throne and DO YOUR JOB - - oh, and your crown's

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askew") [see CORMYR: A NOVEL for a glimpse of those years].

So he grabbed the best people he knew, and put them into positions he needed filled. Yes, he's admirably free of the misogyny many male nobles of his generation display some openly (and his appointments gained him a lot of quiet support and admiration from the noble wives of these same blustering, bullying male nobles, who saw his naming of women to so many important posts as good for the realm AND giving their daughters some hope for better, more meaningful lives - - as in, lives with careers in them beyond "breeding our own horses" and "painting or sewing or weaving splendid things").

Azoun would not have thought of himself as doing anything "for women," collectively. He would have seen himself as "doing the right thing," in each individual "hire," and we know from his statements on several occasions that he thought older generations of Cormyreans were idiots, who harmed the quality of life in the realm greatly, by "wasting" the skills and potential of so many women, noble and common.

In all of this, it should be borne in mind that most women of Cormyr, no matter how ambitious and capable, tend to be more subtle than the Alusair sorts: they rule by tongue and manipulation and forethought, more than by swinging a sword from a saddle and trying to "out-boy the boys." (Not that one approach is inherently superior to the other; I'm just pointing out that in our game adventure and fictional "radar," we would focus more on the action sorts, and less on the quieter, more behind-the-scenes manipulations.)

I'll post more about this when I get the chance. The short answer would be: Azoun would be initially bewildered if you asked him if he thought he was a feminist. Once you explained the concept, he would say he was not; rather, he was a pragmatist doing the right thing for the realm where so many predecessors had not because they were blind to the unused talents of so many women of the realm. Some observers would say that regardless of what Azoun thought, his actions could be seen as the largest steps yet in supporting feminist values (Zandilar, your comments re. inheritance are a larger subject I'll have to tackle in another post; every family has their own tradition of inheritance, and it's NOT always [but is usually] the male line - - and because of this, ANY monarch who tried to change those rules would have a REAL fight on their hands, because each and every noble family would view it as a personal attack on THEIR house), in the recent history of Cormyr.

That's all for now. As it happens, I'm busy writing a scene in fiction not set in the realms, where the poor male protagonist is very much being dominated by a woman. However, it's keeping him alive, so I suppose he shouldn't complain. :}

So saith Ed. Creator of the Realms, and deep thinker about many, many more facets of it than any of the rest of us have thought through.

love to all,
THO

On March 27, 2009 THO said:- Thanks, Damian. Off to Ed these questions go.

Myself, I think the answer to Question 1 is that this is Eric's baby (with Ed's approval, of course; Mr. Boyd always called Ed about such things, because he's a friend and a professional, and because he cares deeply about the Realms and knows full well a tapestry turns out better when everyone working on it knows and agrees on details here and there, and some end results.

I suspect some of the trios of gods (such as the Triad) were named by Eric and George Krashos, guiding others into thinking and writing of those deities in that manner. Some of the trios (Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul, the nature trio, and the Gods of Knowledge, for example) were definitely linked that way by Ed, from the beginning.

Hmm; I know we're straying into territory Ed likes to keep mysterious so as to give DMs maximum

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freedom (he has said a time or two that the game should "handle religion softly so as to leave players and DMs, who are real people who may well have very real religious beliefs, the maximum comfort in tailoring 'their' Realms for their own best enjoyment"). I'm quoting here from some design notes he wrote in 1979, BTW.

love,
THO

--

Hi, all, again.

Markustay, I'm looking at one of my old player's maps (Ed used to hand these out on occasion during play, with some features "known" and labelled and correctly mapped, others mapped but not named, and blank spots where our knowledge didn't extend to), and there's definitely a lake in the Evermoors in a 1981-or-so map Ed drew. So it's "in his original." No name, of course, because our characters didn't go there then, and I can't yet find the later, more extensive maps we were issued after we found a hidden cache of maps in Scornubel and became "sort-of experts" on that region.

So we'll see what Ed says, but yes, it IS his (pre-published-Realms) lake.

love,
THO

--

Yes, TSR provided Karen with photocopies of every map Ed had sent in to them (until they cried halt, when they ran out of empty cubicles to pile all the stuff Ed was sending up in), plus copies of all of their own generated-for-adventure-modules maps. She created the rest by meticulously reading all of the novels and adventures and working out travel times and therefore distances, etc.

Over the years since, Ed has provided TSR (and later Wizards) with many more maps, though they have tended to be of small locales or cities (Crimmor, Tarmalune) rather than larger regions. Ed's preferred mapping style is akin to Fonstad (mountains are drawn in, in a perspective view, imparting some "feel" for the land), but he does professional-quality topographical maps when he has the time and inclination, and delivered at least one of these, of an orc-infested mountain pass, for SILVER MARCHES (it wasn't used).

Ms. Fonstad is, of course, justly famous for her atlases of the works of Tolkien, McCaffrey, and Donaldson, among others. She attended one of the Milwaukee GenCons as a guest, but unfortunately passed away some years ago.

love,
THO

On March 30, 2009 THO said:- Hello again, all.

Markustay, Ed confirms that Greentree Haven is JUST inside the outermost trees on the western verges of northwesternmost Ardeepforest (or, if you prefer the later name, "Ardeep Forest").

love,
THO

On March 31, 2009 THO said:- Erik, I mean every word of it, and more. My chief personal delight in the published Realms is when I get to read great new stories set in "my" world (now, of course, really "our" world) that I didn't write. I LOVED Downshadow.

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(Actually, I've loved all of the books I've read thus far in this series, though all in quite different ways. Jaleigh's City of the Dead is magnificent and great fun, too, but it's very different from Downshadow.)

So you EARNED all that praise, my friend, and I hope you get many more chances, in the Realms and in your own fantasy settings, from other publishers, to earn a lot more. If you write something that I can walk into a bookstore and order or pluck off the shelf a copy of, I'll be buying and hurrying home to read. Just as I always hurry home to read Elaine's stuff, Realms or not, and - -

No, I'm NOT going to start in on the long, long list. This is about you; this is your moment, and deservedly so.

Scribes of the Realms, if you turn your back on this book, because it's 4e Realms or for any other reason, you're missing out on a darned good read (and re-read!) yarn.

Heck, when it comes right down to it, you can enjoy this book whilst pretending it isn't 4e at all, but instead only about ten years ahead of the LAST time you nosed around Waterdeep, whenever in your 3e campaign or fiction reading that was. Or you can read it and enjoy it and not care about when it's set, or even look up and say, "So this is 4e Realms? Okay, fine, if it's all like this book, bring it on!"

I have 80,000 books crammed into my home, and I work in a public library and am board chair of a (different) library system, and have toiled in public libraries for pay for 35 years-plus, now; I have read a LOT of fantasy books. In one recent year I judged the World Fantasy Award, and literally read thousands (yes, no exaggeration: thousands, plural) of fantasy tales published that year. Right now, I'm judging the Sunbursts, Canada's sf and fantasy awards, and reading another year's truckload of works. So I get to read, ah, much fantasy.

And there's never enough GOOD fun "cracking good read" fantasy. For me, this is one such book, so it's a "must-have" for my library. An eternal literary classic? No. A darned good read, that I'm proud to have set in the Realms? YES.

Erik, if *I* owned Wizards and ran the book publishing program, I'd already be hounding you for another book. In hardcover, just as soon as you could get it done. You and Paul Kemp and Jaleigh and one or two others are the bright lights who should be leading the charge onto the general fantasy bestseller lists, not just "oh, that gaming fantasy stuff" subgenre recognition. I wish, oh Watching Gods above how I wish, that Brian Thomsen hadn't died when he did. SO much stopped with him. You getting a Tor Book fantasy debut was one of those things, and in these current economic hard times for the publishing industry, getting that back on track is going to take some time. I laid some groundwork at Ad Astra this weekend . . . but in the meantime, we all have DOWNSHADOW to enjoy.

Scribes, get out there and enjoy it!

So saith Ed. Who means every word, believe me.

love to all, and (heh, wink) a pull-open-my-gown salute to Erik!

THO

On March 31, 2009 THO said:- Ahhh, Furjur. Where to begin?

Um, ask Ed, and get back this update on my scanty old notes:

Okay, take the character portrayed by Ricky Gervais in the movie STARDUST, for the fast sales-patter speech combined with the brightly optimistic manner ("I can get you one of those!"). Boundless energy, cheerfully dishonest without ever ACTING sly, always with three or four good ideas for turning a profit (perhaps far in the future) being worked on in advance. Put these into the

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stereotypical stage Fagin: filthy hat and long coat, "fingerless mittens"/gloves, fairly thin. Once fat, but now retains only a fattish face and broad shoulders, with folds of loose skin hanging off a now thin and supple, even bony in place, body. Huge nose, broken many times in fights, so is a very battered beak. Always smiling, very bright green eyes, the "fattish" of the face comes from plump cheeks and a very large jaw, and there's a long, wagging "spike tuft" goatee beard JUST on the point of the chin (rest of jaw and cheeks clean-shaven), daggerboard sideburns, and untrimmed, very busy eyebrows. Hair is brown shot through with steel gray.

Furjur CAN'T stop making jokes and smartass remarks; his speech is endlessly peppered with them, even when inappropriate (quips about the deceased at a funeral, for example). For years he was a panderer who provided pretty lasses of particular builds and hair hues to wealthy clients, and was so kindly and fatherly that he was actually beloved by most of the women he worked with (though his days of traveling the Realms with a dozen of them are in his past). Almost twenty of them are now his "de facto" (unmarried) wives, all over the Realms, in taverns and inns and shops he "set them up in" (and they form a network of warm waiting beds, contraband refuges, and message-drops for him). His onetime work as a panderer left him a skilled hairstylist, perfumer, cosmetician, midwife, garment alterer, and applier-of-disguises. Furjur wears many gaudy rings, most of them set with colored glass rather than gems, but worth a few gp for the gold in them (and he won't hesitate to use them as currency). He wears and bears a few defensive and protective magic items, always has a few potions of healing in steel vials somewhere in his effects or shoved down his boots, and always wears an earring of regeneration. He pretends to know nothing about magic and never to trade in it, so careless and casual foes won't expect him to be harboring any. He also regularly uses at least one magical means of spider climbing, of providing the equivalent of a flashlight (small, aimable beam of light), and of suddenly producing thick, billowing smoke in a small area, to aid him in escaping or "throw off" hostile missile weapon aiming.

Most of Furjur's life story is NDA because it's linked to planned FR projects that may or may not ever happen, so I'll leak it only as such revelations become possible.

So saith Ed. Who is still scrambling to finish something, scribes, but is always interested in imparting more lore.

love to all,
THO

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