



I LIFE IN THE REALMS

So what's it like, living in the Realms?

The flippant answer is “More exciting than you would like.” Given the prevalence of wars, casual daily violence, and widespread natural or magical disasters, it's hard to see things otherwise—yet Faerûnians do. Unless hardship or outright disaster lands in their laps, they tend to regard such unpleasantness as happening to “outlanders, far away,” often as a result of crazed or evil rulers, bad mistakes, and “the will of the gods.”

Deities are paramount in Faerûnian life. Everybody believes in all the gods and worships every god (even if only in token “Please don't frown upon

me in the days ahead” veneration). The existence, power, and influence of the divine are unquestioned by all sane beings, so no god ever need be taken strictly on faith. Specific directives given by mortal clergy might be taken on faith—or more often, questioned or reinterpreted—but everyone knows the gods are real.

Atheists and agnostics are rare indeed, yet organized religion doesn't dominate daily life because ordinary folk, and not just priests, know that divine aims, deeds, utterances, and desires are complex, confused, and sometimes contradictory. The wants of one god necessarily conflict

with another (Talos of storms and destruction versus Lathander of creation); and mortals can never perfectly understand what the gods are up to. Moreover, it's understood that deities are fallible and can't govern the future, though they work to correctly foresee and influence it.

As a result, most mortal lives are balanced between daily needs and obligations, personal desires ("I want my own farm, someday"), and the endless great game (as Elminster once described it) of trying to advance the influence and aims of this deity and thwart or lessen the influence and aims of that one, so as to tug the Realms closer to what you personally want it to be. There are less noble aims.

RACIAL VIEWPOINTS

Humans numerically and culturally dominate the civilized surface Realms. Most humans hate and fear creatures they deem monsters, such as beholders, illithids, yuan-ti, drow, and goblinkin. "Goblinkin" refers to hobgoblins, orcs, goblins, and their lookalikes; most humans neither know nor care about actual species differences. In the words of the long-ago King Roreld of Athalantar, "If it looks like an orc, it's an orc." Many humans mistrust half-orcs and all elves, and a few mistrust all nonhumans, but in Faerûn, most humans grew up dwelling or trading with elves, half-elves, dwarves, halflings, and gnomes, and so accept them as fellow citizens.

The folk of the Dales have typical backland human attitudes, hating and fearing half-orcs because they can't distinguish them from the orc mercenaries used so often by Zhentil Keep in Daggerdale. Some also mistake half-orcs for the beast-men (ogres) of Thar, having never seen real ogres (and lived to tell the tale), and will reach for the nearest weapon.

Almost all humans, elves, and dwarves in the Realms mistrust small, non-familial groups of orcs (four or fewer), and will be openly hostile to larger groups. As an old upcountry saying plainly states: "Orcs is trouble." (Or, in full: "Orcs is *always* trouble.")

Orcs are born fighters, which just keep coming back for more. (And, the smaller inner voices of most non-orcs add silently, orcs will kill you *and then eat you*. Some of them won't even wait until you're dead!)

Individual, urban-dwelling (in predominantly human trading cities) halfling and gnome families gain acceptance by making themselves useful in the eyes of other citizens. They are the chief source of small, clever inventions (intricate double locks, fold-down doorstops, removable boot scrapers that double as tools for other purposes, heat-reflecting stove hoods and fans whose blades are turned by the heat of cooking fires, and so on). They do the laundry, fix small everyday objects, make speedy deliveries, and seek and find what paying humans are missing (like a window catch of this precise style to replace yon broken one, or a dagger to exactly match this rapier, or an identical rug to this one that must be hastily gotten rid of—only one *without* a large bloodstain right in the center of it, please).

Urban-dwelling gnomes in the Realms usually seek to be the quiet collectors and refiners of good ideas from all cultures, keep low profiles, and make good livings trading useful items. Gnomes make the majority (and the best) of spectacles, magnifying glasses, spyglasses, and other devices involving glass lenses. Gnomes have perfected intricate nonmagical locks and hinges, and mastered large-scale paper-making and bookbinding. They are experts on waterproof garments, portable containers for scrolls, and flat paper, and are building bigger and better looms for everyday cloth. Many gnomes are working to perfect ever thinner and more flexible wire, and they experiment with fashioning everyday items from it. This "quietly, quietly" manner has led gnomes to being the truly forgotten folk of the Realms, but also tends to make almost everyone view them as harmless, helpful, and friendly.

Across Faerûn, "everyone knows" that elves flit from one delight to the next diversion, and they crave and master the most beautiful music, dancing, and visual arts linked to flowing, growing life. It is likewise commonly held that dwarves are stolid, stubborn hard workers, and master forgers, who have unequaled skill in working stone and metal, creating new alloys, and deep, swift mining.

Of course, as everyone in the Realms who really thinks about such things knows, all of these widely known views are stereotypes and generalizations, with thousands upon thousands of exceptions.