

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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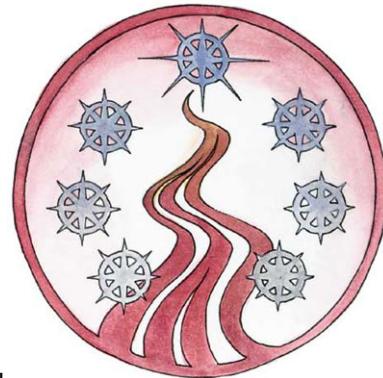
The Hunt for the Lost Spell

By Ed Greenwood

*How and where and when did the **Forgotten Realms** start? What's at the heart of Ed Greenwood's creation, and how does the Grand Master of the Realms use his own world when he runs **D&D** adventures for the players in his campaign? "Forging the Forgotten Realms" is a weekly feature wherein Ed answers all those questions and more.*

here's a good reason one of the goddess Mystra's honorifics is "Our Lady of Mysteries." Most folk in the Realms believe the "mysteries" refer to magic itself, the Art that is a mystery to those who haven't the gift (innate natural ability) to wield it, and a rich and endless cornucopia of mysteries (that is, hidden lore and unknowns that must be conquered through experimentation) to those who do.

All of that is right and true, but there are other mysteries, too. They're sometimes called "the Deeper Mysteries" or "the Higher Mysteries" by priests, sages, and tutoring wizards who are trying to sound grand. These include understanding the essential nature of various creatures, and of the gods themselves—and of the treasure hunts Mystra and Azuth liked to craft for their most ardent faithful. Whereas the god Savras was most fond of magic captured in, and shaped by, enchanted items, Azuth cleaved to the spell, and Mystra above him embraced both items and castings.



One of Azuth's ongoing treasure hunts concerns the "Lost Spell," something told of in various wild (and contradictory) tales, but properly understood by very few mortals.

The Chosen of Mystra are, of course, among those who do understand, and it is from Alustriel's conversations in Silvermoon with those of her mages she most trusted that we know the details of the Hunt for the Lost Spell.

The Lost Spell

Azuth crafted this magic and hid fragments of it in many books of magic that he then caused to be scattered across the Realms.

Each fragment is a line or couplet of an incantation, accompanied by a glyph that was to be drawn on one of the caster's palms with the fingers of the caster's other hand as that part of the incantation was spoken aloud (rather than written out or inscribed).

When all the spell fragments are assembled and put in the right order—and according to Alustriel, some sequences of ordering are obvious to anyone who can speak or read Common, whereas others aren't obvious at all and must be discovered by experimentation—the spell works. Alustriel says the tales that speak of the skin of the caster briefly glowing, and a small, curling puff of blue smoke arising out of the caster's hands and mouth, when the spell "goes off," are correct.

Neither Alustriel nor any other Chosen will confirm how many fragments exist across the Realms, but down the years, most sages have agreed that there are sixteen—and all sources claim there are at least twelve.

Legend holds that the Lost Spell can be discovered an infinite number of times, works for a given caster only once, and that if any of the fragments are destroyed or altered, Mystra and Azuth will know, and they will cause a replacement fragment to come into being—in a book somewhere in the Realms.

Ostable of Athkatla, in recent years, and Sememmon of the Zhentarim, in earlier days, are among those wizards who claimed to have owned and perused grimoires for years before a spell fragment just appeared one day,

without the book being disturbed or their noticing, for them to discover on a formerly blank page, or even written over part of an existing spell but in ink of contrasting hue, the next time they opened the tome.

The Lost Spell has one effect: It grants a second life. Either it benefits the caster or a caster-touched spell recipient, and does so either immediately (if death has occurred or is happening) or in the future.

What It Does

Most often, the caster benefits. When, at some future time, they die, they promptly spring back to life hale, hearty, and whole—that is, with all wounds and diseases healed, missing bits restored, poisoning gone, curses ended, and at full hit points—in a locale and in conditions where they won't immediately be slain again. So oxygen-breathers won't appear at the bottom of the sea, adventurers won't come back to the jaws or belly of the dragon or the inside of the gelatinous cube, and so on.

Moreover, they reappear untrammelled (free of chains, cages, and other restraints), with a full minute of "frozen time" (akin to a *timestop*) wherein they can do things but every being and item around them is frozen in mid-movement. The spell makes them aware of the length of time they have. Typically, casters use this to ready weapons, flee, or position themselves just so. The minute ends abruptly and prematurely the instant they attack another living creature or unleash a magic item or finish the casting of another spell.

All these conditions and benefits pertain to a spell recipient enjoying the Lost Spell's effects in the future. The only difference between a caster and a spell recipient is that a dead caster obviously can't cast the Lost Spell on themselves, but they can successfully cast it on a dead recipient, if they can touch some part of that recipient—even a hair or sweat clinging to an item that is separated from the recipient's body by a great distance, part of a recipient that has been long separated from the rest of them (such as a preserved severed finger or collection of nail clippings), or scrap of a recipient whose body has been sundered and scattered.

No saving throws apply; the Lost Spell always works. Just once, per caster.

Conceivably, a given individual could receive any number of Lost Spells cast by others, and if they are a spellcaster, also cast one themselves—but no one except the gods knows if anyone has ever benefited from multiple Lost Spells. And on this point, like many another, the gods aren't talking.

Elminster's reply, when asked directly, was: "My, what wonderful weather the Stormhorns have been enjoying this last tenday! And the potatoes, this year, bid fair to be a crop that will make carts groan under the weight of what's brought in!"



The Hunt

Human (and elven, dwarven, and so on) nature being what it is, anyone known to possess a fragment of the Lost Spell regrettably but inevitably becomes a target for robbery or outright attack, so lies are many ("Any suggestion that I have such a thing is ridiculous and wholly inaccurate, but my foe Tasagundar, now, has two fragments, I'll have you know!") and truths are fleeting—as in, wizards hide or get rid of books in a hurry after they become known as the owners of a fragment or two. Some have even faked their own deaths and assumed new names and identities to escape the harassment.

Many mages deface or tear relevant pages out of books they find to contain fragments of the Lost Spell (to either conceal what they have from others, or to deny the benefits of the Lost Spell to rival mages), or that contain "strange magical writings that suddenly appeared out of nowhere" (on the general principle that such things must be perilous, perhaps a curse visited on them from afar, or the first stage of a long-hidden menace of that book that will progress if left unchecked).

That said, Deneir and Oghma are as interested in books of arcane lore as Mystra and Azuth, so certain books—the two tomes at Candlekeep known to contain lore, and the carved book of stone that stands like a great statue in the Cavern of the Binder in the northeastern Giant's Run Mountains—are magically renewed and made whole again whenever damaged, and magically return to their places if stolen and carried off. These books might be considered pieces of the Lost Spell guaranteed to all, being three different parts of the spell that are repeated in many other places. One of them is thought by many sages to be the first part of the Lost Spell, and is as follows:

An incantation reading "Hathaero delaerlith aumraunro slareed/For in the time of my greatest need" accompanied by a symbol that we real-world observers might describe as a circle filled by what you might call a sharp musical notation (if we're musically inclined), the pound key (if we've had to press buttons on a telephone to enter something automated), or the hash tag (for those of us enjoying social media). The diagonal up and down strokes of the symbol touch but do not cross the inner side of the circle, and it is drawn circle first, then those two up and down strokes are drawn left to right and from the top down, then the two shorter horizontal cross strokes are placed left to right and the uppermost first. After that, the circle is drawn a second time precisely atop the first.

This first fragment is recorded as being on the bottom half of a hitherto-half-blank right-hand page near the middle of a tome in the library of Candlekeep known as *Darender's Compendium of Wizards of Note in Tethyr*. (It is also thought to be, or have been at various times, in at least sixty other books across Faerûn.) The other Candlekeep book known to contain a fragment of the Lost Spell is *Old Families of Mulmaster* by Lalruth Morldrym, written in 1332 DR, but either the nature of the fragment it contains has changed from time to time, or several sages' accounts contain deliberate misinformation.

The hunt for the Lost Spell has been going on, covertly and by only a few wizards at a time, since 1102 DR or earlier. In the early 1400s DR, seeking the Lost Spell fell sharply out of fashion—as fear and mistrust of all magic was at its height—but a belief arose in the 1360s DR that the Lost Spell might offer great power to wizards, making the magic they cast potent indeed. By the 1370s DR, the hunt was widespread and going on in earnest, with many mages killing rival spellcasters, but recently it has either waned or gone underground again.

Yet as Elminster cautions, "Proceedings that go quiet cannot be trusted to also have become rare, or in hiatus, or safer. The opposite is usually true." He noted that many of the boldest "bad mages" may be emboldened because they're trusting in the Lost Spell that's riding them to save them from death. Once.

There are even rumors of a secret society or exclusive club of wizards formed in Amn, that meet in Waterdeep, Amn, and Sembia, who call themselves the Once-Dead, and they work together on business ventures (such as hiring adventurers to recover old magic from tombs and the Underdark) or to foil shared foes.

Elminster warns that talk of the Once-Dead producing false fragments of the Lost Spell to confound others seeking to assemble it are true. He observed that compelling a member of this society to provide the true and complete spell might be the best way to gain it.

Of course, there remains the challenge of how to manage such a compulsion . . .

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, and he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.