

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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The Lone Wizard

Adventurer Rescuer

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.*

We can't all afford to attend large (or small) gaming conventions. Some of us can't even spare the time to attend regular gaming sessions at our local hobby shop—if we still have a local hobby shop, or ever did. Some of us can't even find nearby fellow gamers. We can certainly reach out through the Internet to find people we can play with, all over the world, but I mean friends we can get together with directly so that we can hang out and chat and settle down into an ongoing, relatively stable **D&D** campaign.

Local gamers may already have that precious thing and don't want to risk its survival by taking in new additions—you, for example—or may have found a style of play that suits them just fine, but isn't what you're looking for.

Perhaps you can find only one other roleplaying gamer (with the possible limited availability of a parent, sibling, or coworker you can lean on to be an X Factor—that is, they won't roleplay, but you can ask them, "Does the dragon/king/guildmaster say yes, or no?" and let their whim "roleplay" a binding answer).

If so, a one-on-one (one player and one Dungeon Master) campaign may be just the thing for you.

What I have in mind can also be an ideal, short, side campaign for player characters who wield arcane magic as members of an adventuring band, in a larger group of **D&D** players.

It can readily accommodate up to three players who are roleplaying rivals or friends (or fellow apprentices to nonplayer character wizards—who perhaps go missing or get dramatically destroyed as the campaign begins). I know it can, because the "Lone Wizard" is something I've run a time or two over more than three decades of DMing the Realms, and all involved have had great fun with it.

Here's the setup: The player or players portray rival or friendly novice mages (or the aforementioned "Lone Wizard") in a city, building mastery of the Art through research, experimentation, sneaking into libraries to check things, watching what happens when others use magic, and hiring adventurers to procure possible magical components ("eye of newt, tongue of king, haunted armor suit, bathtub ring") or ingredients for spell ink formulae.

Though they'll spend much of their time working out incantations and spellcasting details and processes (describing and discussing matters face to face with the DM), their characters' lives in the city and the activities they participate in ("This spell requires a dead man's toenail! Where am I going to get—? Sigh, off to the graveyard at nightfall. Again.") will inevitably draw them into some adventures. They could have confrontations with lawkeepers who show up to stop someone digging in the graveyard or who are investigating reports of mysterious explosions accompanied by purple or lime green flashes of light in upper rooms of hitherto-quiet rooming houses. Or maybe the characters are dealing with mysterious spies stalking anyone who shows any interest in, or aptitude for, magic.

Without much of a band of adventurers for support—or the dubious support of two or three novice magelings trying to keep each other alive as they stumble through misadventures armed with only a few cantrips and a dagger and staff or two—these arcane spellcaster player characters can slowly advance as wizards, forever balancing the need to make coins enough to eat against the risks of raising their public profiles and becoming targets of public suspicion (and possible harassment by the authorities). Imagine an officious War Wizard (one such, Glathra Barcantle, features in my recent Sage of Shadowdale trilogy—or a DM could create someone less

capable and more comical, like the various authorities faced by the various versions of Zorro, down the years) dogging the player characters' footsteps and trying to catch them at something that could be deemed seditious or that might help traitors to the Crown. Or perhaps an authority figure elsewhere in the Realms is trying to capture or blackmail player character wizards into working their Art on behalf of a local ruler (which could make a quite a good campaign, with the unwilling or bumbling "secret agent" of the Crown getting caught up in all sorts of adventures. Call him, ah, Chuck).

If the adventurer is a sorcerer or warlock, the roleplaying possibilities (experimentations or making and maintaining pacts) are not only lush, they're almost forced on the player.

But things can work more quietly, especially if neither player nor DM especially enjoys prolonged and bloody combat, with the plodding wizard player character.

I laid the groundwork for how a sequence of fairly simple magic could become the process for crafting magic items or building lasting and complex magical effects (wards that guard where your wizard lives or hides treasures, for example) in the "building block" spells I presented in the 2nd Edition sourcebook *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical*.

And there's no rule—anywhere at all—that says cautious experimentations and incremental development of magical effects have to be boring.

Any DM worth his or her salt can keep such a campaign grippingly interesting by having magical mysteries beset characters on all sides. Tension can be heightened by mysterious spies who lurk and watch at the most crucial or intimate moments—and then withdraw, doing nothing more. Yet.

"Time pressure" can be heaped on characters by introducing real-life mundane needs such as meeting the rent. The wizard might also make enemies or attract the attention of those happy to manipulate or coerce spellcasters to their own ends, or even "frame" the wizard for their misdeeds.

And, of course, the studious character could suddenly possess a secret or a magical bauble that swiftly causes him or her to be chased by darned near everyone in the kingdom. This secret or item could reveal a hidden side of the world all around (like the protagonist in his office at the beginning of *The Matrix*). Picture a would-be wizard who's grown up in Suzail or Waterdeep or Athkatla thinking dragons are creatures who sleep inside mountains thankfully far, far away in distant wilderlands of the Realms—who is abruptly caught up in, and aware of, a game played by hidden dragons in the very city the wizard is in, and seemingly everywhere else, every day. Erin Evans enticed readers of *The God Catcher* with that delicious concept, and it can serve DMs wonderfully the way she used it, or in other ways that will make a campaign interesting. The Knights of Myth Drannor once met a harried merchant traveling the Realms guarding a strongchest that they finally forced open—to reveal the talking and very sentient gigantic severed undead head of the black dragon the wizard was unwillingly serving, doing its bidding in a protracted attempt to seize or build a new draconic body for it.

Almost any sort of monster could be "bound into" (and unwittingly released from) a spellbook that a Lone Wizard stumbles across, involving that character in just about any sort of quest the DM desires. Perhaps the quest involves searching wizard's tomb after wizard's tomb, all of them mini-dungeons incorporating any new monsters, traps, and magic items a DM happens across . . . as, say, the Cult of Dragons starts to pursue the hapless adventuring mage.

A "mastering magic, alone" campaign that doesn't force such dramatic adventures on a player (who, after all, may well be your younger sibling or kindly parent who just doesn't have a taste for dramatic violence) might be a painfully slow and placid campaign for some, with combat rare or nonexistent, but for someone who wants a more atmospheric one-on-one play experience, it can be memorable **D&D** indeed.

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.