

Introduction

KJW - Since joining these boards I have seen numerous threads discussing and usually praising the merits of solo campaigns. After contributing to many of these threads, I felt that one thread that truly fleshed out solo campaigns would be of considerable use to many DMs. I contacted Illion the Red for assistance, mainly because Illion's contribution to previous threads discussing solo campaigns was always phenomenal. Both of us are fairly experienced DMs and run Group Campaigns, but we are also both married and have run a staggering number of solo campaigns for our wives. Thus all that follows comes from experience and a deep appreciation for the magic of solo campaigns.

Illion the Red – As KJW mentioned, I too, have a passion for solo campaigns as well as a number of years of experience with them. In fact, the homebrew world I am currently running for my Group campaign has the cities and regions developed from a myriad of solo campaigns dating back as far as 1997. I have found solo campaigns to be richly rewarding in roleplaying and nearly every other form of gameplay. When KJW contacted me about this project, I jumped at the opportunity to collaborate with someone who not only shares my passion for the topic, but also always managed to hit upon aspects of solo campaigns that I had not considered or had neglected. I truly hope you find this guide as helpful as working on it has been.

Why a Solo Campaign?

Solo campaigns arise from two situations – desire or necessity. Desire usually is a result of having been part of a solo campaign and wanting to once again enjoy the experience. Necessity often results from a DM having only one player or the DM needing to run a player separate from the group for reasons important to the campaign. These reasons could include providing an introduction to the campaign world or maybe to teach a new player the rules of the game. Necessity will often lead to desire as many players quickly become enamored with solo campaigns.

A solo campaign is often quite different from other D&D campaigns. solo campaigns tend to be more intimate with far stronger character development, more complex story lines, and incredible roleplaying depth. There are a number of factors that contribute to this, but the primary one is the simple fact that everything revolves around a single character. Once freed from the constraints of a Group Campaign, there is far more freedom for the DM and the Solo PC to create something truly special.

Beyond the potential for great roleplaying opportunities, many DMs and players find that solo campaigns are just plain fun. Without anyone to share the spotlight, a player will often find the ability to directly influence the pace and style of play to significantly enhance the game beyond what a Group Campaign is capable of achieving.

Solo campaigns provide a near perfect opportunity for both the DM and the player to try out new ideas and explore options that may have not been explored previously. In short, it's a time to take some chances and see what happens.

We would be thrilled to have other DMs who run solo campaigns post additional advice or ideas. Additionally, any questions or issues are welcomed as well.

Table of Contents

Original Guide to Solo Campaigns-Illion the Red & KJW (1-8)

Breaking Your Own Rules - KJW (80)

Building an Organization - KJW (190, 202-203)

Critique on Guide's Analysis of Wealth - The Hive Custodian (71)
Dungeons - Ormiss (89)
Failed Solo Campaigns - KJW (85)
Fully Solo Campaigns - Illion the Red (79)
Handouts - KJW (103)
Narrations - Ormiss (36)
NPCs, DMPCs, & Romance - Ormiss (76)
Prologues - Ormiss (42)
Romance Entanglements-KJW (Post 18)
Solo Campaigns and Epic Play - Illion the Red (170)
Specialization & Attention - Ormiss (72)

Discussions

How to 'Affect' the Player - (91-92, 98-101)
How to Start a Solo Campaign (137-143)
Music (116-121)
Pre-Published Adventure for Solo Campaigns (129-136)
Discussion of Guiding v. Railroaded PCs (193-195)

Campaign Examples

ajb47 (155)
Almastal_Moonglow (96)
Gilgaer (54)
Gnomemade (153, 159, 163)
Illion the Red (Post 21)
KJW (Post 9, 14, 40, 43, 122, 175)
Mindlich (69)
Ormiss (34, 113)
sparkhunter (187)
Steeldeth (50, 172)
taski (171, 191)

Character Creation

When creating a character for a solo campaign, the DM should discuss the campaign world/idea with the player and decide on a creation method. A creation method that allows for more powerful characters than normal is recommended. This is to compensate for the character having to essentially fill every role in the party. Such methods can range from 32+ point-buy, to 10+1d8 per ability, to 18,17,16,15,14,13 array, to arbitrarily selecting abilities.

Another option for increasing the power of a Solo PC is to use the Gestalt option in Unearthed Arcana which takes the "best of two classes" and combines them into a single class. This will give you a PC that covers more bases than the single-classed or multi-classed PC.

Yet another option is to have the player create, and run multiple characters simultaneously. This is not the recommended practice as one character inevitably becomes the primary character and the other(s) become little more than PC-controlled NPCs.

A final option is to create a number of NPCs that will adventure with or support the PC throughout the campaign. Although this option can make things easier for the PC in terms of survival, it makes the DM's job significantly more complex. This leaves the DM in the position of balancing NPC knowledge and abilities with his own knowledge and abilities. The

DM in this case often winds up metagaming with the NPCs or underutilizing their abilities significantly. This is far from an ideal situation and may contribute to dissatisfaction on behalf of the player, the DM, or both.

The most important thing to consider, however is the style of gameplay that the campaign will be centered on. If the campaign is going to be combat-heavy, the PC had better be able to fight. Similarly, if the campaign is going to be a roleplaying-heavy affair, a character with social skills is pretty essential. As a DM, it is critical to tailor your campaign to the PC created.

The player should be reminded that all essential skill checks will be made by his or her character, so skill selection is important. A potential modification might be to make certain skills class skills for all classes such as Listen, Search, and Spot. Additionally, increasing the PCs skill points per level is often a wise move.

The DM should weave plotlines throughout the campaign that interact with the PC's background and facilitate development of the character. In order to achieve this, a richly detailed character background is essential. Remember, there is only one character in the story and, as such, the story should revolve around that one character. The details of the character's background serve as a source of material for the DM to draw upon and create plot hooks from. In a "normal" campaign with four characters, 3-5 plot hooks from each of those characters should be enough to fill the entire campaign. With one character, more depth is needed to provide plot hooks that are relevant to the character.

Campaign & Story Development

solo campaigns allow a PC and DM to explore the campaign world in a depth not typically possible with group campaigns. With only one PC, the DM can tailor adventures directly to the interests of the player/PC which allows a break from the more generic campaign arcs commonly found in group campaigns.

Game Balance & Experimentation

As there is only one player, keeping a balance between PCs is an obviously unnecessary exercise. Additionally, the focus of a solo campaign is usually more on roleplaying, so many of the mechanical elements, such as combat, often fall to a secondary role. This allows the DM to experiment with the rules, perhaps to give the Solo PC abilities or resources that would not be wise within a party dynamic or to playtest a house rule before the DM adds it to her group campaign.

Character Development v. Story Development

Group campaigns are typically story driven with character development as a secondary goal. While story is an important element in a solo campaign, character development assumes primacy. Whereas a group will usually amble along with a good story arc, a Solo PC is more prone to refuse to follow a story arc that does not mesh with their vision of their character. This situation ties to the fact that neither the DM, nor the player need be concerned with party cohesion or other players' enjoyment; thereby freeing the player to directly pursue ideas and story arcs that mesh with the PCs long-term goals and aspirations.

The story needs to be tailored to the PC, and this means tailoring the story to the goals of the PC. This is usually an easy task, but the DM must be cognizant that the story must be about the Solo PC and not necessary a brilliant campaign idea that would work for a group.

Greater Depth

Group campaigns often fly through campaign worlds skimming the surface, while solo campaigns usually plunge deeply into the campaign world. Because there is no need to share game time with other players or to reach a consensus on direction, the Solo PC is wont to pursue their interests in far greater depth than they ever could in a group campaign. There are some advantages to this greater depth. Firstly, the PC will likely remain tied to a location far more readily than a group of PCs would, thus the DM's work in designing a city or other "base of operations" is far more likely to be used. Secondly, the solo campaign will greatly increase the depth of a campaign world, far more than a group campaign as most NPCs will have significant interaction with the PC and need to be fleshed-out with history, goals, and objectives to support lengthy conversations. Jezebel, the Barmaid needs more than a name, a physical description, and a menu of drinks. Thirdly, the roleplaying opportunities for both DM and PC are more numerous and rewarding, which is one reason solo campaigns are so popular. The DM in a solo campaign should expect and, indeed, encourage extended roleplaying sessions to develop both the PC and the world surrounding him or her.

DM Tool: Political Structures

solo campaigns often thrive on politics and intrigue. The DM should take steps to ensure that there are opportunities for these activities, which means a complex political structure should be developed. This is not just for governments, but also for churches, guilds, and other organizations. What follows are some ideas and considerations for developing political structures:

- 1) Power should be decentralized. For example, while there may be a sovereign of a kingdom, he should be reliant on the trade guilds for revenue, on the churches to manage the courts and keep the people content, and the nobility to manage the kingdom and lead his armies. The more distributed and delegated the power and authority, the more intrigue and politics. Another alternative is having a Monarch who must answer to a council of Nobles who ratify the Monarch's decisions.
- 2) Pseudo-democratic institutions are excellent political structures. For example, the thieves' guild is ruled by a council of nine master thieves and requires majority vote for any decisions, there is political maneuvering and even assassinations to win votes. In any situation where votes are required there will be ample roleplaying opportunities.
- 3) There should be a faction that the PC will support. This is important. The DM should always try to create a faction that the PC will at least respect. This provides the PC with a discernable interest in the political structure. The faction could be in power if you have a PC who thrives on loyalty and service to a cause, or the faction could be out of power for an ambitious PC who could lead the faction back to power.
- 4) Conflicting loyalties create roleplaying opportunities. For example, the PC is a knight in service to the king, but the PC's noble family is opposed to the king and the PC's secret faith is being persecuted by the central church that is allied to the king.
- 5) Distrusted allies and respected opponents are a necessity. The PC needs friends she doesn't trust and enemies she can respect, this may seem like reverse logic, but it really adds to the quality and realism of the campaign. For example, the PC rogue belongs to a thieves' guild populated with backstabbing and ambitious individuals, but a paladin-constable opposed to the guild has worked with her to oppose a greater evil.
- 6) A crisis is needed. A crisis is essential to the conflict that will build the Character into an entity greater than the paper it is written upon. This is the heart of any campaign focusing on politics and intrigue, but, in this case, the crisis should be specific to the Solo PC. For example, the king is planning on ceding dominions to a neighboring kingdom as a result of defeat in war, and the Solo PC is one of the lords of these dominions, this is a massive crisis to the Solo PC, but not necessarily the rest of the kingdom. The level of the crisis should be tied to the abilities, stature, experience, and driving motivations of the Solo PC.

Challenges

D&D is filled with various and sundry challenges. Some challenge the player's reasoning ability, others address tactical choices. In a solo campaign, it is important for the DM to select and scale challenges to both the player's and the Character's abilities. Whereas a normal-sized party can be reasonably expected to overcome the vast majority of challenges placed before them, a solo-PC should not be held to a similar standard.

The key to not overtaxing the player's abilities in this case is to know the limits of the player's ability as well as the Character's limits. There is no substitute for past experience DMing for the player in this regard, but a good DM can ratchet up the difficulty and complexity if the player seems to be easily overcoming the challenges set before him or her.

Roleplaying and other non-combat challenges are an essential element of running a successful single-PC game. Combat is risky – a single well-rolled die can cause all manner of havoc to a character. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on things that will steer away from such situations. Conversations, investigations, puzzles, and other thought-provoking and reasoning challenges are highly recommended. Political machinations can lead to some very rewarding situations that involve little to no combat yet offer challenges to the player of significant complexity and difficulty.

Combat, of course, is nearly inevitable in D&D and special care should be taken with these situations. There are several factors to consider such as Challenge Ratings, Effective Encounter Levels, numbers of enemies, quality of enemies, etc.

Challenge Ratings

D&D is designed around a 4-character party; therefore, a single-PC party has $\frac{1}{4}$ of the resources, actions, abilities, and equipment of a party that the CR system was designed for. There are a number of options for addressing this, but primarily, a Dm should consider using encounters of roughly three levels lower than they normally would. This is by no means an absolute rule; however, it works well as a rule of thumb.

What to Avoid

Take care when designing encounters not to overwhelm the single PC with numbers. Remember that there is great strength in numbers. Six kobolds can overcome a single 4th level fighter if they are smart about it and use clever tactics such as all of them aiding one to grapple and pin the fighter who now has no dexterity bonus and an additional -5 to AC. Even more basically, flanking enemies can really ruin the single PC's day.

Another thing to avoid is situations commonly referred to as "save or die." Such situations exist when a spell or ability can kill the lone PC on a poorly rolled saving throw and can end a solo campaign quite prematurely (Finger of Death, Bodak's Gaze Attack, Gorgon's Breath, etc.). Such an event would not be a satisfying end for either the player or the DM.

The quality of enemies is of equal importance to the quantity of enemies. A single enemy with multiple class levels can be an overwhelming challenge for a single PC if the class levels are pointedly selected to counter the PC's strengths or exploit his or her weaknesses. The point of encounters in a solo-PC game should not be for the PC to be overmatched from the start.

Help for the PC

NPCs can, and often should, be available to help the PC out in various situations. This can vary from an NPC Healer in the PC's base town/area of operations that is willing to provide discounted healing magic for the PC to mercenaries ready to hire out their swords or spells

to assist the PC in battle. These NPCs can be a source of materials, information, or direct support. It is important to ensure that abilities the PC does not have access to through class features be available through such channels. Self-sufficiency can only take a PC so far.

Organizations can also provide support and aid for the PC. If the PC is a member of an organization or is in their employ, the organization should be willing to aid the PC and perhaps fill many of the roles that the NPCs suggested above would fill.

Rewards

In a solo campaign, the spectrum of rewards is often easier to manage than in a typical campaign. This is influenced by the ability of the DM to tailor rewards to the PCs goals and aspirations. For example, if the PC's ultimate goal is establishing a kingdom of his or her own, then the DM can incrementally provide rewards that lead towards that goal.

Experience

The primary source and measure of rewards for any PC is experience. Experience can be earned numerous ways, with the most common being through combat. This is, however, where many solo campaigns diverge from the norm. Experience point awards are often granted for action outside of combat, especially if the campaign does not focus on combat.

Combat experience in solo campaigns that focus on combat can lead to very rapid leveling of the PC if the DM doesn't stick to lower Challenge Ratings and fewer enemies. This is a result of the fact that the chart was designed with a four player party in mind. The expectation is that the experience would be divided up between all four players and not given to a single PC. The normal offsetting thought that there would be less encounters as the PC would need to rest often can hold true, but in combat-heavy solo campaigns, downtime is only needed for a single PC and therefore, tends to take up less "real time" than it would for a full party of adventurers. For these reasons, combat-heavy solo campaigns often rapidly lead to a higher level PC (or a dead one).

Roleplaying awards are very common in solo campaigns and serve as a means to advance a Character's power and ability without physically endangering the PC. If a Character is heavily engaged in the political machinations of a local court, there are ample opportunities for the Character to engage in opposed roleplaying activity.

Opposed roleplaying activity presents challenges to the PC that can be fairly easily equated to combat challenges. Use a similar system of determining Challenge Ratings for the opposed roleplaying challenges. The subtlety of such a system lies in the DM's determination of how well or completely the PC overcame the challenge. A range from 10% to 100% of appropriate Challenge Rating experience is recommended for these situations.

Another recommended roleplaying award is the spot award. Since solo campaigns involve a continual one-on-one roleplaying experience, if the player can come up with something to enhance the experience for both the player and the DM, a spot award would be appropriate. It is the DMs job to make sure such awards are scaled appropriately.

Wealth

The second most important and common form of reward for a Character in a solo campaign is wealth. Wealth is measured primarily in material goods, magic, and cold hard cash. Characters in a solo campaign often have a tendency to acquire wealth at a rate far exceeding that of a Character in a normal campaign. This should not be a cause for concern. Remember that the PC is the entire party in one individual and the treasure tables are

designed around a group of four Characters. There are several ways to address this.

Primarily, the recommendation is to “do nothing.” A Solo PC with the same wealth and items as a party of the same level is significantly weaker than the party. Even though the wealth can be concentrated into a smaller number of more powerful items, the lone PC has only a fraction of the options or actions that the full party has available.

Another option is to tailor the treasure, magic, and equipment available to the needs of the PC. This option usually appears to be as contrived as it sounds and is hard to implement without a serious need for suspension of disbelief.

The opposite of the previous option is, of course, to tailor the treasure so that it is sub-optimal for the PC and the PC will likely have to sell it at a discount to purchase equipment that is either more suited to his or her skills. The treasure in this option could consist of items that the PC simply cannot utilize due to class features or other similar restrictions.

As a Solo PC is likely to gather significant wealth, it is incumbent on the DM to provide means for the PC to spend this wealth. This could be anything from the ability to contract for customized magic items to ostentatious clothing, buildings, or equipment. The ability to convert large amounts of coinage into more portable form is a near essential for a Solo PC.

Magic

Magic is the lifeblood of most D&D characters. Without magic items, most characters’ power falls off dramatically when compared to monsters of appropriate challenge ratings. This is even more evident in a solo campaign. Once again, the Solo PC is forced to fulfill the role of an entire party and doing so without magical assistance will significantly increase the difficulty of the task. Unless the campaign is specifically designed to be low-magic, the PC should have significant magical resources to draw upon. These resources could be spells from class levels, magical items, NPCs, or even other sources such as racial or other special abilities.

It is recommended to allow the Solo PC to optimize their equipment if they so desire. In a normal game, such things can lead to an imbalance in power between party members. In a solo campaign, there is only one party member, so game balance is not an issue. This is not to say that everything should be handed to the character without effort – everything should have a commensurate price whether it is gold, experience, or the Character’s own lifeblood.

Unique Powers/Special Abilities

A solo campaign revolves around a single character that has a disproportionate influence in the world around him or her. One way to enhance this feeling is to provide the PC with abilities that go beyond the norm. Such abilities can be a reward for exceptional roleplaying and achievement of goals or it could be something that the PC begins the campaign with. No matter how the Character acquires them, special abilities can be hallmarks of memorable solo campaigns.

Special abilities should be scaled to both the world and to the Character involved. Such abilities should enhance the uniqueness and playability of a Character. Abilities can range from the minor (darkvision, bonus feats, minor class abilities) to the extreme (spell-like-abilities, planeshifting, major class abilities).

Care must be taken not to be overly generous in granting such abilities. Such abilities are meant to be a reward for the player, not a means to grant the Character the ability to shape reality at will.

NPC Roleplaying by the DM

The skill of NPC Roleplaying is one of the keys to running a successful solo campaign. Certainly, this is an important part of any D&D campaign, but when there is only one PC the demands upon the DM are significantly greater. There are three techniques that can be very useful in helping handle NPC Roleplaying for solo campaigns: Learn to Talk to Yourself, Develop Meaningful NPC Relationships, and Stop and Smell the Roses.

Learn to Talk to Yourself

There is only one PC and if all conversations are PC to NPC then things will become very stilted and unnatural, so the DM must learn to speak with herself. This will feel very awkward at first, but with a little practice it can be a very effective technique. To be able to do this a DM must 1) know the personality of the NPCs, 2) understand the relationship between the NPCs as well as their relationships to the PC, and 3) understand the context of the conversation. With practice these steps can be internalized, but starting out it is a good idea to have these elements written down in front of her as reminders. What follows is a classic example of a situation where the DM must talk to herself, the council meeting.

Running a Council Meeting

Sometimes the PC must take part in the classic council meeting, where a group of individuals gathers to discuss in order to make an important decision. These are the hardest NPC dialogues to successfully pull off because often the DM will be handling an insane number of NPCs. While difficult, the council meeting can be a useful device for analyzing a complex campaign and to provide a course of action when the PC is faltering. Council meetings can range from large conferences from numerous factions addressing something of cosmic importance to a local lord calling in his advisors to discuss a proposal to raise the poll tax to an adventuring company discussing how to sack a dungeon. Here are some useful tips:

- 1) Someone is in Charge: Someone needs to be running the council meeting, it is best when the PC is in charge, but often it will be a NPC. If a NPC is in charge, the PC should have a relationship with the NPC that allows the PC to speak freely. If a decision needs to be made then there should be a mechanism for making a decision, maybe a vote, maybe the person in charge just makes a decision.
- 2) Issues should be Clear: There is no reason for the DM to muddle the situation for the PC and should make sure the issues and arguments are as clear as possible. Certainly, people may be lying, but things should be kept focused.
- 3) Most Participants are Silent: As in real life, not everyone is a talker; even when dealing with a large group of NPCs it is very likely that most of the NPCs will merely watch and listen. As DM it is important to focus on the key NPCs, try to pick the extreme views to highlight the differences of opinion.
- 4) Arguments are Good: Arguments are great drama and keeps things interesting, it may be difficult but if the DM can run a realistic argument between two NPCs this will greatly increase the realism and entertainment value of a council meeting. Also arguments are a good way to get to the heart of an issue by highlighting major differences of opinion.
- 5) Diversions: Sometimes diversions are good, maybe the participants take a break and an opportunity for less intense roleplaying occurs, maybe the meeting is attacked, the DM should have a few ideas on things to spice things up if the meeting gets bogged down.
- 6) End the Meeting: At some point the meeting should be ended, if the PC is in charge then it is up to the PC to do this, otherwise it falls to the NPC in charge. A decision should be made, which may be a decision for the PC to go out and get more information, but a council meeting should give the PC some immediate focus to her efforts.

Develop Meaningful NPC Relationships

There are many other sources for ideas of running effective NPCs, but in a solo campaign

the key is not just interesting personalities but that there are meaningful NPC relationships. Understanding these relationships will help the DM run NPC to NPC and NPC to PC conversations, which, indeed, are a necessity for a successful solo campaign. There are four primary relationships, there are others, but these four define most relationships the PC will have with NPCs. It is important to note that many NPCs may have multiple relationships with the PC.

Friend-Friend

In a group campaign the relationship between PCs is typically that of friends, and few PCs have genuine NPC friends outside of the adventuring party. In a solo campaign all of the PC's friends will be NPCs and they must be played as such for this relationship to exist. There really is not a need to lay out the relationship of friends; it is usually based on trust, common interests, and a relative sense of equality.

Mentor-Student

It is often useful to give the PC a mentor at the beginning of solo campaigns to give the PC focus and someone for them to model their behavior on. Some PCs need extra help to get into character and find their place in a solo campaign others like to have a mentor because they enjoy the roleplaying of being a student and learning in a fantasy setting. The reverse is also a great relationship when the PC becomes the mentor to a NPC, there is nothing like an apprentice, ward, or squire to provide a fun foil to a PC.

Here are some guidelines for this relationship:

- 1) Mentors Push: If you give the PC a mentor, remember that a good mentor will push her student, so the mentor will likely give the PC considerable autonomy to either succeed or fail. Keep a mentor in the background, and only available for assistance if necessary.
- 2) Mentors Protect: Even with autonomy, a PC will have some protection from a mentor, which is quite useful at the beginning of a campaign when the PC is pretty vulnerable.
- 3) Mentors are Resources: A Solo PC will often need advice or counsel especially in a complex campaign and their mentors are great resources, even after the PC ceases to be a student.
- 4) Lineages: While mentors provide quite a bit, they also carry a burden. The PC will by default inherit the lineage of his mentor including enemies, rivals, and responsibilities. These can be great adventure hooks and also can provide goals to the PC.
- 5) Students Graduate: At some point the mentor will release the student, this can be a rite of passage, a special ceremony depending upon the context, but is definitely a turning point in the campaign. Sometimes a mentor will die and thus end the relationship, but the acknowledgement of no longer being a student by their mentor is a wonderful moment and reward for a PC.

Master-Servant

This is a common relationship in D&D and represents many NPCs who interact with a PC from the stable boy to the mercenary hireling to the scribe to followers. Cohorts often fall into this relationship, but are often also friends which help define their unique relationship. Servants are usually obedient and loyal, as long as well treated. From my experience PCs will not tolerate incompetence; in fact they are more willing to tolerate an unruly servant than an incompetent one. Servants are usually best played as silent and reliable as this is what is respected from this relationship.

Superior-Inferior

This is similar to the mentor-student and master-servant relationship, but is different in that the NPC and PC are members of the same organization and this creates special rules based on the relationship. In this situation the DM has to understand the organization and what it requires of its members. A tyrannical organization probably requires inferiors to act closer to

servants, while an order of healers may require inferiors and superiors to treat each other as friends. Superiors though are a great means of focusing a PC by assigning missions or in some cases being an obstacle. Additionally, PCs often like to have inferiors to command and these can also be successful NPCs.

Example

In the following example the DM wishes to give a warning to the PC about his plans to attack a dragon, maybe the warning is a caution, maybe it is to highlight the tension, maybe the NPC is afraid; whatever the reason, the DM wants to give a warning. The relationship is the foundation for interaction and upon it is laid the personality of the NPC.

Friend: "John, I think this may be folly, remember the last time we faced a dragon it did not go well. Perhaps, we should reconsider our plan."

Student: "Master, my study of dragons has been limited, but...it seems that...well, we might be in some danger."

Servant: "Yes, sir, off to face the dragon." Mumbles that he should have been a bricklayer like his mother wanted him to be.

Inferior (knightly order): "My lord, I will follow you to battle and though we are likely all to die it will be for a noble and just cause."

Stop and Smell the Roses

DMs should always take their cue from the player as to length of conversations, sometimes the player will want to fly through a conversation, but every now and then a player will really enjoy a conversation and the DM should linger. This is the same with romance, shopping, interviews, and other things which may be secondary to the DM's sense of story, but are more important to the PC. Give them what they want and slow down if necessary, solo campaigns cover a lot of ground so there is no rush. Always keep in mind that there are no other players clamoring for attention. Keep the spotlight squarely on the PC and his or her interactions.

Concerns and Caveats

Comfort Level & Relationship

solo campaigns are far more personal than group campaigns. The DM and player must find their comfort level, and this usually reflects their relationship. Spouses who are a DM and a player will run a more personal campaign than college roommates. No matter the relationship, a solo campaign will always feel a little awkward at first, the trick is to plow on and find the level of roleplaying that makes both DM and player comfortable.

Scheduling

Less people means easier to schedule. If the DM and player are spouses, roommates, or similar, then solo campaigns can be run almost every night. The key is to find a balance between the needs of the DM and the player. The DM will need time to do adventure design and to rejuvenate the creative juices. The player also can get fatigued from continuous gaming, but the need for a break is greater upon the DM. Communication is necessary, as is being honest about your needs.

Overwhelming the PC v. Spotlight on the PC

There is a delicate balance between keeping the PC in the spotlight and overwhelming the player. It is important to remember that while the spotlight is on the PC, this does not mean

she controls the campaign world nor should the DM dump that responsibility upon the PC. The PC may certainly influence and change the world, but the scope of the PC's responsibilities must be limited. The DM must remember to not heap upon the PC the responsibilities that would normally be heaped on an entire party, unless the player is up to the challenge. What follows are some specific situations to watch for, as well as a few tricks for the DM to use this balance in adventure design.

The PC Micro-Manager vs. NPC Delegation

The PC should delegate tasks to NPCs; the PC who wishes to micro-manage the entire campaign is heading for burnout and probably failure. Players who do this either wish to maintain control, do not have the ability to prioritize, or do not trust NPCs. The DM can correct this problem by providing reliable and competent NPCs to handle tasks or a trusted NPC who can give constructive advice to the PC. The DM should also not hesitate to realistically play out scenarios where the player's inability to delegate and prioritize impairs his goals.

Adjudicating NPCs off Stage: The PC sends a trusted NPC on a quest, does the NPC succeed? This is often a difficult decision for the DM to determine, usually it is best to be generous to encourage the PC to rely upon NPCs, but failure that results in the capture or death of an NPC can be quite effective in advancing character development. The best rule is to use common sense, for example, sending two low-level NPC halflings to destroy an artifact at the heart of an evil deity's stronghold should result in the death of the NPCs and the loss of the artifact, some things the PC just needs to do herself.

The Indecisive PC vs. NPC Authority

Solo campaigns entail tremendous freedom and authority, but some players are indecisive and need guidance. This may be from inexperience or personality, but the DM can assist these players with NPCs who can provide orders and direction. The DM should provide good leaders and not manipulate the PC, the indecisive player needs confidence before they can handle many of the challenges associated with solo campaigns. Certainly, the PC should have autonomy, but providing them with orders and immediate goals is often of great assistance to indecisive players. The challenge for the DM is to increase the authority of the PC at a pace that both encourages them to be decisive and does not overwhelm them, a cautious approach is advised till the DM knows the player better.

DM Tool: The Ultimate BBEG Weapon – Promotion

In intrigue or political heavy campaigns the opponents of the PC may decide that the best way to distract her is to give her more responsibilities. For example, the PC is closing in on a death cult hidden among the nobility, when she is asked by the king to investigate rumors that a neighboring kingdom is threatening invasion. Of course, the king picked the PC based on the suggestion of members of the death cult, but no matter the PC has now been distracted.

DM Tool: The Sacrificial Decision

If the PC is overburdened with decisions, for example the PC controls a dominion and is also waging a war against a death cult then the DM may want to set up a sacrificial decision.

This is when the PC is faced with a decision in which one goal must be sacrificed for another, perhaps the death cult is led by the king and the PC will lose his dominion and be exiled unless he abandons his war against the death cult. When the DM realizes that the PC is overburdened it may be time to force a sacrificial decision, which will ease the PC's responsibilities and often provide a great roleplaying opportunity.

Ending a Solo Campaign

At some point a solo campaign should end. There are three reasons to end a solo campaign: 1) either the DM or player is bored or frustrated with the campaign; 2) the story is finished; or 3) death or incapacitation of the PC.

In the first instance, there needs to be communication between the DM and player. Often one will want to end the campaign while the other may be happy. Sometimes ending the campaign can be avoided by changing the direction of the campaign or taking a hiatus. If there is communication, the nature of any problems can be found and a suitable change instituted. For example, the player may be fatigued with political intrigue and the DM can change the campaign by sending the PC off to war. A hiatus often will mean the end of a solo campaign, especially if it is replaced by a new campaign that is more enjoyable to both DM and player, but sometimes a break is needed to save a campaign. Sometimes the problems cannot be solved and then the campaign should be ended. This is often when the player's character concept simply does not work for the campaign envisioned by the DM, and no compromise is readily available. It is best to simply acknowledge the failure and start over on both counts.

In the second instance, the story has been told. The PC has vanquished her enemies, been crowned Queen, and is happily married with children on the way. Now is the moment to let the character go and to end the solo campaign. The story may not always be epic, but at some point the PC will have reached the moment they long pursued. Certainly, another story may present itself for the PC, but it is often better to end the solo campaign on a high note. You can always return to a favorite PC when a great idea hits the DM or player, but high-level play can often reach the ridiculous and completely overshadow the great story which spawned the PC in the first place. It can be hard, but letting go of a character at their moment of triumph is often the best tribute to a great solo campaign.

In the third instance, either the DM or player seriously messed up. Certainly, the PC may have died the ultimate in heroic deaths, but that would be an example of the second instance of ending a campaign. In this case the PC is dead and the solo campaign is over, unless a reasonable solution is found. It may be possible to raise a character through the heroic actions of NPCs or maybe the PC's deity sends her back for one last mission. It is also possible that the player draws up a new character to finish the work of her first character. As can be imagined these situations should be avoided and a good DM should always have an emergency plan for such a situation.

Breaking Your Own Rules

After reading Ormiss' additions to handling NPCs and reviewing what Illion and I have said, I

started laughing when I thought of the solo adventure I will be running this afternoon. The truth is that I have broken most of my own advice, but it is working for this solo campaign.

My PC is Bert who is a halfling bard/ranger I posted about before, well he put his quest to defeat the infernal Baron Gafke on hold and decided to join another adventuring group. Part of this is to get the aid of a more powerful group than his old group. He sought out the most famous group of adventures in the Western Kingdom, the *Knights of the Glass Dragon*. Now I gave Bert some warnings about the high casualties suffered by members of this group and the ego of its leader Sir Eurid Debane, but he pushed on and interviewed. Now Bert is fairly weak for a 10th level character, but he used craft (musical composition) and his outrageous perform skills to get an invite to join the group.

Unlike my group PC party, this party is focused on wealth and glory. Bert now has groupies and is being worshipped as a great hero, which he is loving. Bert is a minor, but well-liked, member of this group and plays a supporting role to the 'real' heroes. Everyone else has the spotlight and carries the battles with Bert just providing a little support here and there, though his musical skills put him in charge of propaganda. This is working wonderfully and the solo PC loves it, especially as there is high drama with the members of the company, Sir Eurid's wife is having an affair, another member wants Sir Eurid to topple the high king to make a stronger Western Kingdom, and so forth.

The point is that this solo campaign creates a situation where the solo PC is secondary and all the horrid NPC archetypes are in play. For now breaking the rules actually is the best way to run this campaign. This situation allows for the PC to have character growth as he either embraces glory hunting or focuses on the greater good, it also provides a weak character an opportunity to get better equipment and stronger before becoming more independent. So there you go a situation where doing the 'wrong' thing actually may be the 'right' thing as long as you have good reasons for it.

Failed Solo Campaigns

In the interests of full disclosure, I should mention that in addition to the dozens of successful solo campaigns I have ran over the years, a number have been...a little less than successful.

My first foray into solo campaigns was in college years ago before my first major campaign, I designed five pre-adventures for all of my PCs to bring them together. Another DM had started the idea of pre-adventures, but I always felt he was too much of a railroader. My campaign was set in the Forgotten Realms and I had a complex plot involving events in Mulhorand, but my players had drawn up characters with phenomenally diverse backgrounds. I arrogantly assumed that with a little cunning I could tie them all together, thus I ran a PC paladin on a crusade against Thayan aggression, a Halruaan wizard, a ranger from Silvery Moon, and two others that I forget, but I think I had one from Chessenta and another from the Dalelands. Well my players loved the pre-adventures, each was a full campaign of sorts, but after the first few sessions two PCs were killed and the remaining three had chosen paths far away from my original plans. Eventually, I had to scrap the campaign and learned a valuable lesson about pre-adventures and the difficulties of being too ambitious of a DM.

Sometimes when I develop an idea for a solo campaign with the player we are a little too ambitious or unrealistic. One that still holds in my mind was a d6 Star Wars campaign in which the PC (run by my wife) started as an Imperial intelligence officer, well the first adventure immersed her into Imperial culture and then the Rebel Alliance seriously screwed

up her operation and was on the verge of capturing her. We intended for the PC to eventually leave the Empire, but at this moment my wife who was fully into character decided that suicide was the only option. By the end of the first adventure the PC had committed suicide and thus ended the campaign.

I recently gave Stormwrack to my wife to see if anything in that was interesting to her as I had some cunning ideas, she decided to draw up a sea witch and wavekeeper druid who were sisters to play them at the same time. The setting was good and my wife loved the ideas we had come up with, what threw me was having her play two PCs which is something we almost never do. I was thrown by her having conversations in character, as a DM I do this all the time, but for some reason it threw me to see the player doing it. I desperately wanted to run one of them as a NPC. We ran a few adventures and hit a few other problems with the PCs struggling for the spotlight of the campaign, we eventually shelved the campaign with the intention to run one of the characters as a NPC next time and to focus on one PC.

Often a campaign spirals out of control. We have shelved spectacular solo campaigns when they get out of control or beyond management, this is usually when things become epic in scale with massive armies and kingdoms in war or on the edge of destruction. We have one of our best campaigns shelved during the War of Kings as it became too much responsibility for the PC to handle. The complexity was truly outrageous with probably a hundred important NPCs and at least a dozen subplots, my longer running campaigns get out of hand quickly. Nowadays, I prune my campaigns when they get a little overboard, removing plots and NPCs. My wife once ruined a great long running solo campaign she DMed when she kept upping the opposition, an army of frost giants destroy my dominion because she wanted to challenge me and this escalation leads to MAD in regards to campaigns.

There have also been campaigns where the character concept was simply unplayable or the story too outrageous or more often boring. These are when someone has an idea that simply won't mesh with the other participant, this is when the player and DM are at a different place. If I feel like a military sci-fi campaign and my player wants to play a druid in D&D then you usually need to find a compromise, such as a colonist sent to an alien world to set up a new colony.

I figure probably about a quarter of my solo campaigns are complete duds, the trick is to realize this as quickly as possible and start over. Don't hesitate to experiment and if it doesn't work don't worry about it, just start over or make some serious adjustments. The lessons from failures really improve your abilities as a DM and also a player in developing playable and fun characters and stories.

Dungeons

In the traditional D&D campaign, the dungeon is the focal challenge which drives the gameplay, and its exploration is what separates the PCs from the local grain merchants down at the market. In present days, the dungeon doesn't always occupy the same central role in all campaigns (especially in non-D&D settings), but it is none the less integral to the majority of group campaigns.

I think it's time to speak a little on how the solo campaign might handle dungeons. Before I begin, I would like to clarify that by dungeon, I mean any enclosed series of encounters that somehow resembles a location within which the PCs face a challenge. It can be the sewers, a dragon's lair, or the catacombs of Pagan (bonus points! *wink*) just as well as it can be an office building or a cargo ship on stormy waters. There's no setting which doesn't have

the potential for dungeons. They're just more or less common.

How Is a Dungeon Fun?

There are many ways in which a dungeon crawl can appeal to players, but generally speaking, there are three things I would highlight: Conquest, exploration, and party mechanics. Conquest is about bashing down a door and stabbing an illithid, then taking its treasure. Traditionally, many teenage players start with this aspect and later come to enjoy others as well. (Conquest is fun, but it's not why I play D&D. There are better genres for that sort of thing, imho.) Exploration is about finding out what's going on: It's about solving the mystery of what is happening in the dungeon, and seeing what's behind the next door. If you rouse the players' interest beforehand, it can be quite effective.

Lastly, party mechanics is about interaction between the PCs, and how they cooperate (or not) during the challenges faced in the dungeon. Acting as a group during a dangerous dungeon run really helps to develop personalities and relationships. Personally, this is what I like most about the dungeon, and I think a fair share of people will agree with me.

So, when you only have one PC, how do you harness this? Well, this is why I throw in NPCs all over the place. Currently, I'm using a model that my friend developed for his latest D&D venture. Namely, each time we're getting involved in a dungeon, we run into some other people who are also about to enter the dungeon. These people are more or less heroic, more or less intelligent, and more or less scrupulous. In the end, this means three things:

1) Factions

We're not just adventuring with our close companions, but also with complete strangers. Some of these people turn out to be heroic, noble, and true, and we grow to like them and seek their companionship in the future. Other times, they're greedy, cowardly, and have a tendency to brag and take credit. This tends to form factions even during the dungeon, which gives rise to a lot of interesting interactions. In any given challenge, there's a chance that someone will betray you, just as there is a chance that someone you thought was a jerk will save your life. Arguments about how to proceed are had, friendships are formed, emotions spark, and so forth. It's a lot of fun. *In time, a true core adventuring group is formed, and unlike one foisted together at the start of a campaign, it feels real.*

2) Investment & Worry

In a typical D&D campaign, your character runs the risk of dying. During our campaigns, we don't use PC death as a tool, because it would waste far too much of our time spent evolving the plot and developing the character... as well as ruining the romance. It's not worth it to us, since we don't use resurrection at all, in any campaign. (As a side note, this requires trust in the player: You have to trust him or her not to do stupid things that *would* get the character killed. We just don't kill off the PC because the dice say so.) On the other hand, NPCs can and will die. This means that during a dungeon, if you want to see someone survive, you'd better do well. During several dungeons, my greatest concern has been to keep someone alive, for instance. This also leads me into the third point:

3) Expendable Characters

Nothing beats introducing a puzzle by having someone fall down a 100 foot chasm, screaming, or be captured in a razor-edged steel cage. I find that this works quite well. NPCs is a resource for the DM.

Urgency

As **KJW** put it, *dungeons often don't work in solo campaigns as well as they do in group campaigns*. For the typical dungeon, the appeal builds on a group of players socializing as they cooperate to beat the hazards of the dungeon. In order to electrify a single player, you need something else. My suggestion is that you create a sense of urgency: Dungeons are fun, but the experience is greatly magnified if something hinges on your speedy navigation of the challenges put before you.

In one dungeon I recently played, I went in to find and rescue a group of gnomes, one of which was a friend to me (whom I had met in a previous dungeon.) The gnomes had wandered into this ancient dungeon complex after breaking through a wall underneath their home. During the entire dungeon, I knew that, given a poor enough performance, the DM will kill them off. They're in there somewhere, and we need to navigate these obstacles as quickly as possible to ensure that my friend survives.

There are many other examples of how to create urgency during a dungeon, many of which feature external events, such as "timers," i.e. bad things that will occur if you don't manage to solve the dungeon within a certain time limit.

Personal Interest

A solo campaign tends to focus on the role of the PC in the campaign. Therefore, it is natural that the PC should have a personal interest in the dungeons he or she explores. A good way to create a greater degree of involvement during a dungeon crawl is to bait the player with information that he or she craves. This works even better if you intimate that a good performance is likely to net more information, while a poor performance runs the risk of losing the opportunity to gain that information.

My current D&D campaign revolves around a pervasive, supernatural disease known as the Demon's Plague. The PC is being hunted because he was unfortunate enough to share the attributes of a prophesied figure said to be responsible for the plague. Therefore, he has taken a great interest in finding out what is going on with the Demon's Plague; he wants to figure out who he is, what the plague is, and how (if) they are connected. Not all dungeons will cater to this metaplot, but the one I'm about to run does. To put it simply, events surrounding the dungeon will draw him into it, not just because of his good heart, but because he is interested to know how it relates to the Demon's Plague. By successfully exploring the dungeon, he will gain some additional information about it.

Puzzles & Obstacles

KJW made another excellent point in his last post: It's better not to plan a solution to a puzzle or challenge. I'll give a few examples to this. The first is a small event I ran as part of the information gathering process before the dungeon I'm about to run. Here, the player had to enter a burning house to rescue the surviving inhabitants. I had absolutely no plans for what the house looked like inside (I just wing it with vague descriptions unless there's some reason to draw it up), or how he was supposed to survive the incursion. He thought for a moment, then used *floating disk* as a shield over his head while he ducked low through the smoke. After reading the description of the spell and finding it to be a quite legit manner of preventing falling debris from knocking him unconscious, all I had to say was "bonus exp."

The second example is one snatched from the ether: The group, following one of the imps that dwell in the dungeon, are lured into a room. The chamber is 10 by 10 feet large, and 50 feet tall. The imp quickly manages to escape through a duct in the wall, 40 feet up, while

the other imps close and lock the door behind the PCs. They hear a click, and water begins to flow into the room. Panic sets on when they hear the rasp of metal above, and look up to see an iron mesh separate the lower half of the room from the upper. The floor is filled with strange mesh steel cages, the edges of which are sharpened.

In such a situation, I wouldn't bother to think about how the PC might solve the problem. I'm confident that I have built the scene in such a manner that there are several logical alternatives, especially with access to a variety of spells. However, since the price of failure is death for all involved, I would, in this case, take a moment to think about a plan that might bail at least the PC out. Typically, this plan would be delivered by one of the NPCs, but not until the PC has exhausted his own ideas. Relying on that plan would mean that at least someone is likely to die before they clear the obstacle.

Campaign Example #1

What follows is a brief synopsis of a recent solo campaign I (KJW) ran with my wife. This was a successful and enjoyable campaign and gives an idea of what is a typical solo campaign, though there really is no such thing.

Solo PC: Camina Gravescribe a cleric of my campaign's Church of the Dead (LN Greater Deity), her alignment was lawful good. When Camina's mother died her father gave her to the Church of the Dead as payment for the funeral. Camina started off in a group campaign, that went disastrously as the party was nearly TPKed several times and my wife decided that Camina was done with the party and drew up a new more combat orientated PC. We were considering starting up a new solo campaign and decided to spin off Camina into her own campaign.

Premise: My Church of the Dead is a powerful faith that is focused on the burying of the dead and protecting the remains of the dead, while their god judges and sends souls to their afterlives. It is also a very complex faith, it would take many pages to describe the faith in detail, suffice to say that there are many orders and factions within the faith and its political structure incorporates all of the elements listed previously. We decided that Camina would be assigned to supervise a few cemeteries and try to advance up the faith.

The Challenge: Demarche Camina Gravescribe started with a number of obstacles. She was LG in a LN faith. She belonged to the holy surname of least status, Gravescribe. She was low-level, lacked political connections, and was cash poor, which was almost a sin in her faith. Through the early part of the campaign there was a Succession War running in the background that caused shortages, tremendous price fluctuations, and all manner of difficulties for her holdings and her church. There were also complex machinations occurring within her church that she was initially ignorant of, but would quickly become embroiled in. The main challenge, though, was her holdings.

The Custodian of the Crypts of Duchess Street: Demarche Camina was charged with running two cemeteries and maintaining the family crypts of a poor and debauched noble family in Duchess Street. This neighborhood of the city of Calbrien was poor, corruptly managed, overrun by the thieves' guild, home to rundown and fiercely competing churches, plagued with lesser undead in the sewers, and home to several cults including the Church of Bones (LE Intermediate Deity of Necromancy and Undead). Demarche Camina was given a young Ghost Knight (low-level NPC fighter) and a few prayers of encouragement and expected to probably be killed like the last three young demarches sent to Duchess Street.

Beginning Adventures

Demarche Camina went to the other temples, include the Church of the Dawn (CG intermediate deity) to propose combining forces to battle undead, she was able to build a small party of clerics and faithful warriors to slosh through the sewers. Demarche Camina took the bold step of contacting the Assembly (thieves' guild) and asking them to stop dropping bodies in the sewers and to just chuck them over a wall of one of her cemeteries and she would take care of them. Demarche Camina took an even bolder step when she made contact with Church of Bones and told them to stop taking bodies from the cemeteries, and if they did that, she would not delve too deeply into their activities. Within a few days, Demarche Camina had aligned herself with the key powers of the district and protected herself from assassination. For several adventures, Demarche Camina got to know people across the district, fought undead, and built up connections, but was still very isolated from the rest of her church. This was part of her plan, because she realized that many of her policies would not be seen positively by her faith.

Many of our adventures dealt with putting down undead, getting ghosts to pass to the next life, investigating special murders, handling estates, and trying to expand the faith. There were also meetings and discussions with other clerics of the faith and some of them are pretty theological in nature, as Demarche Camina starts to seriously explore her faith. There were also side plots, such as the Succession War which was changing the kingdom, but which Demarche Camina was happily uninvolved with, additionally Demarche Camina had a mute prophet as her ward and was involved with various charitable activities.

Campaign Intensifies

Demarche Camina is contacted by an Elder Demarche from a different region of the church to provide intelligence on the Church of Bones as there would be a development to eliminate this rival to the faith. Demarche Camina investigates, using her ties to the Assembly to learn that the Elder Demarche was aligned with the Cult of Orcus against the Church of Bones in a conflict known as the Bone War, which was being fought across the campaign world and in the outer planes and was coming to Duchess Street. The Elder Demarche tells Demarche Camina to make sure she is not in the district one night, and Demarche Camina decides a LE deity of necromancy is better than a CE deity of necromancy and gives a warning to the Church of Bones and her other allies in the district. She stays that night and tries to protect the cemeteries, undead enter the district and a grand battle is fought between the followers of Orcus and the followers of the Church of Bones, who are also indirectly aided by other factions. Demarche Camina and her small group fight off undead trying to desecrate the cemeteries. When things quiet down, Demarche Camina goes through the streets and sewers gathering bodies of the undead and their treasure and bringing it back to her cemetery for cremation. In the morning she sends all of the treasure to her church, except for scrolls, potions, and a few items for her own use.

During this time her ward, the mute prophet was assassinated as part of a side-plot and this was a major turning point for Camina as she desperately wanted to raise her ward, but this was against the teachings of her faith. She decides in the end to let her ward pass to the next life and thus finally comes to embrace the ways of her faith. She also starts to become a spiritual leader and having finally dealt with death is able to better articulate her faith.

Campaign becomes High-level

Demarche Camina becomes embroiled in the politics of her faith and Duchess Street. Due to her major behests to the church she is given funds to build a crypt, ie. temple in Duchess Street. Due to her political ascension she is given an additional cemetery to manage as well as Novice Demarches and a few more Ghost Knights. One of the scrolls from the great battle, was a scroll of teleport circle that looked to lead back to a temple of Orcus.

Demarche Camina kept this for herself and recruited a group of high-level adventurers, much higher-level than herself, to take out this temple. They teleport in and fight a tremendous battle, Demarche Camina keeps in the back dealing with lesser undead and providing support to the high-level NPCs. After this mission, Demarche Camina is wealthy and a potent cleric and has seriously crippled the Cult of Orcus within the kingdom.

This is about when the campaign winded down and went on hiatus, Demarche Camina married a royal magistrate, became an Elder Demarche, was named a teacher at the Seminary of the Dead, and became a disciple of a epic-level spiritual leader of her faith. There are many adventures waiting to be embarked upon and my wife has hinted at returning to the campaign, but the story of Camina Gravescribe has mostly been told and this is where we left it.

Adventure Example #1

What follows is a brief synopsis of a recent solo adventure I (KJW) ran with one of my players as a side adventure from the group campaign.

Solo PC: Bert Woodshank a halfling ranger/bard with a chaotic good alignment. Bert's player is one of my best roleplayers, and Bert is his most cherished PC. Bert is admittedly worthless in combat, but he is a good scout and has endeared himself to the party by writing songs for all of the party members and the group's adventures (yes the player does indeed write songs for the group).

Premise: The party rescued an ancient temple from evil and the Tear of the Water Dragon King (water elemental weird, MMII) granted the PCs prophecies or answers to questions. Bert asks 'who is the halfling maiden he should marry' and is answered thus: "Three fair maidens of the little folk outshine all the rest for their beauty and charm and await the hand of a worthy suitor, such as you. In Pailanus, there is a beauty beyond compare named Addy Briarbrook, but any suitor must overcome her stubborn father and five jealous brothers. In the homeland, there is the lovely Madeline Greenhill, a lover of words and ideas who is as cunning as she is beautiful, but the suitor who takes her hand should not expect a traditional wife. Finally, there is Wisteria Clearbrook, who is the daughter of the First Mayor of Lorien and a lady-in-waiting in attendance to the High Queen Aurine of the Western Kingdom, and her laugh is like the singing of stars, but she sought by the most heroic of the little folk." A few months later the party settled down for some down time and Bert decided to pursue Madeline Greenhill, and thus began the solo adventure.

DM's Note: So why did I give him three choices? Well, if the DM has the opportunity he should give the PC choices such as this, poor Bert spent many sessions weighing each candidate and trying to decide who he should marry. Also if the DM imposed his idea of an ideal wife upon the PC, that would be an example of bad railroading. Still this is railroading as I in effect limited the PC to three choices, but I thought they were good choices for Bert.



The Challenge: Bert needed to travel back to his homeland, get permission from his family's matriarch to wed Madeline Greenhill, find Madeline Greenhill, court her successfully, and get back to join the party before its next big adventure.

The Caravan: Bert decided to find a caravan going to the homeland, he figured he could offer to perform, scout, and help out to pay his way. Bert was a mid-level character and while not the best in combat, was very skilled. To help him out I had him meet up with an old friend and fellow performer, Gabby Gemsparkle a gnome rogue/illusionist. (I made up

this character, introduced her as an old friend, and my player ran with it creating a back story as the adventure unfolded.) Bert and Gabby join up with the Caravan of Master Ansai, a massive caravan of cattle, horses, wagons, and pilgrims that traveled from a major city to the grand capital and back twice a year. The caravan is like a moving town filled with interesting people and activities. Bert and Gabby are hired to perform and help out the caravan. Bert performs well and makes friends with everyone in the caravan, and when cattle rustlers strike the caravan at night it is Bert who is first on the scene, tracks down the rustlers, and using hit and run tactics recovers the cattle for the caravan. Master Ansai is impressed and gives Bert some more tasks on the route, such as negotiating with farmers and serving as a liaison with mercenaries as they cross a dangerous forested area. While with the mercenaries, Bert is part of a battle with orcs and with music and sniping helps carry the battle. When the caravan reaches the homeland, Master Ansai pays Bert a bonus of 50gp, gives him the pony he had been loaned by the caravan, and is offered employment with good pay for the return journey, but he needs to be ready to go in 30 days. Gabby says goodbye and wishes Bert good luck, now Bert is alone.

DM's Note: Bert did very well with the caravan, and it gave me an opportunity to set a time limit for his courting adventure. Master Ansai offered him a good job for the trip back, one that Bert would like to take. Timing is always a problem for solo adventures in reuniting the PC and party, this employment offer established a timeline to help bring everything together on time.

Family: Bert spends a little time with his family, and sees that some things have changed. He feels a little out of place among his kin and friends, but focuses on his task and gets permission from the matriarch to pursue Madeline Greenhill, who he learns is the daughter of the eccentric wizard Alton Greenhill and lives in the northern reach of the homeland.

DM's Note: Bert provided me with a list of some of his family from his background and I filled in the rest. It was a brief stay, but I worked in the details from his background, but also changed details. His lizardmen enemies had made peace with the halflings and unmarried relations were now engaged, married, or married with kids. Backgrounds are great, but a good DM needs to make them evolve to make them work.

Finding Madeline: Bert wanders across the homeland finding Greenhills and tracking down Madeline, he eventually comes to the small town where she and her father lives. Bert learns that she is pursued by the son of the major who is a big brute, and that her father has disappeared. Bert serenades her and almost is blasted with magic missiles as Madeline is a low-level wizard. Bert plies on the charm and eventually learns from Madeline that her father has disappeared on a quest to find the House of Luzen Springapple the Mad, who was a great halfling wizard who had a magical house linked to multiple planes and was her great-grandfather. Bert says he will help her find her father in exchange for her considering to marry him. Madeline amused with her odd suitor agrees and they set off to find the House of Luzen the Mad.

DM's Note: OK I admit I patterned Madeline and her situation on Belle from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, don't judge me harshly, but it actually worked very well. Now as for Madeline's personality, I have the prophecy, Belle, and a some ideas. Madeline is of course beautiful, charisma 18, but she is also bright and a wizard. Her wisdom is a little on the low side, and physically she is a little weak. She is assertive and a little bossy (only child), opinionated (when she eventually meets the party her little folk superiority does come out from a number of humorous exchanges with the other PCs who actually aren't fond of her), and loves knowledge, with Madeline I make up tons of pointless trivial historical facts, she was on track to be the Loremaster prestige class

The Quest for Papa: Madeline knows where to go and she and Bert loot the grave of an ancient ancestor, recover a magic key, find a secret door, and enter the House of Luzen the Mad. Inside they find a female Djinn who was an old friend of Luzen and now executor of his estate, she tells them the house will fall to the relation who can bring a golden apple, feather of a phoenix, and water from the celestial ocean to her. When asked about Alton, she says he set off to get the items...but he went to Sigil first. The Djinn advises them to not go to Sigil as they are...well prime halflings...and a little naive at best, but Madeline and Bert charge to the portal to Sigil in the upstairs attic of the house. Well they come out in Sigil, totally out of their element, and they don't notice the ghoul-demon watching their portal. The ghoul-demon leaps out and tries to take them prisoner, Bert tells Madeline to flee and he fights off the ghoul-demon. Madeline escapes back through the portal, Bert is captured. He is taken to Baron Gafke an exiled cambion who has Alton in his dungeons and wishes the Soul Shard which was stolen from him by Luzen the Mad a century ago. Baron Gafke gives Bert three years to find the Soul Shard, if he succeeds then Alton will be released, if not then Baron Gafke will be coming to the homeland to find the Soul Shard. Bert is dumped by the portal and returns to the house and then the homeland and finds Madeline.

DM's Notes: I admit to being overly ambitious, the House of Luzen the Mad is a wonderful site and a true treasure if it can be reclaimed. Also I get to add a new BBEG to the campaign and introduce some planar elements. So many future adventure hooks! Happy DM!

Return to the Party: Madeline agrees to follow Bert back to his party to see if they can help rescue her father and also agrees to marry him along the way as she has become impressed with the charm and bravery of her suitor. Madeline makes a splash with the party and tries too hard to sell herself, she annoys some of the PCs, but as she is Bert's betrothed they let her come with the party. After a few sessions, Madeline is starting to fit in better, but is frustrated with the party's obsession with completing their current contract before deciding what to do with her father. Tragedy strikes! During an attack by evil druids opposed to the party, Madeline is killed. She was far lower-level than the rest of the party, and Bert blames himself for her death. After much indecision he decides to not raise her, but pledges himself to rescue her father. Bert acquires extreme hatred of druids. Bert struggles and slides from CG to CN and eventually leaves the party after an argument with an NPC.

DM's Notes: OK I am not a mean DM, it was not my intention to kill Madeline, plus resurrection was possible, and the end result was Bert leaving the party. All of this was unexpected, but great for roleplaying and my player loved the solo adventure and everything that happened. Right now Bert's player is waiting for our next solo adventure as he decides what to do about Baron Gafke and Alton Greenhill.

Romantic Entanglements

My wife is much the same, she loves the roleplaying and adventure, but it is often the romantic entanglements that make or break a good solo campaign. What follows are some questions and suggestions for designing a good object of affection for the Solo PC.

Designing the Romantic Interest

1) *What are the strengths?* The romantic interest needs to be a compelling character, he should be confident, humorous (though it may be sarcasm), and should have a presence to match that of the Solo PC. Remember the Solo PC is often a near legendary character of

great ability, connections, and ambition, so her romantic interest must be impressive to catch their attention.

2) *What are the flaws?* The romantic interest MUST have flaws. This could be a lack of ambition, too dedicated to their work, or some other element of their personality that is a genuine shortcoming. Flaws are what make great NPCs and when they can overcome these flaws they can become legends.

3) *What does he do?* The romantic interest should have a job or responsibility, perhaps they handle this responsibility poorly, but they need something to help the Solo PC and DM figure out his connection and relationship with the Solo PC.

4) *Why is he interested in the Solo PC?* This is a question the DM must ask. If it is beauty or other shallow reasons then the relationship may quickly hit rough waters when the ambitions of the couple come into conflict, if the romantic interest sees deeper then this will help the relationship in troubled times.

5) *Is there a future in the relationship?* Like in real life it may take some time for the Solo PC to find the right person, the DM may well go through a few tragically flawed romantic interests, before the soul mate is found. Additionally, they may be the perfect couple, but one has an arranged marriage or some other obligation that may spell doom to the relationship. A good happy ending takes a lot of work.

The Key Balance

As Quarkstomper states, the difficult balance is between keeping the Solo PC in the spotlight and making the romantic interest heroic. If a romantic interest becomes too subservient or less compelling then the relationship will collapse, whereas if the romantic interest steals the spotlight then the relationship can become patronizing. The best track is to give them related but separate careers, where both can shine and be as heroic as possible. For example, the Solo PC is an adventurer and the romantic interest is a respected court magician, yes they can help one another, but they have separate responsibilities. They both may serve the king and this is something that may unite them, but they work separately. They need to be separated physically and professionally to keep the relationship thriving during the campaign. When the Solo PC and romantic interest are close together, like both are members of a party of adventurers then things become more complicated.

DM Tool: Friends & Family

Sometimes the best way to sell a romantic interest is to have others sing his praises, this could be his friends, family members, or even underlings. These conversations will also help evolve the romantic interest. When a soldier under his command states "the General is always with us in the field and he is among the ranks in battle, he is the best officer I have ever served with," the Solo PC now knows the General is a loved and good leader and the DM knows that the General is very dedicated to his duties, which could become a flaw in their relationship.

Previously, **KJW** and **Illion the Red** have spoken admirably on the subject of NPCs, but since some questions on this topic have arisen (and I see them quite often in other threads), I think it can be useful to talk about it some more.

NPCs, DMPCs, and Romance

Most people who have participated in a D&D campaign, and especially those who did so as teenagers, will have run into the concept of the DMPC (Dungeon Master Player Character--in itself an oxymoron). The gist of the concept is that the DMPC is an NPC that the DM is placing in the spotlight at the *expense of the players*. One classic example of such a character is when the DM bases a campaign around accompanying an epic fighter/sorcerer (drow half-dragon, probably) that is on a path bound for godhood.

Few DMs *want* to make a DMPC, but awareness on this matter has caused worry about doing it. It's rare to go a week without seeing a new post on these boards detailing some frustrated player's struggles with a DMPC. The qualities of a DMPC are inherent in the "big brother" syndrome, in which another person overshadows you utterly. As a side note, in real life, my elder brother and I have been born with completely different sets of talents, and it has led me to love and admire my brother without ever feeling inadequate as the result of his success. I believe that this is key to defusing a potential DMPC situation.

1) Overshadowing

My best friend once played in a campaign within which the basis of his character was that he was the only known survivor of a race of, essentially, large, muscular humans quite skilled at beating things. Though I do not specifically remember the name of the race, it went something like "Ferengar." His character's name was Fer.

During his early adventures, Fer runs across another person who turns out to be another member of his race. This person is just like him, except he's stronger, bigger, and more mysterious. His name is Engar. True story.

The point is that in order to be overshadowed, you have to first stand in someone's shadow. In a solo campaign, this means that if the PC is a wizard, it's (generally) not a good idea to consistently put a higher level wizard NPC in the party. If you do, make sure the PC has skills that the higher level character lacks. This also means that it's *not necessarily* a bad idea to put a 12th level rogue in a party where the PC is a 10th level fighter. In this example, the fighter still has more BAB than the rogue (and other benefits.)

2) Responsibility & Involvement

This has been stated before, but it's part of the equation. In a solo campaign, the PC should generally be the leader. This doesn't mean that there's no one out there with more authority than the PC; it just means that such people should stay away from the adventuring party. In *Eye of the Beholder II*, Khelben Blackstaff sent the party on a quest to explore, uh, something. A temple, I think. Anyway, the important thing is that he did not come with the party. If you'd been running around in the dungeon with a 20th level wizard babysitting you, it'd have become boring quite rapidly.

Similarly, if you go before the king, and you have an NPC speaking to the king, leaving the PC to listen and react at best, that is a bad thing, because it lowers involvement and makes the player feel as though his character doesn't matter. In a solo campaign, this is especially bad. Some DMs with good intentions have created an interesting story in which the scenes are scripted out, and the PC doesn't factor in too much; like a cut scene in a computer RPG. If, at any time, you have plans for an NPC to take the spotlight during a scene in which the PC is present, you have to ask yourself how this will add to the player's enjoyment. It might, but how? (More on this later...)

3) Information & Decisions

Another devastating type of DMPC is the Tall Dark Stranger. In this case, the mysterious NPC might not be more powerful than or in any other way overshadow the PC, but he or she holds the key to the campaign. Such characters are most often put into a campaign in order to provide vital information and ensure that the PC(s) make the "right decisions." In a solo campaign, this can cause the player to become disillusioned with his role in the story.

If you are consistently using ambiguous NPCs who are clearly withholding information on loose grounds ("You're not ready yet, grasshopper..."), ask yourself whether this is necessary. In many cases, skill or ability checks, or satisfying investigations, can allow the PC to reach the correct conclusions on his own. In this manner, you can motivate and shape the "correct" decision rather than create a character that insists upon it. Besides, it's much more fun to investigate and find the hidden information than to have it handed to you. This is especially true when you can use the information to trump some arrogant people.

If you're not making any of these three mistakes, don't worry about DMPCs. A solo campaign doesn't necessitate NPCs that are weak in spirit or powers; the only thing that matters is that you keep the spotlight on the PC.

On the topic of romance, which as KJW mentioned earlier in the thread "has the potential to make or break a solo campaign" (agree 100%), NPC construction becomes a little trickier. Some excellent advice has already been given on how to avoid the pitfalls. I will add that you shouldn't be afraid to make the potential partner an awesome character. Equals make by far the best lovers, and a bit of friendly (or bitter!) rivalry can easily blossom into a satisfying romance. Just remember where the PC's talents lie, and keep your player in the spotlight. It's alright to switch the spotlight for a short periods of time in order to let an NPC show off, but only if it adds to the enjoyment of the player. Watching a romantic interest flip out and win a duel with a knight to save herself from an arranged marriage can be quite satisfying as the solo PC (speaking from experience.)

Generally speaking, for a romantic interest in D&D, I'd make her equal level (but it depends on the character concept), typically of another class than the PC (or an Enchanter to the PC's Illusionist, or a finesse fighter to the PC's sundering power attacker, etc). I'll have her offer her opinions, but let the PC make most of the decisions. I have one caveat: For all NPCs, I have quirks, flaws, traits, and behaviors that make them react strongly to various situations. There are times when I'll have an NPC strongly disagree with the PC, or insist upon another course of action. Since the player is always in control of at least the PC, the occasional disagreement adds spice to the party dynamics. In the case of a romance interest that isn't a party member (which can be quite interesting, but I just love cooperative heroics too much to do this often), she doesn't need to have class levels at all, but she needs to be an equal in some fashion. For instance, a queen or a high priestess (without cleric levels) is the equal of a 15th level fighter, even if she can't stand up to him in a fight.

With this in mind, don't worry about DMPCs.

Here is an example of one of the Solo Campaigns I have run in the past and still revisit from time to time.

This campaign centered around a Halfling Rogue with three names. Portia Amareliss Thorngage was the first experiment that the player and I tried with an evil D&D character.

Early Campaign

Set in the seaport city of Natesh, our intrepid adventurer quickly ran afoul of the city's thieves' guild with her freelance work. She cased a number of houses and picked various pockets while she waited for the targets of the houses to be "away." Four houses fell to her skills before the Thieves' Guild took notice of her, but when they did...they did so quickly and with little leeway. She was given a simple choice – join or die. She chose "join" but harbored her resentment of their strong-arm methods for a later date.

Once in the guild, her skills and talents proved to be superior to her peers and she quickly became in demand by the various sub-leaders of the guild. One, in particular took a very special interest in her. Archie never seemed to leave the guild house or the complex underneath it, but he always seemed to know what was going on outside the guild – especially when it concerned the young Halfling that had taken to calling herself "Liss."

As Archie demanded a far lesser cut of loot and allowed her more freedom in choosing her own assignments, Liss gravitated to his employ, performing more and more jobs for him. She was having a grand-olde-time increasing her standing and her secreted-away wealth.

Campaign Shift One

Then came the day things changed for her. She received some special and odd instructions directly from Archie which involved meeting him at a location well away from the guild once the job was done. She, of course, immediately became very suspicious of the mission, especially since it involved the murder of a local merchant. Still, her work under Archie had been profitable and fun, so she decided to fulfill the mission. She killed the merchant and (outside of the mission description) framed her chief rival in the guild, making sure that he had no alibi for the crime.

Her meeting with Archie afterwards was approached with care and suspicion. Frantically watching for traps and double-crosses, she went to the designated meeting location and, surprisingly, Archie was there, alone, and happy to see her. He explained to her that her mission was actually a test of her true calling and complimented her on her execution of the mission, especially proud of her nuance in framing her rival. She was welcomed into the ultra-secretive Crimson Claw Assassins' Guild.

Liss continued her ways, accepting commissions for both thievery and assassinations with equal abandon and glee. Her reputation and prestige continued to grow in both of her disciplines until her "fame" began to grate on the nerves of the upper leaders of the Thieves' Guild. They sought to rein her in. She had other ideas...

Campaign Shift Two

Liss played up the simpering reticent servant to her "masters" until they were satisfied that they had full control over her. She then put into motion a bold plan she had formulated to take control of the guild for herself.

Through over a year of bribes, tips, and other means, she had (in disguise) gained the friendship and loyalty of the captain of the city guard and a great number of the most effective amongst the guards' ranks. She used this friendship to set up a secret operation for the guards to wipe out the Thieves' Guild.

Simultaneously, she set about arranging a rare meeting of the full guild to discuss a "grave

threat" she had uncovered while sneaking around the Duke's Mansion. During the meeting, she slipped out and silently killed the thieves watching the entrances to the guild. The thieves were taken by surprise as the best of the guards stormed into the guild from every secret entrance. None of the guild leaders survived...and precious few of the thieves survived either. The guild was destroyed and all thought killed.

Liss began her new life as the leader of the few who survived the attack. As the new leader of the Thieves' Guild, her adventures continued, moving into a more political arena where manipulating others became more important than accomplishing things herself.

This campaign continued for some time after this climax, hitting upon a number of additional high points, but in the interest of space, I'll end here.

Alright here are a few ideas for solo adventures for clerics that could be built into entire solo campaigns...

1) The Solo PC is sent to a small frontier community to tend a small, but spiritually important, shrine to the faith. The Solo PC will serve there for a year before being transferred to another assignment. If the DM wishes the community could be so small that the Solo PC is the primary cleric of the community. This is a good first adventure for a low-level cleric in a small community (easier to design).

2) The Solo PC is appointed the spiritual advisor to a young prince (or princess) of the kingdom. Our young royal is advenurous and possibly a romantic interest, but has little common sense and it is up to the Solo PC to protect him from machinations in the royal court.

3) The Solo PC is named the custodian of an ancient relic of the faith, unfortunately when she arrives to take charge of the item she learns it had been stolen upon the death of the previous custodian. Now the Solo PC must find the relic, which would be of little value to anyone outside of the faith. This could be a good side adventure for a cleric who is part of a group campaign and should be rewarded by her faith for her heroic deeds.

4) The Solo PC is charged with transporting the remains of a recently deceased high priest from his death to his tomb, but enemies of the faith wish the body to animate into a deadly form of undead. Truthfully, this could be a great group adventure.

5) The Solo PC is sent to a savage land to spread the faith and is charged with eventually starting a temple. This could be to a savage human land, to humanoids, or even civilized but very exotic humanoids, such as Merfolk. This would be a great solo campaign, as the Solo PC works against the local faiths, strange customs, and other challenges.

Alright here are a few ideas for solo adventures for wizards that could be built into entire solo campaigns...

1) The Solo PC is about to graduate from his wizardry training and must perform some challenge, such as recovering an item from a trapped chamber, defeating a fellow student in a magic duel, to traveling and recovering some item needed by his master. This is a good way to start a Solo Campaign and also to teach a new player the rules.

2) The Solo PC is appointed the magical advisor (or tutor) to a young prince (or princess) of the kingdom. Our young royal is adventurous and possibly a romantic interest, but has little common sense and it is up to the Solo PC to protect him from machinations in the royal court. [Some ideas work perfectly well for all classes with a little tweaking]

3) The Solo PC wishes to join a wizard guild and must complete a far more dangerous challenge than #1. This would be a good side-adventure for a PC wizard who is with a group, but wants to join a wizard guild. If the DM introduced some machinations behind the scenes during the Solo Adventure, such as the Solo PC being recruited to join a faction that wishes to overthrow the guild this could become the basis for a group campaign.

4) The Solo PC wants to craft a magical item and the DM requires the Solo PC to have to acquire a few rare components. This was common in 2nd Edition, and is easy to add to 3.5 by replacing some of the GP cost with necessary items that are not available for purchase. The crafting of a powerful magic item can become a campaign upon itself.

5) The Solo PC is drafted and assigned as the wizard to a border castle on the frontier. This is a good idea to set up a campaign in a small community while providing the Solo PC with lots of support. This could easily evolve into many types of campaigns depending upon the setting.

Originally Posted by **KJW**

Once again people should feel free to write up a synopsis of a favorite solo campaign or adventure they have run, I do believe that more examples can help people understand why solo campaigns are so popular. In truth, most of my solo campaigns are in other systems so I only have a handful of D&D examples.

Interesting that you should mention that. For myself, although I spent my adolescence dreaming about participating in the quintessential roleplaying campaign, the lion's share of my experience as a player and as a DM has come from solo campaigns played with my best friend. As a DM, however, I've largely used custom systems, rather than published ones. However, I will take the liberty of giving an example that would have worked just as well in D&D.

The Cardinal Edict

One of the great benefits of having but one player in a campaign is that you're granted a great deal of freedom in relation to the magnitude of the PC. Consider the Baldur's Gate series (BG2 is most likely my favorite game of all time); this premise would be almost impossible to play with a group, due to the blinding spotlight on the "main character," but functions very well as a solo campaign. During a discussion one day, my player intimated that he liked the idea of playing a young, inexperienced king who would have to prove

himself. "Sweet, strategic army battles," I thought, and merged the idea with a campaign seed that had been ruminating in my mind for a time.

Prince Aozrayn of Erde Kahn, a relatively small nation on the sub-continent of Erz, is 15 years old, and the campaign started with the ceremony that marked his coming of age, and cemented his position as the heir to the throne. The royal ball that followed was spent introducing the player to his natural environment in preparation for the coming events. Through conversation and interaction, he was introduced to his bodyguard (the Princess Serreia of Navasco, a neighboring nation famous for its blend of philosophy and weapons mastery... I was typing away on an explanation of Navasco here, but I realized it's more than needs to be said), his parents, and generally got a feel for his position as crown prince.

Generally, it's best to start a story with action, but a solo campaign often relies largely on deeper emotions than a group campaign. Therefore, I felt it necessary to provide some time for the player to become acquainted with his friends and family before I threw him into the thick of it. I wouldn't say this is always the best way to start a solo campaign, but considering what happened next in this particular campaign, I believe it was for the better.

During the festivities, a shadow organization calling themselves the Crimson Shield approached the king and requested a private audience. The prince participated in this meeting after the ball, and to make a long story short, the Crimson Shield agents presented the royal family with relatively convincing proof that a demon incursion was about to occur in a neighboring country. The Crimson Shield, purportedly a group that exists to prevent such events, also claimed that the royal heirloom of Erde Kahn, the Ruby Sigil, was one of the artifacts potent enough to prevent this particularly devastating incursion. This gate, if opened, would align the domain of the Nameless Terror, the Exarch of Ker-Reguel, Realm of Fear, with Erz.

Note that, as over the top as this is, this campaign setting is relatively low on magic. Hence, neither Aozrayn nor his parents believe(d) that demons exist. Earlier in this thread, there were comments on council meetings and the role of the PC in such situations. Although Aozrayn's father was the natural leader during that event, it had previously been established that his parents were grooming him for leadership. Hence, the precocious prince was allowed to interject freely during the conversation, and his parents often let him speak for them.

Though unconvinced, the royal family decides to lend the Ruby Sigil to the Crimson Shield. However, they insist on accompanying the monks to the sealing, bringing a small retinue of their elite soldiers. Since there's no time to arrange an overt reason to travel to the neighboring nation of Jalunde, they travel incognito and swiftly across the border.

After dispatching a group of bandits who, strangely, did not seem perturbed by the revelation that they were attacking royalty, the group reaches the ritual grounds in the deep forest. To make another long story short, it doesn't go quite as they had expected (😬), and the Crimson Shield monks are slain as devils emerge from the burning portal, led by the hulking Gate Crusher. Their last words? Protect the Ruby Sigil... which is in Prince Aozrayn's hands. Under the skilled guidance of King Restefon, the knights fight valiantly to drive the devils back, but they are ultimately slain. Aozrayn, in a fit of terrified necessity, manages to lure the Gate Crusher away by goading him with the Ruby Sigil. Eventually, the king is cloven in twain by the Gate Crusher's axe, and the queen is torn to shreds by a group of lesser devils as she tries to protect Serreia. However, just as Aozrayn strikes out in fury and fear, the ritual, set in motion, is completed... and the Ruby Sigil absorbs the emerging

realm. The devils are sent back as the prince falls unconscious.

When Prince Aozrayn wakes up, he and Serreia are the only survivors, and the Ruby Sigil has somehow become grafted to his shoulder. Thus, the campaign's prologue ends.

Intrigue

In order to make this campaign interesting, I had decided to introduce a variety of semi-related plots that would keep twisting while the player does whatever he wants, each one capable of spinning out an adventure arc now and then as I see fit. There are several challenges facing Prince Aozrayn:

- When Aozrayn returned to Erde Kahn, the border was closed. He was then informed that the nation was at war: Shortly following his parents' death, the Queen of Kirzегоth had proclaimed that the regent of Erde Kahn had willfully attacked the nation of Jalunde, and declared war against the smaller nation. All of Erde Kahn's neighbors--with the notable exception of Navasco--allied themselves with Kirzегоth.
- The Ruby Sigil has apparently made Aozrayn the Guardian of Ker-Reguel, the realm he managed to seal away. Although this enables him to decide who comes and goes from the realm, he cannot yet control his power, and the incessant voices of the innumerable denizens of Ker-Reguel crying for release make his life difficult. Since Ker-Reguel is apparently part of an elaborate afterlife, many of the demons trapped within are willing to bargain for release...
- During Aozrayn's absence, an impostor had taken his place and ruled the nation ruinously. Though Aozrayn slew this impostor--a shapeshifter from a demonic realm apparently engaged in war with Ker-Reguel--his short rule had caused much damage. Of course, the presence of such a demon in Erz has some connection to the actions of the Kirzegotian queen...
- His father's leadership held Erde Kahn together. Although the people are royalistic, the young king has much to prove. This is my player's favorite part of the campaign, so I make the most out of it. There are numerous people in positions of power in Erde Kahn that do not believe that the young man has what it takes to run the nation, so he has to prove himself to these people while simultaneously learning how to administer a complex nation.
- Four nations are allied against the small nation of Erde Kahn, and their armies are marching through their territory as we speak. In order to protect his nation, Aozrayn must not only unite his troops and learn to lead and inspire them, but also find alliances wherever he can. There is ample intrigue, as even his allies are hard pressed to remain on his side.
- Though Aozrayn does not know it yet, the Gate Crusher has managed to breach the boundaries and enter Erz. (This was revealed in one of the short stories I occasionally write to expand on tangential characters and events.)
- Not all denizens of Ker-Reguel are hostile: For instance, Ech-Sezare, the Patriarch of the Dark Cloud Clan, has granted some assistance to Aozrayn, seemingly without interest for reciprocation. A demoness named Oysua seems to remain aloof of the demonic hierarchy, spending her turtuous existence constantly running from her many enemies in order to remain independent.

This type of situation allows for a varied campaign; rather than follow any one aspect, the player remains free to concentrate on whatever he finds most intriguing at the moment. At the same time, the nature of the events that surround the recently crowned king force him to take action. As the DM, however, it doesn't matter to me what he decides to do, since the playing field is set up.

The House of Feathers

There's been one traditional dungeon so far. When Aozrayn returned to the capital, he dispatched the impostor who had been ruling the nation in his name during his absence. However, the plot of these apparent shapeshifters ran deeper: When the nation's most powerful duke, a friend of the king who would otherwise be Aozrayn's staunchest supporter, arrived at the royal palace, he accused the prince of murdering his father, based on testimony he claimed to have received from the dying king. Eventually, in order to prove his innocence, Aozrayn agreed to go through with a lost tradition; the rite of the House of Feathers, which was a test to ensure the capability of the crown prince in the past.

Along with his most trusted people, Aozrayn traveled to Mount Damai to the south in order to go through the House of Feathers and seek the priestesses that dwell on the top. However, upon entering the House of Feathers, having earlier received a cryptic (and crude) warning from the demoness Oysua), he finds that the Ruby Sigil reacts to the wards within, causing a rift in Ker-Reguel that promptly becomes a battleground between devils that attempt to pass through the lethal rift.

Improvisation

One interesting thing about that dungeon was that the player chose who to bring with him before leaving the palace. Aside from his trusted warriors, he also said that he wanted to bring two of the ~100 soldiers that had accompanied him from the border to the capital, and had thus far proven their loyalty. His criteria were simple: He wanted a sword user and a man with a polearm... so I came up with two names and made up their personalities as we went along. Following their actions in the House of Feathers, both of them had been developed to the point where they had become trusted and well-liked by the player.

The point is that there are a lot of people in a world, and you don't have time to describe them all. When the player(s) decides to talk to someone, it helps the suspension of disbelief if you learn to develop their personality as you go along. This way, it feels as though the character existed before he was introduced, rather than being made up. He just hadn't been in the spotlight before. In general, improvisation, when trained, can help you by filling in the blanks as you go along rather than burning yourself out trying to create an expansive list of geographical features, organizations or NPCs.

Cooperation

More so than in a group campaign, a solo campaign is a cooperative effort between the DM and the player. My player tends to be very proactive, and I indulge that. If he's discussing something with a character, he will often make up things about their shared past or the world that I had previously not planned. In this case, unless what he just said directly contradicts something important, I just accept it as the truth and run with it.

Completely Unrelated Example:

NPC: "*What was that?! Gods, these things vanish as quickly as they strike... how can we*

stand against this?"

PC *"This reminds me of that time we hunted gnolls through the barrow. How did we survive then?"* (Never happened, but these two have adventured before, off the stage, so it's reasonable enough.)

NPC: Grimaces. *"Sheer luck?"*

PC: *"Well, that, and a couple of well-placed fireball spells..."* Grins.

NPC: Pales. *"You're not going to... Oh, gods..."*

Not all players are this proactive, and making this work is a matter of getting to know each other's playstyles. However, the important thing is to keep in mind that unless what the player suggests is contrary to something which will ultimately be more fun for him, it's good to learn to roll with it.

That was too long, too detailed, and probably too boring... and still I feel as though I left out too many important details. 😊

Narrations

This is a something that I've only recently begun to truly explore, but I've found it to be a powerful tool. In a story that lacks interaction, and especially a novel, a large part of the entertainment can often spring from knowing what both sides are thinking, or knowing something that the main character doesn't know. (Shakespeare used this almost incessantly, and look where it got him!) In a typical D&D campaign, narrations are tricky to use correctly. The difficulty lies in revealing something interesting without causing the players to metagame. If you have a group of skilled roleplayers, it's a powerful tool, but even more so if you're running a solo campaign for one skilled roleplayer who will wilfully deny his character player knowledge in order to make the story more dramatic.

In such situations, narrations can be used in a variety of ways. Narrations provide a dramaturgic break that can help you guide the pace. If the player is on a quest to save someone, you can narrate a scene where the captor is torturing or otherwise threatening the victim in order to instill a palpable sense of urgency. It'll probably make the player hate the villains more, too. In a romance, you can use narrations to show what the other person is thinking, even as they're outwardly cool towards each other. Narrating a scene with previously unknown characters can be a useful method of hinting at a profounder plot or deeper world.

I'm also planning to use narrations in the campaign I wrote about in the previous post as a means of occasionally providing further information about the king and queen's shared past, since it's rather atypical. My hope is that exposition on these characters will endear them to the player, so that the loss is all the more felt. It's difficult to make the player truly care about NPCs without extended time developing them, which is why I'm going to go about it in a rather strange manner. 😊

It's important to find a good, balanced way of using narrations. If you overuse them, or use them at the wrong times, you'll risk ruining the interactivity of the campaign, which is

undoubtedly a bad thing.

By the way, thanks for a great thread!

I have been inspired by Ormiss to post an overview of my current solo campaign, which is not D&D.

Soledad Castenada

Well right now I am running a solo campaign with my wife in Rifts that could be called West Wing: Rifts by the way it is playing out. Rifts is a post-apocalyptic setting where the Earth is overrun by beings and demons that have come through the Rifts. It is an outrageous setting with little game balance and I used to have major problems with the mechanics, but a recent revision and my wife's enthusiasm for the setting prompted me to try another Rifts campaign.

We started on the premise that my wife wanted to run a Coalition (evil human supremacist nation that is anti-magic, but also the most advanced and safe nation in North America) deserter who turns her fellow deserters into a mercenary unit. We ran one adventure and it felt stale and neither of us got into it as it was pretty similar to solo campaigns we had run before. My wife liked her character a psychic named Soledad Castenada...and she liked the idea of bounty hunting instead of being a mercenary, but I felt that bounty hunting would get stale quick. We stepped away from the solo campaign for a few weeks.

I retooled the campaign and had Soledad instead of being a deserter, she was exiled from the Coalition for investigating corruption too high up the chain of command. I was inspired by a series of mystery books we have been reading about a Chinese police officer sent to prison in Tibet for similar reasons and embraces Tibetan Buddhism, then gets involved in murder investigations, and eventually released to wander Tibet.

Soledad is sent from the Coalition to be part of the exodus program with which she will be given a senior law enforcement position in an allied but separate mostly human kingdom (Manistique Imperium) with a luxury apartment, high salary, and all manner of benefits. Although Soledad is being kicked out of the Coalition, she was a honest and brilliant investigator so her supporters made sure she would be taken care of in exile.

We began the campaign on the ship that took her to Manistique and was sitting in the harbor, but while the ship was traveling to Manistique with trade goods and passengers the Imperium went through a civil war and a change in government. Soledad helps with communications monitoring and waits on the ship for 2 weeks, tensions rising on board, and confusion about what was happening on shore. Eventually, the government sends out a delegation led by an alien to process visas, clearly the pro-human government has been ousted. Soledad fears the worse and is confirmed: all the benefits she was promised have been rescinded and she has no apartment or job waiting for her. Fortunately, the alien (Minister of Immigration & Tourism) gives her a few meal and hotel vouchers, lets her in the Imperium, and wishes her good luck.

She goes to the Royal Police Service and presents herself for employment, making it clear she will take any work and that as a former police lieutenant and psychic she is very

qualified. She is accepted by the Special Crimes Bureau as a detective (a demotion from her previous position in the Coalition) and assigned to Sgt. Raz'torgak Berak a alien-bear magic user as her partner. She has to deal with all her prejudices at once as it is clear that this is a test by her new superiors. She gets a rundown apartment and a bicycle and is ready to work.

My wife is interesting as a roleplayer; her abilities do actually match the character. In my online group campaign she is playing a half-ogre barbarian and she plays it well and thinks like a half-ogre; in this campaign she is playing a savant police investigator with psychic abilities and was truly phenomenal at roleplaying out the police work. Soledad and Sgt. Raz were one of the few paranormal teams in the Royal Police Service (RPS), so they were given lots of cases involving demonic cults, demons, wizards gone mad, psychic criminals, and the like.

Soledad grew frustrated with the ability of criminals to strike and then leave the Imperium and discovered CACTUS (Cooperative Apprehension of Criminals Treaty for Unified Security) a little known agreement that the Imperium belonged to that focused on bounty hunters and bringing to justice mobile criminals. With her computer background she begins improving the program and championing for the Imperium to become more involved with this agreement. [OK admittedly with two lawyers we get excited about treaties, laws, jurisdiction, and all that nonsense.]

The Queen of the Imperium names a new head for the RPS, an alien from a advanced state known as Lazlo; his first action is to have all personnel take a battery of tests, submit their resumes, and also any ideas or suggestions they have. Soledad submits a very lengthy series of suggestions. Then Minister Azlan Reyn tells the officers of the RPS to dismiss 10% of their personnel. Soledad's lieutenant fires her as she is the least senior of the department and not even a citizen. Soledad uses her computer skills to send her resume directly to the new minister and then waits to see what happens. Minister Reyn then gives Soledad her lieutenant's job and tells her to experiment with a paranormal investigations department.

At this point the campaign is moving along pretty well and Soledad is also doing volunteer work teaching computer skills to 'gifted' children at an orphanage and school supported by her new church. She is trying dating, but with limited results and is slowly coming to consider the Imperium home.

A major series of terrorist attacks by enemies of the Coalition using magic and determined to punish the Imperium for its economic alliance with the Coalition puts Lt. Soledad Castenada in the spotlight. Pressure is on, lives are on the line, and Lt. Castenada manages to thwart the terrorist cell, though several escape. This though gives her national attention. She goes on a delegation out West to go to the annual CACTUS Conference and she makes friends with law enforcement personnel across the continent and also senior leader of the Imperium, including the new Foreign Minister Gwen Patterson who is really the power behind the new government. She comes home and is on the way up.

Then one night the Coalition comes to her apartment and they have a deal,: she spies for them and in five years she can come back to the Coalition as a citizen with a high position. They make it clear that they can make her life more than difficult if she refuses, but they focus the discussion on the carrot. Soledad is scared, but goes to the first alien she met, Minister Garzan Tripphas of Immigration & Tourism and asks for help. He gets her to take citizenship and inform every key government official she knows that she was contacted by the Coalition. She has thrown her lot in with the Imperium and its new government.

The campaign moves forward and Lt. Castenada eventually rises to Capt. and creates the Special Threats Department to deal with the most egregious of threats, which in Rifts is pretty outrageously extreme. She begins working with mercenaries through the Manistique Imperium Mercenary Guild (an institution of my own invention and really cool); she uses these mercenaries to strike terrorists and pirates outside of the Imperium. She also recruits clairvoyants and they lead to the discovery of a pending coup against the government in power that is supported by some high-ranking members of the government and also the Coalition, which wants to annex the Imperium. Minister Reyn and Foreign Minister Patterson are informed by Soledad of the situation just a few days before the coup is planned; complex maneuvering, psychic and magical interrogations concealed by mind wipes, and delicate planning allow the government to thwart the coup with minimal loss of life. The Coalition aborts its invasion plans against a prepared and ready Imperium. Capt. Soledad Castenada is a hero.

OK as for campaign planning, we had gotten West Wing Seasons 1 & 2 as gifts over Christmas and as we have been watching and loving the series, I started thinking that this could be a cool approach for the Soledad campaign. After the coup, the new relatively new monarch, Queen Marie, has been pretty much a figurehead in the Imperium and has been poorly informed about security issues though she is a key vote on the Imperium's Security Council. She recruits Captain Soledad Castenada to serve as her Royal Conservator. Captain Soledad is now responsible for advising the Queen on security and foreign policy issues and has a office of loyal people that she has built throughout her time in the Imperium, Sgt. Raz is still with her as well, to assist her and carry out investigations on behalf of the Queen. On her first week on the job she initiated investigations into a distant civil war in a state that is believed to be secretly controlled by androids, dispatched a recon team to determine the threat of a demon state to an allied kingdom, and began investigation a princess of the Imperium to see if she might be convinced to enter into an arranged marriage with a king of a rising kingdom. The Queen is thrilled to finally have someone explaining her these issues and this has allowed her for the first time to take control of a Security Council meeting. Now the politics will begin as some of the government don't like the idea of the Queen being assertive.

OK now for this campaign I created a very complex government for the Imperium, there are four royal families, a Senate, a Cabinet Ministry with elected Ministers, a Privy Council to advise the Queen, the Royal Services (which are the law enforcement and military branches of the government), and seven (now six following a merger of the two weakest) political parties. In a few months I have created over 200+ NPCs of which about 50+ are recurring characters, though the story is about a core group of 20 characters. Soledad has finally starting dating a decent guy, unfortunately he is a mercenary leader and his unit is away and in danger most of the time, which is the key flaw in their relationship that must be addressed among others. For background materials I have 'news' reports from Sundays that are about 3 pages of material (consisting of a highlight of key articles in major newspapers and a synopsis of a major TV news program that Soledad watches). I have done about 30 of these so far so there is lots of depth to the setting.

I will post later overviews of 2 old D&D campaigns, which share elements of this campaign and show how to do some of the same things in a D&D setting.

KJW, thanks for sharing with us the adventures of Soledad Castenada. I must confess, aside from playing and DMing (when it flows), reading summaries or logs of excellent campaigns is one of my favorite pastimes. Therefore, I thank you not only for the example, but for the entertainment and inspiration that reading it grants me. I'm looking forward to the D&D

campaigns you mentioned. As an economist, I definitely understand the lure of treaties and pure political maneuvering as roleplaying potential. For me, that kind of realism adds a great deal to any campaign, even one focused primarily on action.

In the recent thread called something akin to "The Most Outrageous Character Ideas," a player that wanted to be heir to a throne was mentioned, as was the reference to the Baldur's Gate plotline. Naturally, I agree that both these ideas are poor in most group campaigns, and I do recall playing a halfling king in a session when I was 12... Incidentally that was a solo campaign, but nothing to be proud of. I think I killed a hydra within an hour. At any rate, making a player royalty should, in my opinion, only be done as the story concept warrants. For instance, in a campaign based around diplomacy and heavy politics, it might be better to be an advisor or minor noble with a lot of limitations. (Soledad comes to mind, in her position as the queen's advisor.) However, when the campaign idea is the trials and tribulations of a ruler who has no one to turn to for higher assistance (well, except for demons... heh heh heh...), it fits. Ultimately, if you are blessed to have a skilled roleplayer in your campaign, anything that fits the campaign will work out. I am fortunate enough to have a very close relationship with my best friend, who is an experienced and excellent roleplayer.

At any rate, my suggestion about the king PC is: If you've got a player that can handle the challenge, and a campaign idea that harnesses the position rather than being hampered by it, go for it! It's been a lot of fun so far.

I'm glad you liked the example I made with the soldiers; part of the challenge and Aozrayn's roleplay is that he must choose his vassals carefully. His father's dearest friend, the chancellor and captain of the Falcon Knights fled with Aozrayn's sister during the impostor's reign, and their whereabouts are unknown, even as the late queen's Midnight Hunters (an organization of largely urban rangers) hound them, obeying the impostor's last command. Most of the knights died, and Aozrayn is left to fill positions with the best--and most loyal--people he can find. The soldiers, Cafas and Aridai, witnessed their young liege's bravery first hand in the event of the House of Feathers, and have bonded with him to the point where they will give their lives for their king. This will undoubtedly matter in the long run. Such relations also inspire me, since loyalty, friendship and heroism are among the things that touch me most.

The player actually has a lot of fun simply governing his kingdom. Occasionally I throw in more or less significant courtly events where he has to render judgment on a variety of things. One of the most interesting parts was how he handled the three nobles that accused him of killing his father: After returning from Mount Damai, he gauged their intentions and rendered quite different judgment accordingly: The duke was not punished, because his intentions seemed genuine, but one of the more opportunistic nobles was actually stripped of his title (actually, Aridai happened to be from that noble's domain, and could attest to his poor rulership... and suggest a better ruler, a young mayoress who will be quite surprised at the turn of events), while the third, a woman, was put on a "probationary period" as ruler of her domain.

You mentioned that narrations felt uncomfortable in the beginning. I forgot to mention that; I definitely felt pretty stupid when I started narrating. After doing it a couple of times, it gets a lot easier. The first time I used it was in the Wheel of Time (I used to be fanatical about the series until Crossroads of Twilight came out) campaign I started up this summer, and I felt like a total dork while describing Myrddraal and Trollocs sneaking through the woods. (If you're not familiar with WoT, a Death Knight leading a band of orcs will give you a close enough mental image.) The irony is that the campaign hasn't gotten too far because

I'm worried about not being able to keep up the quality of the sessions after feeling like I got a hole in one during the last session. The campaign, and the romance, has so much potential that I am worried about wasting it. 😊

Thanks for your kind words! It's very encouraging and inspiring to get some feedback aside from my player.

I should mention that me and my friend play online, since we live in different countries. There are detriments to playing online, but personally I feel that it fits us well. I'm not going to speak for other people, but I find that especially in a solo campaign, the roleplaying intensity is helped by the fact that it's easier to shut out outside influences and imagine faces, voices and situations. It's easier to imagine the queen's smooth, feminine voice if the baritone DM isn't mimicking it, for instance, and you get more time to consider what words and speech pattern your character would use.

Prologues

The first time I encountered the idea of the prologue was in the second campaign my friend DMed for me. This campaign, which he has titled Shrouded Stars, is a science fiction campaign initially based on the premise of piloting gritty, "realistic"-style mecha. In order to show my character's past, my character, Ralward, was started off as a 12 year old boy on a fairly recently colonized moon called Fallowmist.

In this campaign, set in a made up solar system, the science level isn't outrageous, but rather a few hundred years beyond our own. There's no such thing as interstellar travel, and only a few planets have been colonized. Fallowmist, a moon orbiting an inhospitable mining planet called Bane, has been largely abandoned by the solar community, and had degenerated into a struggle between two armed factions that dragged the entire moon into their conflict.

During the first session, Ralward's mother was accidentally killed by a gunshot when a fight broke out between thugs from the two factions in a roadside tavern. Following this event, his father, previously an optimistic colonist, became obsessed with getting off of Fallowmist with what remained of his family. In order to do this, he needed a ride, and in order to get a ride, he needed to participate in the one feature that made Fallowmist and its backwards "misties" famous on Homeworld: The annual MotorGames.

The crux was that the MotorGames have no rules. You're supposed to cross the finish line with a vehicle, and that's it. Ralward's father spent years building a motorcycle he called the Lunar Comet, and finally participate in the event. Unfortunately, quite near the finish line, as Ralward watched, a ruthless participant named Hendar "the Hammer," knocked him off of his bike and got him killed. Not a great day in a 14 year old's life, so Ralward got sad, and then he got mad. The ambush that followed ended with both of them believing that the other had died, which later led to the most awesome showdown I've played... but I digress.

Later on, Ralward helped his employer prevent an act of terrorism against one of the moon's Atmospheric Formatters (a terraforming device), but was picked up by the Alliance military as he passed out, and was taken into space. Waking up and staring out at the shrinking moon in the night sky of space was quite a roleplaying moment.

Ralward is 22 now, and Fallowmist seems a long time ago, but as player, I'll never remember what his life was like back and, and what his thoughts were. This backstory could have been simply retold to me before the first session, but the fact that it was played out

added an immeasurable depth to my character. These days, we almost always do some sort of prologue to our solo campaigns.

An effective prologue is as long as the player wants it to be. In the Wheel of Time campaign I mentioned earlier, the prologue kept getting longer as circumstances prompted more detail. The difficult part is knowing where to start. Actually, I've played a 2 year old once, and loved it 😊

Queen Eleanor Peridan Caldru

I had two PCs break off from one of my best group campaign and become two of my most epic solo campaigns. First, I will tell the story of Lady Eleanor Peridan a fighter/cavalier who would become the first Queen of the Western Kingdom.

Lady Eleanor was a knight from minor nobility in the kingdom of Timbron who joined up with an adventuring group that was seeking the lost Tomb of Emperor Belagon, a great warlord who was the son of the God of War and who nearly conquered the entire continent a millennium ago. He was killed by elves, or actually by his wife on behalf of the elves, but his tomb was forever hidden. This difficult quest went across the continent and the party faced all manner of challenges from rival parties, a river god, to finally the reborn Emperor Belagon whom they awoke when they discovered his tomb. Most of the party survived this quest, but the party dissolved when its common purpose ended. Some became villains, some tried to keep the company going (eventually the remnants of the entire party were decimated in a later adventure), but Lady Eleanor decided to find her own destiny.

In the party, Lady Eleanor was closest to Arendius, a old diviner/lore master NPC who was a font of useful and useless information, and was aided by her squire Brunsk, who was a squire only in the most generous sense and was mostly a glorified groom of pessimistic disposition and limited education. Lady Eleanor was disappointed with most of the monarchs she had encountered in her travels including the less than impressive king of Timbron and she dreamed of serving a great king.

Arendius came to her one day with information about Theus an ancient king who was elevated to godhood, but who returned to the world to be reborn as a mortal king for the ages. He unfortunately was betrayed by dark gods, and his ancient kingdom collapsed, but legends say that Theus continues to be reborn with no memory of his existence, but waiting for his chance to rebuild his kingdom. The old party had encountered the fabled White Armor of Theus and tangled for a time with its curse, before a party member died and they were rid of it by giving it to the Church of Mithras (a warrior god for knights and paladins and Lady Eleanor's faith of choice). Lady Eleanor and Brunsk began a quest to find the reincarnation of Theus with Arendius providing research and occasionally joining in on the quest.

(See [Theus](#) for a generic and slightly dummed-down version I used in Master DM Competitions #19.)

Brunsk's contribution was to taste various local fruit preserves on their travels as it was said that where Theus lived the land would be bountiful, so Brunsk figured that the best preserves would lead them to Theus. Lady Eleanor was more methodical and sought out to find any remnants of the Blue Knights an ancient order of knights dedicated to serving Theus. Neither of them were overly successful, but Lady Eleanor, who was a gifted warrior and very well-equipped, dispatched much evil in her travels. They were joined by an elven ranger named Marinane who was saved by Lady Eleanor and in truth was curious about the

quest and figured a decade or two searching for a lost god-king would be an interesting experience. They are also joined by Numestra (Lady Eleanor's new cohort) who was a bard that wished to sing songs about this legendary female knight and hero.

Lady Eleanor from her travels and discussions with sages and prophets came to fear that a great crisis was on the horizon and that only by finding Theus could this crisis be averted. Still she despaired, but one night was visited by a young girl named Marie (in reality this was Aurora a good god feared by my players for her meddling and heavy handed approach to mortals) who gave Eleanor a magical compass that would lead to the birthplace of the current incarnation of Theus.

Lady Eleanor, Marinane, and Brunsk set off in pursuit and came to a village in Anduran and learned of a young man named Micadus Haeron who went to the Principality of Pailanus to study engineering and was working on the Grand Temple of Dalicus (CN Greater God of the Sea), which would be the largest temple in the continent upon its completion. Pailanus was a port city of great culture and justice, but Lady Eleanor still feared for the safety of Theus, or Micadus, and tried her best to conceal her identity when she sought him out for she was not an unknown hero in these lands.

She quickly found Micadus who was a gifted young engineer working as a foreman for a pittance of a wage on the Grand Temple of Dalicus. He was a respected and well-liked leader and the workers looked to him to settle their grievances, but he was not kingly to the eye of Lady Eleanor, at least not yet. Lady Eleanor eventually quietly introduced herself to him and explained his destiny, not surprisingly he rejected the idea and thought Lady Eleanor a disturbed woman. She refuses to leave his side and stated that she would protect him from harm, which was fortunate as a few days later a demon-assassin came after Micadus and Lady Eleanor barely managed to fight him off. His identity revealed, the dark gods were already in pursuit. Micadus was still in denial, when Marie showed up and told him to grow up and deal with it and advised the two of them to leave Pailanus now as Belagon was coming to invade the Principality. Lady Eleanor asked if Belagon sent the demon-assassin and Marie replied, no that was sent by Dehok the God of Fear and Terror whose task it is to ensure that Theus does not ascend again as a god.

Lady Eleanor gathers her party and takes Micadus from Pailanus just ahead of the floating citadel of Belagon and an army of thousands of mercenaries and Belagon's Stone Army, which is composed of one thousand stone constructs inhabited by the souls of his best soldiers from a thousand years ago. They await in the Earth until called forth by Belagon from any point in the world. Pailanus is occupied and the continent trembles in fear of another dark reign by Emperor Belagon. Word also spreads that Theus the White King has returned to the land to bring peace, but in truth Micadus is confused and unable to process all that is happening.

Lady Eleanor is joined by Arendius and they realize that they were part of the party that accidentally restored Belagon to life so this crisis is their responsibility, but that the best they could do is organize a common defense of the western kingdoms with maybe Micadus as the central king or leader of the cause. Marinane is sent to the Elven Lands to get help, while the rest of the party heads for Maerithia and Alphatea the two most powerful kingdoms in the west. Behind them Belagon is quickly claiming territory for his new kingdom.

Fear is rampant, and many of the lands are afraid of opposing Belagon for the legends of his cruelty to those who challenged him are many. The wizards of Maerithia decide to be neutral in the conflict and the halfling shires follow this example. In Alphatia, the party is welcomed

by the aged King Sorian X who is a man of faith and immediately accepts Micadus as Theus reborn and pledges the aid of his mighty kingdom in this cause. He names his grandson Prince Cusarus to command his forces to face Belagon; immediately Prince Cusarus dislikes Micadus and the two of them are in constant arguments. Prince Cusarus is a knight and military officer, while Micadus is of a more commoner, with a flexible nature. Micadus also becomes smitten with Princess Tione, another grandchild of King Sorian X.

The Belagon War begins in earnest with the knights of Alphatea routing many of the mercenaries of Belagon who lack the discipline and skill of his armies of ancient times. The legendary Emperor had been too impatient and his invasion begins to crumble as it was not prepared for serious resistance. Belagon orders boulders dropped from his floating citadel to devastate Pailanus and sends word to this 'Micadus' that if his forces continue to advance he will completely destroy Pailanus; he also releases the black dragons he has under his command from an ancient accord with the Black Dragon King.

There is much debate among the leaders and Micadus suggests that the army hold position and stall, while he tries to convince the elves to aid the cause. Lady Eleanor and Micadus go to the elves and find that they are mobilizing for war against their old enemy, they will throw their sky ships and aerial cavalry against the fortress and will provide archers to the army. The decision is made and the army advances on Pailanus riding through the night in hope of getting as close to Pailanus as possible before discovery. At this point several new heroes have joined the party including Fargain Ironshield of the dwarves and the brother Sir Almayce and Sir Tigris of Alphatea. Lady Eleanor takes the party to deal with the most powerful of the black dragons and by morning the fortress is in retreat with the elves suffering heavy casualties but hounding Belagon in his withdrawal. Much of his Stone Army was lost and his mercenaries totally routed, more importantly the invincible mystique of the ancient Emperor Belagon has been lost.

Lady Eleanor expects Micadus to take the throne of Pailanus and work to unite the western kingdoms, but Micadus instead installs a survivor of the Royal Family of Pailanus and takes but a small town as his dominion. He intends to unite the land with words and wisdom not with swords and bravery; Lady Eleanor accepts this and takes charge of the newly formed Blue Knights., but she is unhappy with the passive nature of her new liege and is drawn in many ways to the more direct and assertive Prince Cusarus.

The Blue Knights under Lady Eleanor fight many evils including a great red dragon and the Jabberwock, from these battles many of the ancient artifacts are found including the Crown of Theus, which gives Micadus memories of his godhood and rekindle some of his abilities, but he still refuses to become any more than an advisor to other kings. A suit of Blue Armor is also found and brought back for a tournament to be fought to see who should wear this armor from among the Blue Knights.

Lady Eleanor is nervous about this tournament; she is the First of the Blue Knights and should win the tournament and get the armor, but many years ago she was a disaster in tournaments. Not surprisingly, times have changed and Lady Eleanor easily wins the tournament against some of the best knights of the continent. For a time she and a band of Blue Knights travel to other tournaments to herald the wisdom and glory of Micadus Haeron. Lady Eleanor also becomes closer to Prince Cusarus as the two of them have much in common and dream of a united Western Kingdom. Lady Eleanor finds her relation with Micadus distant as he turns to Princess Tione and others for counsel, but no other warrior is as famous or feared as Lady Eleanor and the Church of Mithras names her as their champion as well.

Then the Godswar began.

Archon the King of the Gods is slain in treachery by the Dark Gods in the Sacred Hall where no god can harm another, but the Dark Gods sneak in powerful mortals with divine gifts to ambush and slay Archon. A war erupts in the Outer Planes that threatens to destroy the Pantheon, this causes ripples and fear in the world and Micadus knows what he must do for good to remain in control of the heavens and the world (which is one of five worlds controlled by my pantheon, each world is different, but share similarities in culture and traditions). Lady Eleanor is sent to recover an ancient key, which he will use to summon UR the over-power to issue a challenge on behalf of the gods of light. Micadus talks to UR as a god and all the gods are trapped on the world to fight till one god is selected as king; UR also restores many dead gods to life, including Archon.

Lady Eleanor is a little overwhelmed, but does her best and seeks counsel from Aurora who is in her full form now and ready for combat against evil. Lady Eleanor is told to gather forces for battle as Maerithia has joined with evil and Alphatea is where the Godswar will be fought and ended, she is also told to go to the capital of Alphatea for King Sorian X has marched to aid another kingdom and evil has found roost on the throne. On the way Lady Eleanor tangles with lesser demigods and holds her own, but realizes that this fight is beyond her and only commits her party when absolutely necessary. She joins up with Prince Cusarus and the two of them march on the throne where Karse the God of Deception (a minor demigod but a real pain) is posing as the High Priest of Archon and is serving as Regent. They drive him out and prepare for the onslaught as the dark gods are marching with their mortal followers towards Alphatea. The two of them provide heroic leadership to Alphatea during this crisis. The Battle of Calagard is where it all comes down, Lady Eleanor and Prince Cusarus ride out to meet King Sorian X and the gods of light to battle the gods of darkness and their allies. Survival is the hope and the goal is to give the gods of light any edge in this battle.

Lady Eleanor and her band plow through the mortal minions and even destroy a few minor divinities, but they are knocked around like playdolls by the more powerful dark gods. King Sorian X is killed as are many of the great heroes of the land. Archon is nearly destroyed again, but Mithras steps up and defeats Zythgal the God of Darkness. The rest of the dark gods immediately surrender the challenge and Archon is elevated again as the King of the Gods, though his faith is demoralized and weakened and in terms of divine power both Aurora and Mithras are now greater.

The Western Kingdom

Micadus Haeron, the reborn Theus, refuses to become the ruler of the Western Kingdom, but announces his support for such an idea as long as all kingdoms would be equal under its rule. Prince Cusarus marries Lady Eleanor and they are selected as the first High King and High Queen of the Western Kingdom. A Council of Princes and the western kingdoms are united and in time become the most dominant power of the continent.

This is where the campaign ended.

I switched my group campaigns to another of my Five Worlds for a time and then came back to this world about 120 years in the future long after the death of High Queen Eleanor and High King Cusarus, but with the Western Kingdom still strong and just. Honestly, we have yet to decide if they are really dead or now minor divinities or angels, but for the mortal world they are dead. This was one of my more epic campaigns and my most epic in D&D. There was some politics, but not much the real challenges were tactical and in building

something lasting. This solo campaign also completely fleshed out my campaign world.

I should also note that I trimmed out a lot from the adventures of Lady Eleanor, including an orc war, a battle against the Prince of Vampires, and numerous other hefty quests. Lady Eleanor began the group campaign at 4th level, started the solo campaign at 11th level and we ended the campaign at 20th level.

If you are running a potent PC class like Sandra the 5th level Monk, from Illion's example, then you might not need NPCs, but I find that D&D is founded on balance of abilities, which often means that one PC is out of whack with the combat dynamic. You can get around this by the structure of the campaign, but I use NPCs quite effectively to address this concern, and have found little 'risk' as long as they are used properly. Your concern about using DMPCs is a good one. I don't like 'DMPCs' and find that concept a poor idea, but using NPCs is a boon to a solo campaign. I don't like 'DMPC', because that implies a sense of ownership, a good DM uses his NPCs to build his world not to boost his ego. The key to running a NPC is to keep them secondary in role, but real in personality.

Here is an example: *Sabrina the 5th level Wizard is our hero.* Sasha has two allies; Samson the 4th level Fighter who belongs to an order of warriors that serve as bodyguards to wizards, and Sasha the 4th level Cleric who worships the God of Magic and has taken a vow to foster arcane magic by helping the PC on her quest. In combat, Sabrina alone would be in trouble against even kobolds, but Samson is a good warrior and serves as her offensive line. Sasha can help hold the line and heal in combat, allowing Sabrina to use her spells to maximum effect. In roleplaying, Samson is a bodyguard and only speaks when asked a question and Sasha is bright and helpful, but she kinda worships Sabrina as a holy artifact.

Here is another example: *Serena the 5th level Paladin is our hero.* Serena has two allies; Simone the 2nd level Cleric/2nd level Wizard (future Mystic Theurge) is an old friend of Serena and has joined her on her quest as a spiritual journey. Saul is a 4th level Ranger and has been sent by the King to aid Serena on her quest. In combat, Saul can use archery to soften up the enemy and wade into melee to help cover the flank of Serena, Simone is weak but well-rounded with magic and focuses on magical support and augmentation of Serena and Saul (in a level Simone will be able to cast Bull's Strength on Serena, that alone will make a difference in dangerous combat). In roleplaying, Saul argues with Serena, but his intellect and charisma is less than hers and he will defer to her judgment, while Simone speaks cryptically and has an ephemeral quality.

In both of these situations, the PC has a little help which allows her to shine in combat and to tackle some fairly potent opponents, you will actually be surprised with what a solo PC can handle. Also as Illion said, if you don't like using NPCs just tailor the encounters to the characters and make sure the PC is above average either with stats of equipment.

This is absolutely perfect. And slightly ironic.

I've recently been bit by the gaming bug...again. I played in an extensive campaign for roughly 8 years in my college years and beyond. Times have changed, however, and I'm now married, 2 kids, and my group has long since dis-banded. But, there's hope. My wife is very tollerant of me and my hobbies and she has agreed to give this D&D thing a try. She's never gamed before so this could be interesting.

I came on these boards today to search and ask if anyone had ever run a solo campaign. You can imagine my delight when I found this thread. I've read every post, and some of them twice, this morning. I couldn't have asked for a better resource. Much praise and kudos go out to all of you who have written here, especially to KJW and Illion the Red for starting this incredible thread. You have my thanks.

So, since I have this treasure trove of knowledge at my disposal, I will pick your collective brains. This is my first time running a solo campaign and my wife's first attempt at playing. I know that I have to be careful but I want to create the most enjoyable gaming experience I can to help foster that gaming bug in my wife and make her a gamer for life. Here's a short rundown of my campaign. (I haven't fleshed out many of the smaller details yet so please bear with me.)

General Overview

My wife took a liking to the Aventi race found in Stormwrack. For those of you unfamiliar, they are essentially amphibian humans (they are considered to be "humans" for the sake of the game i.e. extra feat at 1st level, etc.). I'm running the campaign in the Forgotten Realms and the Aventi civilization fits perfectly. (Again, for those who don't have Stormwrack, the Aventi civilization was much like Atlantis: an ancient and powerful civilization that sank to the bottom of the sea due to a cataclysmic magical disaster. You can see how the Aventi and their history fit with Forgotten Realms quite nicely.)

My wife also picked Sorcerer as her class. I know this is probably not the best class for a first-time player but I wanted to give her as much freedom as possible and I decided not to "guide her hand" too much in character creation. I wanted her to feel like she owned the character and that her Aventi Sorcerer, Mabryn, was a creation of her design.

The campaign is going to revolve around her civilization. The first adventure will be a simple "fetch" adventure where she will travel on-shore to retrieve an ancient scroll that is said to hold part of the incantation that destroyed their entire island nation. The Aventi are avid sea traders and have heard rumors of a powerful wizard inquiring into the Aventi, their history, and especially into their lost, powerful magics. This simple "fetch" adventure, of course, will blossom into a far-reaching campaign that will take up from Cormyr (where the adventure starts), through the Dales, around Zhentil Keep, and probably up to Anaroch and the city of Shade. My idea is that an Aventi wizard once when to Netheril to study magic and was there when the fall of Netheril occurred. He was taken to the plane of shadow along with the other inhabitants and since they have returned, he wants some of the ancient Aventi magic back for himself.

I'm going to get her a traveling companion, of sorts. A dwarf cleric named Hargred. Initially, they will be looking for the same NPC and the same Aventi scroll. The intrigue would stem from "Why would a dwarf be interested in an old Aventi scroll?" I'm hoping they form a bond and see each other as being on the same path. But since I'm RPing the dwarf, I guess that burden lies with me. And the actual details about why the dwarf is interested in the scroll is one of those details I haven't figured out yet. Go figure.

I'm going to try to keep her dice-rolling to a minimum. Like I said, she's never gamed before...ever. She often looks at her sheet and is overwhelmed by all the numbers, and graphs. Basically, I'm going to do as much as I can to keep her eyes off her sheet and on the task at hand. I hope this tactic works and that I succeed in making this fun for her. I would love for my best friend to be my PC for life.

Here's the part where I ask for some help.

1) Am I doing the right thing by letting her play a sorcerer and not an "easier" class. (I mean no offense to any other classes...but managing a spell list, spell components, and other details required of a sorcerer can be challenging for a first-time player.)

2) Does the campaign sound interesting? I feel that I can provide motivation for her from her "tribe" back home. Her people need her to succeed and stop this menace. Also, some revenge motivators may come into play from time to time. I considered having her village attacked but I don't want to have that come of as gratuitous "plot-forcing".

3) What other advice can you give for me both in regards to the campaign and running a solo-campaign with a first-time player? This is probably the biggest question and the most challenging aspect of what I'm up against.

Again, I'd like to say that this thread is priceless and my hat goes off to all of you that have posted and contributed here.

I'm overjoyed that our labor of love has helped others out 😊

Here's an attempt at your questions:

1)Allowing your wife to play a Sorcerer should not be much of a problem. If she is reasonably intelligent (she married a gamer, so she must be 😊) she should not have much trouble figuring out life as a Sorcerer.

I would either give her Eschew Material Components as a bonus feat or get rid of them entirely for her first go-through. They add flavor and some cost to the spellcasting, but since you don't have to spend any time getting the components organized or out of your pouch, it might be an unneeded complication for a starting character.

2)It sounds like an ambitious quest for starting out. I would suggest not leaping into it right away. Spend some time (at least a few sessions) dealing with her family and friends at home. This may get her comfortable with the whole roleplaying aspect as well as give you the opportunity to have her cast some spells in a controlled environment.

Have her encounter a few things on the way to the shore once she finally does leave on the quest - maybe some aggressive fish (small sharks or the like) or merfolk/other intelligent undersea life. This will help demonstrate that things can be dangerous out there. Just remember that as a Sorcerer, she will not have much staying power in a flat-out fight until she gets a number of levels under her belt - tone down the physical combat and allow/encourage the flee/outrun option. Perhaps give her a guide to help get her to shore that can handle the physical combat.

3) Kinda started this one already, but we'll try some more. Emphasize the roleplaying aspects over the combat aspects unless she shows a particular affinity towards combat. Make sure to be "overly" descriptive about spell effects - it's her Character's primary aspect, so make it really cool. Don't hesitate to allow her a powerful Character as there is no one else in the whole world that she needs to be balanced against.

Most of all - make sure that you BOTH have fun. If you are having fun and are full of enthusiasm, she may follow suit without even realizing it.

Originally Posted by **SteelDeth**

1) Am I doing the right thing by letting her play a sorcerer and not an "easier" class. (I mean no offense to any other classes...but managing a spell list, spell components, and other details required of a sorcerer can be challenging for a first-time player.)

I agree with Illion, in fact, in my group campaigns I pretty much ignore spell components as if everyone has Eschew Material Components. Basically, I just assume everyone has enough of the inexpensive components to cast their spells. Components in general are an annoyance and I only worry about the expensive ones.

Also the Sorcerer is pretty easy for a spell-caster, only so many spells you need to know the mechanics for, so this is a far better class than clerics, druids, or a wizard with a penchant for acquiring new spells.

My only concern is with having her running an Aventi, but see #3 for some ideas on this.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **SteelDeth**

2) Does the campaign sound interesting? I feel that I can provide motivation for her from her "tribe" back home. Her people need her to succeed and stop this menace. Also, some revenge motivators may come into play from time to time. I considered having her village attacked but I don't want to have that come of as gratuitous "plot-forcing".

Once again I second Illion about pacing and challenge. You do not want to overwhelm her with too much pressure or information, you may need to do plot-forcing, but be patient. The concept sounds good, quests are always good, but go slow at the beginning and a few small encounters to introduce the rules is a good idea.

I run my own campaign worlds, but the Realms is my favorite of the published campaign settings, your concepts and ideas sound good, I also love using Netheril as well and nothing beats a dwarf NPC. Seriously, you have made some good choices. I have Stormwrack and my wife loved the Aventi too, I talked her out of playing one, but we introduced them into my campaign worlds. So conceptually I know all the stuff you are using and it's all good.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **SteelDeth**

3) What other advice can you give for me both in regards to the campaign and running a solo-campaign with a first-time player? This is probably the biggest question and the most challenging aspect of what I'm up against.

Your biggest challenge will be immersion, I have three bits of advice.

First, think about what type of books, movies, and television your wife likes, this is a great clue to what sort of campaign she would most enjoy. Tailor things to her preferences, but make sure you put in some stuff to keep you interested as well.

Second, playing humans is tough, non-humans difficult, and amphibious humanoids really, really, hard. The main problem is that the player (and DM) may struggle to grasp the concepts and culture involved to really make the PC playable and fun. Make sure you have an idea how it all works and have a few encounters designed to show her the

specific cultural and conceptual ideas that make Aventi really neat. Stormwrack has lots of info on them, so play that up and give her a few traditions to follow. I would key onto their honorable nature and unique history, maybe she always needs to give a warning to her opponents before battle or leaves a shell with a fallen enemy to ensure the passage of their soul to the afterlife. This will help her get into character and help you clarify the Aventi in your mind.

Third, and this depends upon your wife, but you could have her draw up her family and community. She may even come up with ideas about the Aventi. This gives her a vested interest in the campaign as she contributed to it. The downside is that you have to use what she draws up and it may be...well, quite different from your expectations. Usually, though I have found that players can come up with great ideas that make your campaign world richer.

Hope that helps, will be more than happy to answer anymore questions.

I first wanted to thank you guys for this thread. Seems that it addresses most of the concerns I had about running a solo campaign. It is definitely going to stick in my dm for some time 😊.

I have a few questions though. It's in fact my first experience as a dm, and I have little experience as a player (I started playing some time ago while abroad, when I came back home I could not manage to find a group thus I decided just to form mine, and try to dm. Turn out that I'm running a solo campaign with my cousin's boyfriend, who never roleplayed before).

He decided to be a druid, and I let him speak about his background (I planned to set up a story out of the information he was giving.). I just told me that as far as he remembered, he always lived in the forest. He's got a very pale skin and red eyes, but he's human anyway. He just want to leave the forest he knows well to explore the surroundings.

Out of that, I decided he had been living in the forests north of archendale. I chose to use the forgotten realms as background (deities, countries, guilds, ...), but I just follow the basic rules. To explain his strange features, I'm planning to make him the son of a drow and a dragon (btw, he incidentally chose to be called darvin dundragon... and speak draconic. I suppose he wants his story to be related to dragons...). I'm not sure it is really valid since he's human (maybe a half-elf would be more accurate, if I consider the dragon to take a human form). So my first question is: does this story make sense? He's not yet aware of anything related to his origin so I can change my story if needed.

We haven't been playing a lot yet, just a few sessions. Darvin (the character) encountered first a few kobolds and then a party of commoners, led by the local militia warrior, caught him while he was about heading to the forest's edge. The guys were patrolling the forest in search for some kobolds that had been reported in the vicinity. They were extremely nervous because of the drows living in that forest and, seeing the strange look of the

adventurer, decided that he was some kind of drow himself and beated him and fastened his hands. Their idea was to drag him to the village and decide his fate later. They did not find the kobolds but eventually met the dreaded drows who simply killed them all. The drow leader, after some reflection on the adventurer's look (man, it's true this guy looks strange), just chose to stab him and leave him dead there (although not quite dead).

After some time, Darvin wakes up and sees in front of him a old bearded guy (in fact Silvanus) with a wolf. Silvanus asks him if he was not happy in the forest, etc..., and finally says that if his will his to leave the forest, he won't try to impeach it, but instead asks him for some help, in return for the care after the battle. He asks to steal some fire items for him (Silvanus hates fire items). At the end Silvanus says that he should go to Archenbridge and get in touch with a druid there. To help him in those tasks, he gives Darvin a wolf (Fenris...) (I liked the idea not just to start with a companion but to have kind of story related to it).

Then, my adventurer went along the road toward archenbridge, avoided a few adventure hooks 😊, eventually met a would-be sorcerer (that will certainly reappear at some point), met a chauntea cleric and reached the cleric's village where people want to expell him because first of his wolf (after all, there is a wolf pack attacking the flocks every night) and then because of his strange face (seems that people are quite racist in this part of the world). He's about to run away when the cleric appears again, calm down people saying that Darvin's there to help them and takes the adventurer to his place. There, he asks for the druid's help in a case of water poisoning (I'm using a modified burning plague adventure's now). The villagers come again and say that if Darvin does not try to protect the flocks from the wolves, they will expell him and slaughter Fenris.

Darvin agrees to go to the fields during the night to see if something can be done. There, a pack of wolf eventually appears. Its leader feels the threat of a big wolf for his charge and attacks. Fenris manages to kill him and the pack somehow consider it as their new leader. When they head toward the village, the whole pack seem to be reluctant to walk nearer and they run away, except another wolf that just imitate everything Fenris is doing.

Finally, in the last session Darvin undertook the quest of the burning plague.

Do you think I could let Darvin have two animal companions? I read it'd be ok to have a character more powerfull than in a normal campaign. In fact, Darvin is not really controlling the new wolf. This one just does whatever Fenris is doing.

A question related to dm in general: I have some ideas for a few plots involving guilds and knightly orders, especially one of paladins that could be somehow related to Darvin (like one knight is his brother, etc...). Do I need to have a very definite idea of the guild, with leaders, etc... at this moment or I'll need to think about it when he first meet one of those guys?

Finally, I wonder if anyone has some nice house rules about supply. I don't really want to

bother about food and ammunition (it's already difficult enough for my poor dm experience to master all the rest) but neither do I want to have my adventurer spending two weeks in a complete desert without being concerned about food and water.

Originally Posted by **GilGaer**

PS: I apologize for any weird expression and poor english.

I always find it amusing how non-native English speakers apologize for their language when they are typically better writers than most of the Americans on these boards. 😊

Quote:

Originally Posted by **GilGaer**

So my first question is: does this story make sense? He's not yet aware of anything related to his origin so I can change my story if needed.

OK what is the child of a dragon and a human...well a half-dragon...now if that half-dragon made friends with a drow...their child would be a half-elf with dragon blood...now this freak meets a cute human and they have a child...it would be...the PC. Just make it up, D&D biology and genetics is for the outrageous not the realistic. I would say that great grandpa was a dragon and that grandma was a drow and there you go a freaky human with interesting ancestry.

I would run with his weird appearance, maybe there are prophecies of the pale fire-eyed one who would do something of great importance. This may be why Silvanus has an interest in this druid, he is key to some important event that could change the Realms.

Remember what the player believes about his background may not necessarily be true, which gives the DM some wiggle room to make adjustments as the campaign goes on. Nothing is set in stone for a clever DM who can maintain consistency with inconsistency. What you have created is reasonable and not outrageous, but don't be afraid to change things as the campaign develops.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **GilGaer**

My second question is the following 🤖 Do you think I could let Darvin have two animal companions? I read it'd be ok to have a character more powerful than in a normal campaign. In fact, Darvin is not really controlling the new wolf. This one just does whatever Fenris is doing.

I wouldn't worry about it unless it becomes too distracting to the player, which I don't imagine will be the case. An extra animal companion is a very reasonable boost to a Solo PC, this druid could have a party of animals. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. That said I think you may need a genuine NPC to travel with the Solo PC, I say this because this new player is missing adventure hooks and it sounds like he is struggling a little from prejudice

and poor planning. A NPC could help by giving him someone to bounce ideas off and who can make suggestions sometimes (both good and bad suggestions).

Quote:

Originally Posted by **GilGaer**

A question related to dm in general: I have some ideas for a few plots involving guilds and knightly orders, especially one of paladins that could be somehow related to Darvin (like one knight is his brother, etc...). Do I need to have a very definite idea of the guild, with leaders, etc... at this moment or I'll need to think about it when he first meet one of those guys?

I find you need to have a basic idea about the guild so consider these questions. Who is in charge? Why does it exist? How does one join? Does it have special resources? Are there any unique traditions? All you need is a few sentences on these and you will be more than fine.

Here is an example from my campaigns (admittedly an evil order): Knights of Misery. The Sovereign of Misery (20th level Death Knight Black Guard) commands this order which is dedicated to the restoration of the dead Shadow Dragon King, a very evil deity. One is asked to join if one is dedicated to death, evil, seeks undeath, and can follow orders, if you refuse to join you are killed. The seat of the order is the Citadel of Shadows on the Negative Energy Plane, but only the undead members of the order can survive at this site there are lesser sites on the Prime Material Plane. They speak of the Shadow Dragon King as alive and present and show no mercy in battle and revel in death and worship undeath, which is the goal of all members. If you fall in battle you will be raised as a undead warrior if you succeed you may be made into greater undead. I think this is all you need to get started, you can add more later of course, but a paragraph like this is more than enough.

Here is a caveat. I had a DM way back in college who was brilliant and did most everything impromptu. Well one day he decided to design his own campaign world, it had flying ships and cities all controlled by an fabulously powerful elven empire. Well one of our group, not usually known for his piercing questions, asked: what is the name of the Emperor? The DM looked blank and was stunned by this obvious question, the campaign fell apart a few sessions later as the DM never really got back on track after that. The lesson here is not to have answers for every question, but to give answers to every question.

A DM should never say I don't know. When my players ask me a question I haven't considered I look down at my notes and roll dice which gives me a second to come up with a name or an answer to a question. Nowadays my players know I roll dice to stall, so I have had to drop that part of the ritual for shuffling through my papers as if there is an answer. Of course a lot of times you can tell the players they don't know stuff, but if they ask a real basic question you need to give an answer.

This is also why I recommend having a list of names whenever you DM so you don't get stumped when the players ask for the name of the funny and amusing NPC merchant they just met.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **GilGaer**

Finally, I wonder if anyone has some nice house rules about supply. I don't really want to bother about food and ammunition (it's already difficult enough for my poor dm experience

to master all the rest) but neither do I want to have my adventurer spending two weeks in a complete desert without being concerned about food and water.

I charge my players the rates in the DMG for cost of living, they tell me how they wish to live and I have them pay that amount every month. This handles food and housing without having to go through every meal. I just tell them when a new month is beginning.

As for ammunition that is the responsibility of the PC, if he is not keeping track of his ammunition they say he runs out. You should not have to worry about. For NPCs I assume that they usually have sufficient ammunition unless it is an extreme situation like a lengthy battle against many goblins or orcs.

As for food and water, just figure how many days the PC has and have him check it off as the days pass. Though a druid with a high survival check will probably be fine in even the most inhospitable locations...though his animal companions might not be so fortunate.

In these situations put the burden on the PC to keep these records, but also be generous if he makes mistakes.

First of all, let me say, excellent article.

However, I would like to expand on the "Wealth" subsection of the "Rewards" section. Although a solo character will generally gain more wealth than a single member of a party of equivalent level, they will not gain as much treasure as the entire party. The reason for this is that, while the character doesn't have to split their treasure with anyone (thus gaining four times the wealth from an encounter as a four-person party), they also don't have to split their experience with anybody (thus also gaining four times the XP). Therefore, given equal CR encounters, they gain both experience and wealth at four times the rate of a single member of a four-person party, and thus their wealth per level stays about the same given equal CR encounters.

But the solo character *will* get somewhat more wealth, and the reason is this: gold rewards don't increase as quickly as XP rewards. Increasing the CR by 2 doubles the XP reward, but the wealth reward only increases by a factor of 1.7 or so for that same increase. Given that a solo character will likely be facing weaker CR creatures than a full party, this results in more wealth per level for the solo character. If every encounter's CR is dropped by 3 relative to a party of four, the solo character gains about 2.2 times the wealth per level as a member of a party; if the CR is dropped by 4, this increases to about 2.8 times as much.

However, this is only an analysis of flat wealth. Some of that wealth will be in the form of magical items, and as we all know, magical items are often quite class- and level-specific. Here the solo character has a disadvantage vis-a-vis a party of characters: when a party finds a magical item, they are more likely to be able to use it effectively since there are four possible people to give the item to. On the other hand, if an item can't be used effectively by the solo character, there's nobody else to give it to. Furthermore, since the solo character tends to fight weaker CR creatures, the items that they gain are likewise likely to be weaker and less effective for someone of the character's level. (After all, if you have a *longsword* +2, finding a *longsword* +1 isn't really that big a reward.) Thus, it is more often that the solo character is forced to sell items at a discount.

You are absolutely correct in your analysis of encounters, but for many reasons solo PCs do better in wealth acquisition than their counterparts in group campaigns.

First, the solo PC usually gets the best magic items and trust me if you randomly roll treasure in the DMG (as I usually do) and a solo PC gets the best item each time they will quickly pull ahead in wealth. This is based on the assumption that NPCs are involved to make a party more like a typical group campaign, which is how I do things. With NPCs you have a party structure, but one which is weighted in favor of the solo PC. Now if you only have a solo PC then your analysis is right on the money and I would be curious to see how Illion or others, who run things with one NPC, would respond to this point.

Second, solo PCs usually invest more in businesses, people, or other ventures. This is due to more roleplaying time which creates more opportunities. It is amazing how in every solo campaign I run, the solo PC comes up with moneymaking ventures, while in my group campaigns these rarely come up even with the same players. Related to this is that a solo PC will often have more contacts for trading an extra item or will hold on to it longer looking for a trade, this is just the nature of solo campaigns where there is more time for secondary activities unlike group campaigns which are more rushed and focused on adventuring. Solo PCs are networking fiends and it realistically affects wealth.

Third, because of the focus on the solo PC, if they are successful they are likely to be given fairly potent boons from benefactors or allies, such is the nature of the beast. This is probably the area where in most solo campaigns the solo PC is going to pull ahead the most in wealth and this is pure roleplaying and outside of the encounter mechanics.

Also take this example, in a group campaign a PC gets a dominion and puts a little energy into it and focuses on adventuring. This is the paradigm suggested by the DMG, Stronghold Builder's Guide, and throughout 3.5 D&D. In solo campaigns you often find that the PC wants to really build the dominion into something impressive, this is the focus of the campaign. Now you have a situation where adventuring is less, but wealth acquisition by roleplaying would soon surpass wealth acquired by adventuring.

I am not arguing with your analysis, for you are correct at least in my understanding of the mechanics. I pretty strictly follow the DMG rules and almost every time the solo PC beats out group PCs in wealth. It is just the impact of roleplaying in wealth acquisition throws the typical encounter basis in wealth acquisition all out of whack.

Selling Stuff

Solo PCs tend to accumulate a lot of stuff - a great deal of which is not directly useful to them. The natural tendency is for them to sell stuff off that they can't use. In most normal group Campaigns, such loot is sold off at the recommended 50% of market value as a matter of convenience and to keep such events from taking up the totality of a session which generally makes the uninvolved parties rather bored and frustrated.

One interesting aspect of selling items in a Solo Campaign, is that the simple act of bartering and chatting with an NPC merchant could take up the totality of a game session without taking away from the fun of the game (providing the Player enjoys the interaction). Because of this in-depth interaction, Solo PCs tend to get a much higher return on the items they sell to merchants - especially so, if the PC is more socially adept. This has the net result of increasing the wealth of the PC.

Making Stuff

This section mainly applies to spellcasters, but in some respects, it could apply to other

Character types.

One of the things that prevents a significant amount of item creation in group campaigns is that the caster has to spend the time to make the items as well as spend the experience to do so. Meanwhile, the rest of the group either takes significant downtime, or continues adventuring without the item maker. While this may work in some Campaigns, it often is not a model that is either effective or practical as the "outside world" continues to evolve while the PCs are taking their downtime.

In a Solo Campaign, the entire Campaign focuses around the single PC and having that PC take the downtime for item creation often isn't a big deal, especially in more roleplaying-focused Campaigns. Therefore, the Character benefits by creating items for a fraction of their "purchase price" as well as not having to be concerned with falling behind the rest of the party in experience.

In the more mundane realm, I had a Solo Elven Ranger that I was DMing for spend months crafting a Masterwork Composite Longbow with a +5 Strength rating to match her significant Strength. During this time, she concentrated her time when not crafting on working with the leaders of the community in strengthening their defenses and planning on pushing the steadily encroaching "invaders" (otherwise known as settlers) back.

Specialization & Attention

It's a common thing for players to pick or create characters based on a concept that inspires and intrigues them. This ranges from wanting to play Drizz't or Legolas to expressing interest in playing a ninja or even a bard. When a player, for instance, proclaims that she wants to play an amphibious race, it suggests that the player is interested in doing the kinds of things that amphibious humans (in this case) would do.

As the DM, it is easy for forget that such a player will often want to be given situations in which her specialties are at a premium, in order to feel, well, *special*. Excellent advice was given on focusing on the culture of the aventi and making the player feel as though she is truly part of a non-human culture. At the same time, it is quite possible that the player wants to feel unique and special. In the case of a campaign such as was described for the aventi character, with travels that take her far (even through a desert), an amphibious humanoid will definitely be different. (Though, admittedly, the Forgotten Realms is a place filled with eccentric beings...)

Catering to the talents, abilities, and specializations of the PC in a solo campaign can greatly enhance the feeling of satisfaction (and fun!) This is true for all campaigns, but especially in a solo campaign, where a considerable amount of time can be devoted to the central PC without minimizing the role of the other players. I believe there are some passages about this in the DMG II, but I have not read much of it. From a solo perspective, it bears repeating and expanding on.

Generally speaking, it can be helpful to create plot hooks and opportunities to shine based on the character's traits. This is true even for a character that isn't specialized in the true sense of the word. Some examples:

Tervinniar, the Draconeian Scholar, is a sage who has spent decades of his precious time studying draconic lore. As a result, he has mastered the language of dragons. One day, while visiting the Kingdom of Nwashe, he grew weary of listening to his comrades debate strategies for toppling the Gallwood Consortium, and went for a walk. His feet brought him

to the local library, where he happened to overhear a conversation between several scholars who kept switching back and forth between common and draconic. Intrigued, Tervinniar listened in on their conversation (which seemed to focus on a book they pored over), and to his great dismay, he found that the neophytes were butchering the noble language of dragons. Politely, he pointed out the proper way to translate 'ruisumahere,' and was promptly invited to join the stunned scholars. After a short conversation, it turns out that the scholars are in the employ of the king, and are attempting to translate an old tome written in draconic. The scholars believe that the contents of the book hold the key to renewing the ancient wards that fortify the mudflats beneath the capital; knowledge that must be gained before they crumble, and the city sinks. Naturally, they request Tervinniar's capable help...

Sorry, I love examples. Anyway, such plot hooks do not have to be the result of a specialized character. Indeed, it's enough that a character has, to use the example above, skills in an uncommon language. If the player has spent skill points on learning a language (or been given it as part of her backstory), it stands to reason that she wants these linguistic skills to be used at some point. In my D&D campaign, I recently designed an adventure based around the idea that the player would get to use one of his less common languages. (He had previously communicated an interest in getting to use his languages, and I personally love linguistics, so...) The adventure doesn't revolve around language; it's just what enables him to partake of the activities at all, and makes him special. Those crazy fey should learn common or leave the country!

Another, more commonly adaptable example:

Elia-Tera spent her sheltered childhood with the elves. Her father, a human expatriate, taught the wilful girl swordplay from a young age, despite her wavering interest. (Those kids and their bardic music...) In later years, she has taken up the life of a wanderer, searching for clues about the malicious nature spirit that has descended upon the elven forest and keeps its defenders occupied. While searching for a reclusive druid reportedly living in a hidden garden within the walls of the massive city of Karianimm, Elia-Tera visits a theater of some sort and is surprised to find the group on stage apparently performing the ceremonial kata of her father's school of swordplay. Elated by this reminder of home, Elia-Tera walked onto the stage and joins into the familiar patterns (which she repeats each morning as part of her meditation). As it turns out, the group is none too pleased, considering her intrusion onto the stage a challenge. Before she knows it, Elia-Tera is forced to defend herself, and does so admirably. After forcing the four rather clumsy practitioners to yield, she finds herself cheered on by an ecstatic crowd thirsty for her skills with the blade.

In my humble opinion, showing up arrogant people is one of the staples of satisfaction. Especially if the abashed Elia-Tera blurts out "I'm sorry! I didn't know you were beginners!" after the fight.

For closure, I should give an example using the aventi. Let me take a look at my copy of Stormwrack before I mouth off about their abilities...

Sheresk is an aventi tutor from a medium-sized colony in the Pearlescent Reef. She would often regale the children in her ward with tales of the great seas, and the lands above, while imprinting upon them the knowledge of ancient Avernus. Several moons into the past, sahuagin slavers raided the Pearlescent Reef and captured several of the children under her care even as she stood petrified, too frightened to help. Wracked with guilt, Sheresk eventually left her home in order to appease her burning conscience by rescuing

the children from the predations of the vile sahuagin. However, after breaking into the sahuagin settlement where the children were taken, she finds to her horror that several of the girls have been traded to fiendish aboleths from the Brine Flats, realm of the most heinous Demon Prince Demogorgon. Determined to bring them back, Sheresk set off on a journey. During her travels across the parched lands, she reaches the coastal town of Autrim, where apparently a great storm has recently sent a ship to the bottom of the sea just a few miles out of the harbor. The problem is that the ship carried the town's annual tribute to the Council of Lords in Abiarthet. During the riots that occur in the city following this awful event, Sheresk convinces her traveling companions to help her acquire a small ship, and spends several days hauling the gold and silver from the depths of the bay. Returning to the town with the tribute, she is praised as a hero.

Ugh, that introduction was much too long. Sorry; I just can't help it! Not the coolest example, but these things do not always have to be, either. There are more dramatic twists to the above example for those who are inclined. The important thing, to me, is that she got to show off her amazing amphibious skills in a society dominated by humans.

This type of plot hook (Event Trigger, really) can be used for even the smallest things. If the PC is a sorcerer who picks an uncommon spell, such as *ventriloquism*, the DM will do her game a favor by catering to the selection by providing interesting opportunities to use the spell. The player will often try to direct play towards such situations, but it's best to help her along the way. No one needs an incentive to pick *fireball*, but *illusory script* is a liability in most campaigns. This is because the former spell's utility is built into the game (it destroys things, and D&D has lots of rules on destroying things) while the latter needs the DM's cooperation to be useful.

Again, druids want to do druidic things and parley with fey, while a cleric with a penchant for oratory skills will want to preach. Players will attempt to find such situations themselves, but the DM can do so much more. Back in high school, I'm sure that many of us have daydreamed about being thrown into a situation where the girl we stammered around would get harassed while you were present, so that you could save her. This is the same thing: It's all about facilitating unlikely scenarios that make the player feel satisfied. (Pardon the lack of a feminine variant; do girls dream about being knights in shining armor...? I hope so.)

This brings to mind one of the greatest moments of a campaign I'm currently playing in (not a solo campaign, but it has solo aspects). There, I play Ronoc, a humble priest of a Redan, (a farmer's god, basically) from a small village. While delivering a religious icon to the priests of the faith in a larger town nearby, he was robbed, and the icon was taken. Through the attempts to regain it, the house where it had been taken was, ahem, unfortunately burnt to the ground. The icon was destroyed. When Ronoc explained this to the local priest, the latter was furious, and accused Ronoc of attempting to withhold the relic. Then and there, Ronoc, who had a much more lenient view of his god's teachings, and cares little for icons and material wealth, entered into an argument with the priest. While a small group of devout listened on, he argued theology, and was questioned by the throng of people after the priest left. This was awesome fun.

I hope this is useful to someone.

Raw Power

In order to survive as a self-reliant Character, such Solo PCs tend to be built and operate on a significantly higher power scale than other PCs. This often includes increased ability scores, additional class features, maximized Hit Points, or unique powers. The result of this

is that the PC is often able to handle encounters that are only slightly weaker than a group of the same level could handle. This, of course, leads to the PC garnering treasure at a significantly greater rate than he or she would in an equivalent party.

The first issue that arises in analyzing such an instance is game balance. The PC has significantly more wealth and power than a PC of his or her level normally should, creating an imbalance in the system.

My response to this issue is (bluntly) so what? The only important Character in the entire world is overpowered. This is a good thing. Game balance is irrelevant in this case as there is no other members of the party to balance the PC against. The "star of the show" is larger than life and more capable than anyone else around. This is often the case in the classic fantasy novels and makes for a good model in this case.

Another issue that arises is providing a challenge for the PC who is at such a high power level. This may be a significant challenge for an inexperienced DM.

The good news, however, is that as the PC's power grows, he or she can shift encounters to include varying types of challenges. A group of creatures presents a significantly different challenge than a single creature since the effects of flanking and "aid another" can really swing in the group's favor. In addition, purely roleplaying encounters can, and should, be used to further the Character development without regard to the PCs combat capabilities.

