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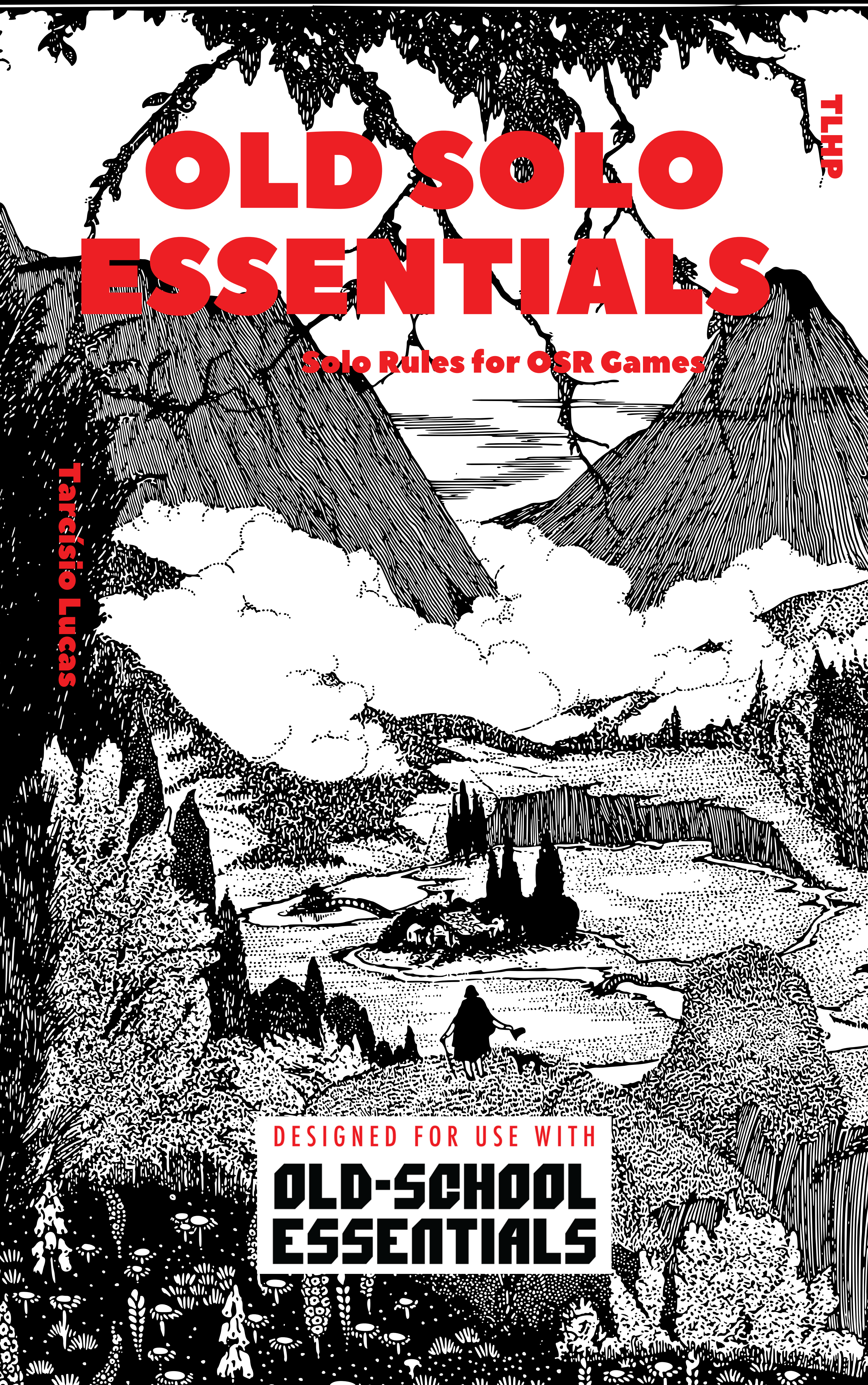
OLD SOLO ESSENTIALS

Solo Rules for OSR Games

Tarcísio Lucas

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

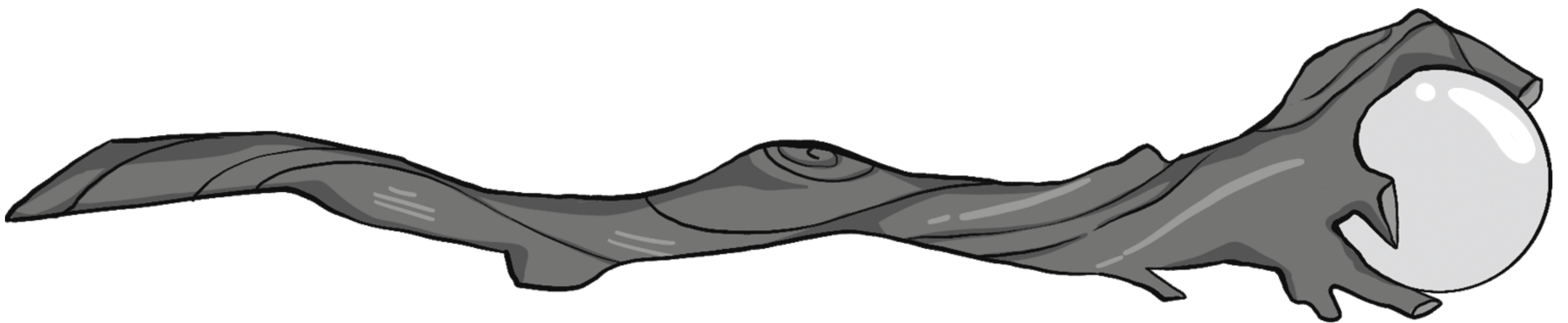
**OLD-SCHOOL
ESSENTIALS**



OLD SOLO ESSENTIALS

Tarcísio Lucas
Art: Public domain and TLHP

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**Requires Old-School Essentials
Advanced Fantasy**

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Why solo?

There are many reasons to start playing solo.

Maybe for you are difficulty finding other players, maybe your personal schedule is a mess. Maybe you're traveling, maybe you're in the hospital. Or maybe you want to test out some house rule or adventure before introducing it to your gaming group.

Or maybe you just want to play solo.

The SOLO RPG is a reality that officially exists since 1975, when Gary Gygax released the article "Solo Dungeon Adventures" in the first issue of The Strategic Review magazine.

I particularly believe that knowing solo RPG techniques even helps to master better, improvise better and create amazing stories and plots without having to spend a huge effort in this endeavor.

Why Old School Essentials Solo?

Above all, for the great ease of using the OSE material together with other osr materials that we have on the market. OSE has brilliantly condensed the highlights of my favorite version of the original fantasy game at its finest.

It is very easy to pick up materials written for other OSR games such as SWORDS & WIZARDRY, Basic Fantasy, Castles & Crusades and with a minimum of adaptation use it along with the Old School Essentials rules.

And the opposite can also be said. Thus, this method can be used with very little or no adaptation at all in any osr system based on the D20 system.

Warning

Although throughout this method I present what it is and how the solo RPG works and its main mechanics, I STRONGLY recommend that you go further; YouTube and other platforms are full of tutorials and actual/gameplays with endless practical examples of how solo RPG works.

In Portuguese language I suggest my own channel, "Tarcísio Lucas", which has more than 900 videos dedicated to the topic. And in English language I recommend the channel "Me, Myself and Die" by Trevor Devall. Both channels mentioned are on YouTube.

replacing the DM

Perhaps the biggest weirdness of solo RPG is the absence of the DM. How to replace the one who is responsible for introducing new elements throughout the story, interpreting the npcs, refereeing the actions of player characters and proposing challenges?

In general, the solo RPG does this using two tools/mechanics: oracles and random generator tables.

The Oracle

In many solo methods the Oracle is also called a "Master Simulator" or "Master Emulator".

Despite the pompous name, an oracle is nothing more than an analog artificial intelligence capable of answering questions that in a traditional game would be answered by the DM.

Concretely speaking, it is nothing more than a game mechanic almost always involving a Die Roll (some methods use cards or another factor) where the result can be interpreted as "Yes" or "No".

"Are there signs of a struggle in the tavern?"

"Is the famous thief Mirandir in the hall?"

Do the village people look scared?"

These are examples of questions that in a traditional session would be asked to the DM and whose answer would be "Yes" or "No".

In practical terms, this can be done by rolling a D20 where 1-10 would represent "No" and a result of 11-20 would represent "Yes".

If the chances of the answer being "No" for logical and circumstantial reasons are big, you can decide in advance to add -3 to the result that the die presents. Or vice versa, add +3 if the answer is clearly more likely to be "Yes".

What questions can be made?

The same questions you would ask the DM if it was a group session.

Ask questions whose answer can bring important elements and information to the scene.

Since something only comes into being (or not) in the solo RPG from the question, the line that separates DM from player is extremely thin. It's very difficult to know where one begins and the other ends, and that's the fun of the whole thing.

Of course, a "smart" player may be tempted to ask questions whose answers will bring advantages and benefits to his/hee character, but hey...really, are you thinking about "stealing" in a...solo game?

Going beyond

Having a "Yes" and "No" answer is interesting, but we need to go further. Once you have the answer, think about the logical consequences of that answer, and make those consequences part of the answer itself.

Example: "Is the dead man in the middle of the tavern the tavern keeper?"

Answer: "Yes". It's the innkeeper.

Logical consequences: the tavern is immediately closed. Nobody enters and nobody leaves. The music stops. Nothing more will be served until the end of the night.

And the next step is that classic question to PJs:

"What do you guys do?"



And then it is now up to you to decide what the Character will do. It is totally possible and recommended to control more than 1 character in the solo game, even more so in OSR games where the degree of lethality is high.

However, this method presents rules for those who want to venture out with a single character.

Tests

Having decided on the actions of each character, the solo player must decide whether these actions require some kind of test to perform. It may seem difficult to decide this, but the truth is that most of the time this will be easily identified in the situation.

For example, in the above case of the dead innkeeper.

I decide that my character tries to see in the scene some clue about what happened. With that in mind and keeping the OSE rules in mind, maybe a WISDOM check.

If the character passes this test, he will find something. If he doesn't pass, he won't see anything suspicious.

My second character decides to remove the body from the spot, placing it on top of one of the tables. He tries to do it himself, which will require a STRENGTH roll.

Tables and more tables

Let's assume my character has passed the above WISDOM check.

What does he find suspicious?

Although this question can also be answered by asking a question whose answer is "yes" or "no" ("Do I find a crumpled parchment in one of the tavernkeeper's hands?") at this point it is very interesting to use generator tables.

Maybe an Object table is interesting in the scene above. I would roll on this table and the result of the roll would tell me which Suspicious Object caught my attention.

The coolest thing about this is that you can use ANY random table from ANY game or add-on you have. Incidentally, "collecting" tables is a hobby that many solo players cultivate with great affection. Some even go further; some people really like to CREATE their own generator/random tables, putting elements in them that they would find interesting or that make references to previous events that took place in the adventure.

And then the result of the action of the characters will make the scene follow its flow, which will lead to new questions/situations that in turn will generate other actions of the characters. In a very simplistic and summarized way we can say that this is how a solo game works.

Only that?

Not really. That would be the basics.

Many questions can arise in this process.

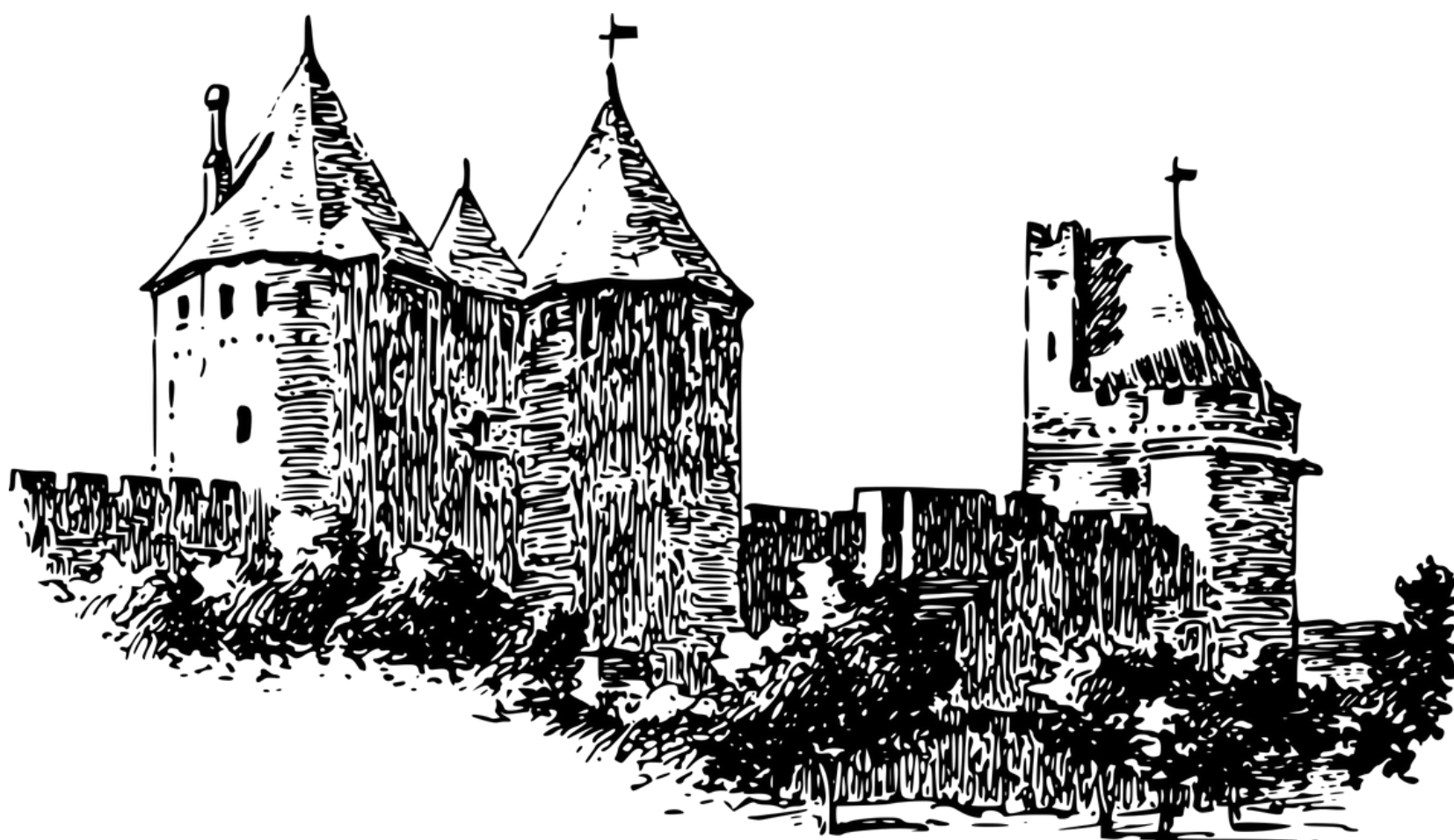
"How do I know a scene is over?"

"How do you know when the adventure is coming to an end?"

"I asked the npc how the innkeeper's wife acted. It's not a question where the answer is "Yes" or "no". What to do?"

These are just some recurring doubts of those who start to venture into the world of solo RPG.

Don't worry, there are techniques for dealing with each one of these issues, and they'll be covered later.



Starting

The first step is similar to what a traditional OSE adventure would be: building your character.

Build your character the same way you would build if you were getting ready for a group session.

In fact, it is recommended that you assemble a group formed by at least 3 adventurers. I particularly suggest 4 heroes. More than that will make it very difficult to control them all, and less will make the adventure very deadly and difficult.

The last chapter of this book covers rules for adventuring with a single adventurer, but I find it more interesting to use these rules after You've experienced playing with more than one Character.

Also create a short background for your character and what is his relationship with the other characters in the group. Assume they have met before at the beginning of the adventure.

Defining the Adventure Plot

Having the characters ready, we will define the plot, the larger story that will propose the objective of the adventure on the part of the heroes. Roll through the following 4 tables:

Table 1: Action

1 - To Protect

2 - To Destroy

3 - To Find

4 - To Investigate

5 - To Deliver

6 - To Hide



**Table 2:
Object/Creature**

- 1- A Medallion**
- 2 - A Scroll**
- 3 - A royal person**
- 4 - A Book**
- 5- A Wizard**
- 6- A Potion**

**Table 3:
Where**

- 1- An abandoned Temple**
- 2 - A forgotten Village**
- 3 - A cursed Forest**
- 4 - A ruined Castle**
- 5 - A dark Swamp**
- 6 - A semi-destroyed Tower**

**Table 4:
Because**

- 1 - The Evil must be contained**
- 2 - Power cannot fall into the wrong hands**
- 3 - A Prophecy Must Be Fulfilled**
- 4 - A Prophecy must be stopped**
- 5 - A Ritual needs to be completed**
- 6 - A Ritual must be stopped**

The opening scene

Roll on the Table below to see EXACTLY how your adventure begins. Use the table below if you're out of ideas or want to get started without any preparation. But don't get hung up on it. If you somehow have a clear starting point to a campaign or adventure, ignore this table and go with your idea.

11D6

1- It all starts with the characters of the "players" running away from some imminent danger in an open place that they don't know well.

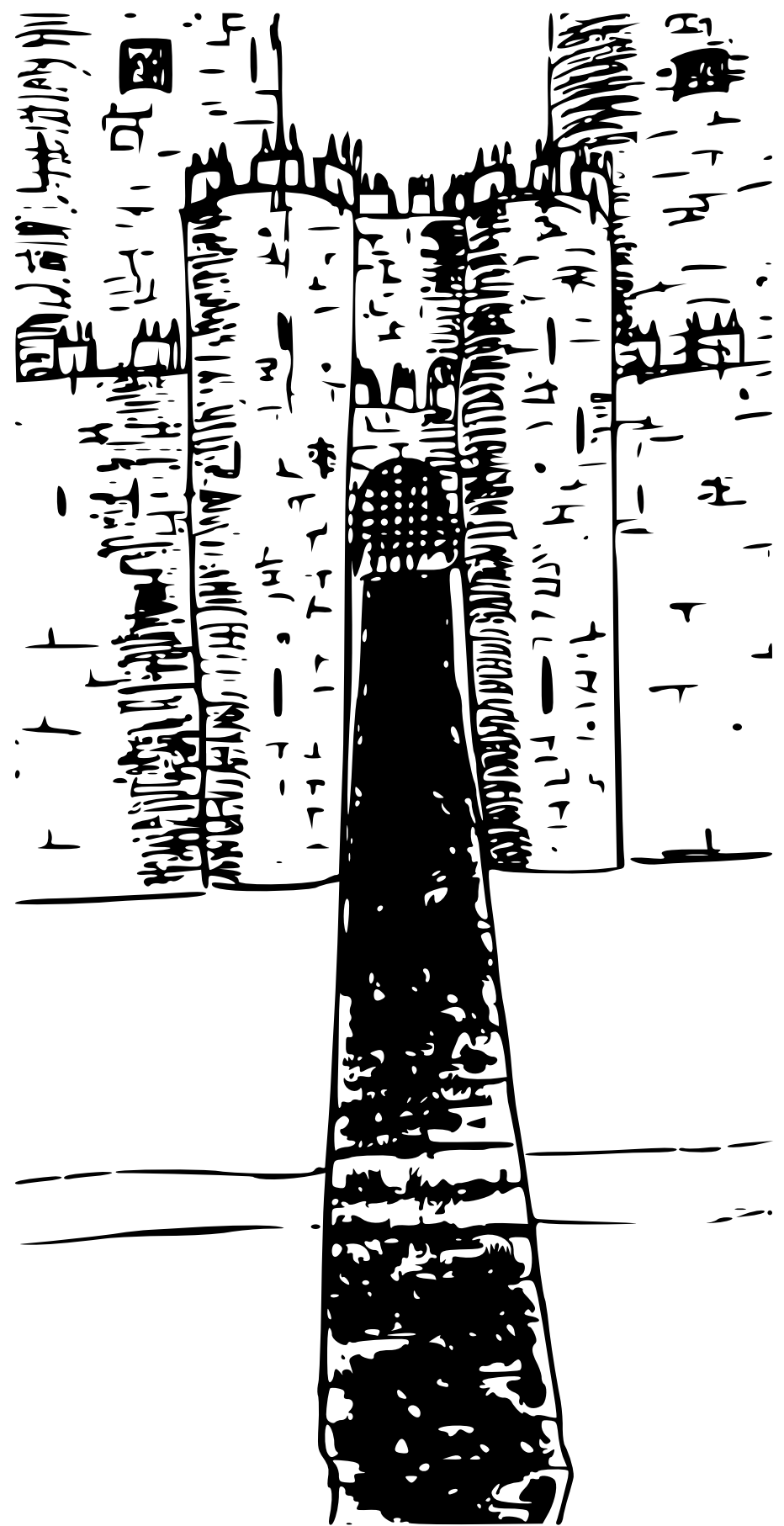
2- It all starts with an important social event promoted by the most important person in the locality. The characters are there uninvited, investigating something.

3- The adventure begins with the characters trapped in a dark, dirty place, for some unfair reason.

4- The adventure begins with the characters waking up in a closed, but wide and clean place, without any memory of how they got there.

5- The adventure begins with the characters in a frantic chase, after a person or creature that they have been chasing for a long time.

6- The adventure begins with someone approaching the characters in a public place, offering dangerous and lucrative work.



What is a scene?

In a solo game the adventure is divided into "SCENES", just like in a movie or series.

Each scene will be a part of the story and will bring challenges and dangers to the characters. It will be the characters' actions, whether successful or unsuccessful, that will move the story forward, leading to new elements and new challenges.

Here we will use the ADVENTURE CLOCK to determine the scenes, which at first will be distributed in 4 stages (clarifications later).

Number of CHALLENGES in the current Scene

A challenge can be many different things. It could be a trap along the way. It could be an ambush. It could be a fight. It could be an investigation at a suspicious location. It might be convincing the prince to pay you in advance for the journey. The possibilities are practically endless.

Important: the number of Challenges is NOT related to the number of tests the character will make throughout the scene. CHALLENGES are the situations that will present themselves as part of the story. Some challenges will need a lot of tests to overcome.

Defining challenges

There are two ways to define a CHALLENGE. The first way is to define through questions to the oracle.

"Are there goblins in this part of the cave?"

"Does the ceiling crumble with the noise of my spell?"

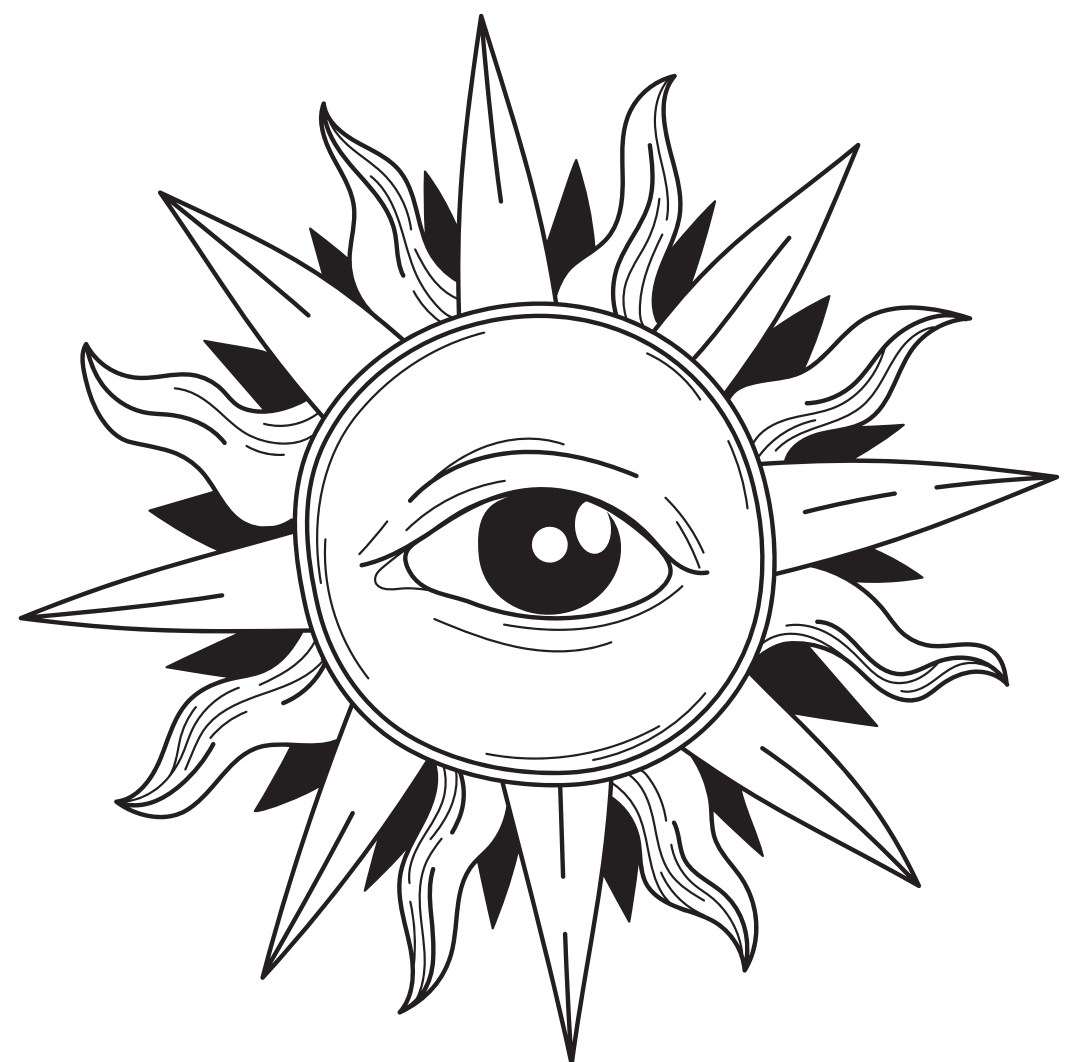
"Is the river of lava coming my way?"

These are some examples of questions to the oracle in which the answer has great potential to present itself as a challenge.

This method is ideal for when you already have a very clear idea of what you want to appear in your adventure.

The second way is indicated for those who are out of ideas or really want to be surprised.

In this case, just roll through the CHALLENGE table on the following pages. You must roll and the result must be added to the adventure in order to connect to what had been previously in the adventure.



THE ADVENTURE CLOCK

One of the biggest complaints of those who play solo is that sometimes the adventure seems to go "infinitely", without ever reaching its end. In a traditional group game it's easy because there's the DM figure delimiting the size of each session, adventure and campaign. But in the solo game (and just to be clear AGAIN: Here "solo" game really means alone, without the figure of the DM or another player) this can be more confusing. For that there is the ADVENTURE CLOCK.

THE ADVENTURE CLOCK



How to interpret?

THE ADVENTURE CLOCK is divided into 4 parts, as we can see in the previous graphic. Each division represents a part or stage of the adventure, with 1 being the beginning and 4 being the end of that adventure. Parts 2 and 3 represent the CHALLENGES and dangers in the "midst" of the adventure.

Within each division of the ADVENTURE CLOCK, there is an indication of how many challenges that section will have.

The player with his characters must face each of these challenges to move on to the next stage of the adventure.

You can create these challenges freely, or use any table of events and random encounters that you are used to, or maybe use oracles and solo methods that you may already be using or use the D100 table of challenges present here in this material, this being the most suitable. A challenge can range from jumping under a pit to facing a dragon. Or Open a door to convince someone of something.

The last CHALLENGE of part 4 of the adventure should be the most epic and challenging. A final boss, a tough choice, a very complicated saving throw...

Some tips

The challenges must be somehow connected with each other. For example, unlocking a door can be a challenge. And what's inside after that one is opened will lead to another challenge, and so on.

If possible, each division of the ADVENTURE CLOCK takes place in a different place, with the last place being the one where the mission/adventure objective is located. Of course, if it makes more sense for the entire adventure to take place in the same place to be more coherent, go with it.

Almost always a challenge will be won (or not) through a dice roll, be it an ability check, a saving throw, a combat, some ability or similar.

However, if after establishing the challenge the player finds an obvious solution to solve the issue without the need for tests, no problem.

But always try to keep at least one roll in each challenge; this greatly increases the thrill of playing solo.

Ask the Oracle as many questions as you need to determine exactly the details of the challenge to be faced.



Introducing elements

Not everything needs to be random on your adventure. THE ADVENTURE CLOCK is an excellent tool for introducing elements that we really want to see in our adventure. Examples:

Before the adventure begins, you can define in which locations each part of the journey will take place. I can determine that the part 1 challenges will take place at the fair in the City of Avernon; part 2 will be in the Dark Forest; part 3 on the Shantal Underground Complex; and part 4 in the Necromancer's Castle of Stars. Just by defining this, ideas for challenges begin to emerge. For example, finding the entrance to the Underground Complex will certainly be one of the challenges to be faced in part 3.

Another interesting thing is to determine certain encounters in advance. For example, I may already decide that the last challenge of part 2 will be a Gelatinous Cube, because inside it will be the key that will open the entrance to the Underground Complex. I can already determine that one of the final challenges in step 4 will be an illusion spell. And so on...

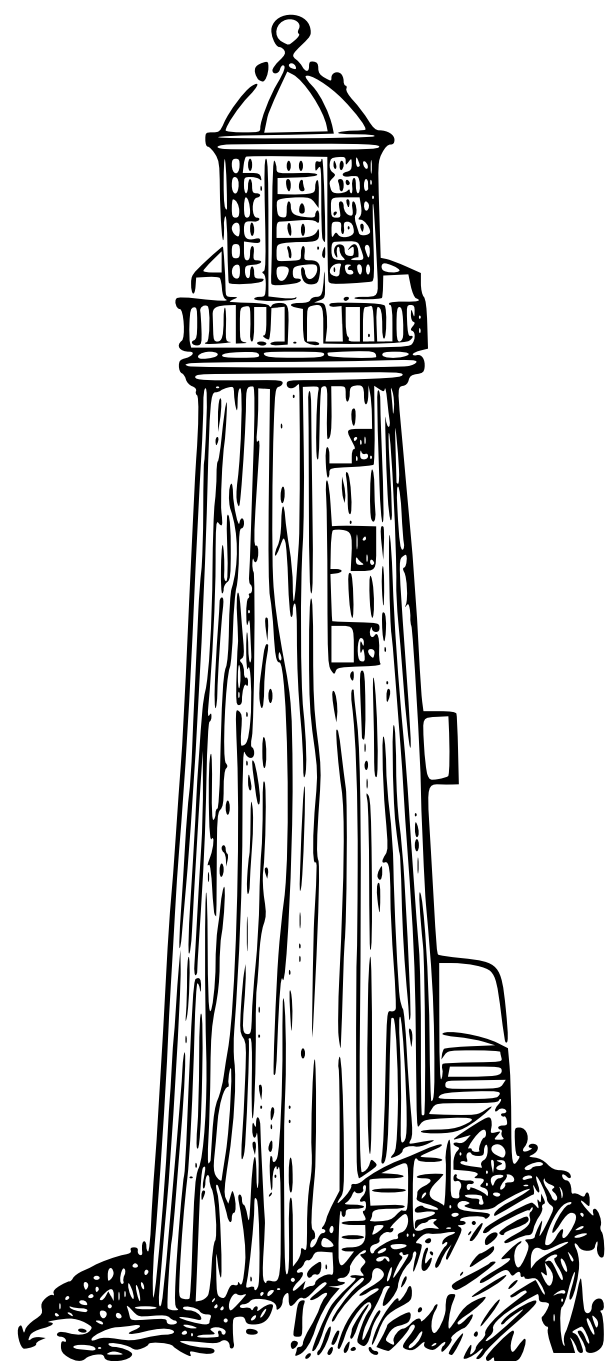
Going Beyond

One thing that needs to be clear is that this 4-step division can be changed. I chose it this way because I believe it is an interesting number, generating adventures with a beginning, middle and end and that are neither too long nor too short.

But do you want longer adventures? Then divide the adventure into 6 steps, where each extra step will present 1d6 challenges.

Want shorter adventures? Consider splitting it into just 2 steps, the first with 1d6+1 challenges and the second with 1d3 hazards.

Still not the division you want? Then create your own that fits your needs.



Defining the Challenges

As stated earlier, there are many ways to define a CHALLENGE. The first way is to define through questions to the oracle.

"Are there goblins in this part of the cave?"

"Does the ceiling crumble with the noise of my spell?"

"Is the river of lava coming my way?"

These are some examples of questions to the oracle in which the answer has great potential to present itself as a challenge.

This method is ideal for when you already have a very clear idea of what you want to appear in your adventure.

The second way is indicated for those who are out of ideas or really want to be surprised. You can use tables from your favorite games, or websites that generate events and meetings...or you can use our d100 CHALLENGE CHART.

In this case, just scroll through the CHALLENGES table on the following pages. You must roll and the result must be added to the adventure in order to connect to what was previously presented in the adventure.

You don't have to literally interpret the challenge. Adapt details to better fit your adventure.

And if even with adaptations you think the Challenge is "out of place", simply ignore it and roll again on the table.

Then follow the CHALLENGES Table on the next pages.



CHALLENGES

1d100

- 1- A narrow and slippery passage...
- 2- A stone statue in the middle of the way
- 3- The nest of an aggressive creature
- 4- The ground breaks under your feet...
- 5- A swarm of wasps...
- 6- A skeleton from ancient times comes your way...
- 7- 1d6 zombies suddenly appear...
- 8- Bodies torn apart on the floor with expressions of horror. Who or what did it is still there. Roll 1d6, where 1-3: a spectral creature; 4-6: a wild animal...
- 9- 1d6 +1 goblins attack...
- 10- A black tentacle literally emerges from the shadows...
- 11- A hired assassin charges against 1 of your heroes...
- 12- A mist appears in front of you, and within it silhouettes of some creature...
- 13- Quicksand under your feet...
- 14- A giant snake appears as if by magic...
- 15- The path is hidden by an illusion, looking like something else...
- 16- A huge gem of very high value (use your game table, or simply define the value as 4d6 x10 gold pieces). It's stuck in a rock and it's hard to get it out...
- 17- A melancholic and ethereal music is heard, causing numbness and lethargy...
- 18- A fungus distills a poisonous substance...
- 19- Someone exactly like one of the adventurers introduces himself...
- 20- 1d6 Lizard-men appear...
- 21- 1d6+2 Orcs appear...
- 22- A mysterious flash tries to blind everyone momentarily...
- 23- The floor is filled with a sharp and extremely rigid crystal...

CHALLENGES

1d100

- 24- A door or passage needs to be opened...
- 25- A sudden collapse of the physical structure happens...
- 26- An inexplicable tiredness... is it magic?
- 27- The path forks and not even your maps indicated that...
- 28- 1d2 Giant spiders appear...
- 29- A huge gargoyle appears...
- 30- A large stone or piece of construction or a fallen tree stuck your progress...
- 31- 1d6+2 Kobolds...
- 32- An intense and inexplicable cold is made...
- 33- An intense and inexplicable heat is made...
- 34- A dart trap on the way (damage 1d6 (open locations) or 1d6 + Dungeon Level)...
- 35- You find what seems to be a secret passage...
- 36- A big chest on the way...
- 37- A Dragon...
- 38- A cry for help coming from somewhere nearby...
- 39- The ground shakes and a crack appears, swallowing everything...
- 40- A huge stone ball comes rolling towards you (1d8+2 damage)...
- 41- A giant centipede...
- 42- A Golem on the way...
- 43- A deafening noise is heard, causing great mental confusion...
- 44- A place in ruins collapsing, and you must pass through there...
- 45- 1d6 giant rats...
- 46- A person unconscious in the middle of the way...
- 47- A group of common bandits (1d6) in the same location...
- 48- A crossroads. The right way is indicated in strange characters above the arch of that passage....
- 49- 2 trolls distracted...
- 50- Someone running, a creature in pursuit...

CHALLENGES

1d100

- 51- 2 other creatures appear, fighting each other. Decide or assume they are 1 wyvern against a giant scorpion...
- 52- A vampire...
- 53- A werewolf...
- 54- A fire elemental...
- 55- An air elemental...
- 56- A giant bat...
- 57- 1d6 skeletons in armor...
- 58- A bridge/narrow passage over an abyss...
- 59- A strong earthquake...
- 60- A spell brings darkness to the environment...
- 61- Someone attacks, mistaking the group for something else...
- 62- The ground is covered with thorns capable of penetrating anything. They could be poisoned...
- 63- A giant snake in the middle of the way...
- 64- A giant scorpion...
- 65- A vengeful spirit linked to the past comes to claim revenge...
- 66- A narrow and slippery passage over water...
- 67- A magic wall made of fire...
- 68- A magic item stuck on the wall, next to a mysterious mechanism...
- 69- 1d6+2 goblins...
- 70- 1d6+2 Orcs...
- 71- A thick fog makes it difficult to locate...
- 72- 2d6 wolves....
- 73- Indistinguishable whispers accompanied by a strong drowsiness...
- 74- An unnatural Wind makes it difficult to walk and even stand....
- 75- A slimy, crawling creature in the middle of the way...
- 76- The path goes beyond a large and tall block of stone....
- 77- 1d6 zombies
- 78- 1 zombie, 1 skeleton and a giant spider on the way....
- 79- A maddened mage appears (level 2 mage)
- 80- A prolonged and continuous sound, impossible to bear for a long time...

CHALLENGES

1d100

- 81- A poisonous smoke...
- 82- Cry for help from the place where the group/adventurer just passed...
- 83- Bodies intact on the floor...
- 84- 1 ogre...
- 85- A spear is thrown towards you...
- 86- A wide and slippery passage...
- 87- A metal statue in the middle of the way
- 88- A Magical Creature's Nest
- 89- Something from above breaks over your head...
- 90- A swarm of giant insects...
- 91- A lich from ancient times comes your way...
- 92- 1d6 zombies suddenly appear...
- 93- Bodies torn apart on the floor with expressions of horror. Who or what did it is still there. 1d6, where ,1-3: a spectral creature; 4-6: a wild animal...
- 94- 1d6 +1 goblins attack...
- 95- A black tentacle literally emerges from the shadows...
- 96- A Lizardman charges against 1 of your heroes...
- 97- A mist appears in front of you, and within it silhouettes of some creature...
- 98- Quicksand under your feet...
- 99- A giant snake appears as if by magic...
- 100- The path is hidden by an illusion, looking like something else...

Combat

Combat in solo mode are very close to the traditional way, with the difference that is the one who rolls the dice in the monsters' turn will be the player himself. Otherwise, all the rules for monsters are still valid.

If in doubt about monster behavior, here are some guidelines:

- Always attack the closest character;
- In case of more than one adventurer at the same distance, attack the weakest one...

What if I want to steal or facilitate?

Unfortunately this is a question I get asked more often than I would like. The answer is simple.

If the temptation to steal from the results or at any moment of the solo session is really strong, immediately close this material, save your data and miniatures, maps, and go look for a professional who can help you. For someone who decides to "steal," in a solo game has already lost in life. Only act like this if it's for the benefit of the story, then yes it's allowed and DMs do it often. But if it's just to take advantage, really this person's problems go far beyond the one presented in the challenge.



Playing with 1 single character

This method assumes that the player will control a group of adventurers. But if you still want and prefer to play controlling a single character, you have 3 options. Choose one of them:

1- Start with the maximum value of the HP die, plus Constitution modifier (ignore negative bonus in this case). And every encounter will always be against 1 single creature, even if there is indication that there could be more.

2- Start with the maximum value of your character's HP die, plus Constitution modifier (including negative modifiers). The number of creatures will be as indicated in the tables, but instead of rolling the creature's hit points, consider the HD value to be the hit points, and add 2 to that value. For example, a creature with HD 6 will be dealt with as having 8 hit points (HD +2) A creature with 1 HD will be dealt with as having 3 hit points. If the creature has a HD of type "HD 1+4, disregard the value after the sign. Then add 3 to the value (and not 2 as usual).

3- You can play controlling 1 single character but still next to a group of other characters, which will act as npcs. This can be done with the rules of my other material "Mestrando no RPG Solo", also released by TLHP Publishing.



And what else?

That's it for now. Here are the basic rules for playing OSE solo. I have plans to soon release material with advanced and differentiated techniques, but I believe that what we have here is enough to get started.

One thing that needs to be clear here is that solo play is NOT and IS NOT intended to be a replacement for traditional group play. Nor does solo mode try to compete with group mode.

They are two different modes that offer different experiences. And much more than enemies, these two modes can be great allies. Solo RPG can be an excellent tool in preparing for an adventure and improvising in the middle of a traditional session. It can also be a way of testing house rules and adaptations before officially bringing it to the table.

The solo RPG can also be used to set the history of important npcs in the story.

Anyway, you're not denying group play when playing solo, and you don't even need to deny solo play if you're in a group.

In fact, we want you to enjoy both worlds.



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