

Old-School Solo

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

**OLD-SCHOOL
ESSENTIALS**

CREDITS

Written by Peter Rudin-Burgess

Cartography by Dyson Logos (www.dysonlogos.com)

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INTRODUCTION

Old School Essentials is a cleaned-up and streamlined version of the D&D I started with. I first played the blue book basic D&D and first owned the red boxset basic rules. After that, we went through basic and expert and then migrated to AD&D.

I hadn't done anything with Basic/Expert rules from that day until now. I picked up Old School Essentials Basic rules a while back but didn't get around to playing, and then recently bought the Bundle of Holding, which had rules and adventures. More than enough to keep a player busy for months, if not years.

Obviously, it was time to crack open the game and roll up a character. These rules require *Old-School Essentials*.

If you are familiar with solo play, these rules tweak many common solo engine ideas to make them feel like native OSE rules. These rules also include techniques taken from stage improv. and turn them into gaming techniques.

These are not my first rules for old-school D&D-style games. What has changed is me. I have evolved my solo playing over time, and the tools I recommend have developed at the same time. These rules are the newest incarnation of those rules, honed for OSE.

If you are not familiar with solo play, welcome to a fascinating aspect of our hobby. In no other game will your character always be center stage, the adventures wrapped entirely around your character, and absolutely no loss of fidelity between what the Game Master imagined and what you imagine.

One of the cornerstones of solo play is the simple closed question, the choice between two exclusive states: a chest is locked or isn't. The knight is sitting on a horse, or not. You could get a long way by just flipping a coin. Solo play takes things a little further by giving you six different outcomes, from the most emphatic negative to emphatically positive results. What you have to do is imagine what that answer means for your character at that moment. For example, a chest that is most definitely not locked could have the smashed remains of its lock and hasp lying on the floor next to it. At the other end of the scale, it could have four locks and be wrapped in chains.

Yes and no answers will only get you so far. It won't tell you what is written in a diary or what the town guard is really thinking. Solo rules give you the tools to answer that kind of question.

Asking the dice is not new. If you have ever rolled for a random encounter, you ask a yes-no question. Once you have your answer, you can expand on it by rolling to see what the encounter is with. The same is true when you search for secret doors or roll of monsters' morale.

Solo rules take these ideas and turns them into a coherent set of add-on rules that help you have adventures without a human Game Master.

SAMPLE OF PLAY # 1

This is a short introduction and introduces some of the ideas of solo play.

At this point, there is no world, no backstory, no overarching story. However, I can imagine that my character, Kallen, a first-level cleric, is in the service of a Bishop. I have bought myself plate mail and shield, so I imagine I am part of a military column moving through the countryside. I can start to imagine a column of mounted knights with a few dignitaries at the head. The Bishop will be part of this knot of wealthy figures. At the Bishop's beck and call, I can imagine myself on the periphery but not part of their social rank. I want to start the game by immediately putting my character at the center of the action. I decided that the Bishop feels obliged to at least pay respects to a religious house that lies along our route but doesn't want to visit in person. I decide that the place is 1d12 [4] miles out of our way. This is far enough for it to be a chore for him to visit but close enough that it would be a snub to the vicar to not pay his respects. The solution is to send me to convey the Bishop's apology for not visiting, with an excuse that the Bishop is pressed for time. There is an added advantage as the Bishop knows that it will be good for me to meet other, higher-ranking clergy as an acolyte.

This has come directly from my imagination, with only one random element. It is the sort of introductory scene that I may use to bring a party together at the start of a game.

I am imagining rolling agricultural land, fields, unpaved roads crossed by streams, and the occasional copse of trees. To complete the starting scene, I imagine my character given a wax-sealed letter by the Bishop and strict instructions to be

back by nightfall. I have given myself very basic equipment, a riding horse, weapons, armor, and shield. Unfortunately, Kallen is not prepared for a life of dungeoneering and adventure, so I have not equipped him for it.

I now have a reason why I am out in the world.

Turning to the rules, I roll for a wilderness encounter, using the standard rules, and the dice say I will have an encounter. I know the terrain, so roll on the grass random encounter table, and get Brigand. A normal party is 6-8 characters, and I am alone. So I divide all the numbers by 7. So I rolled for 12 brigands, which I reduced to two. I also roll for their treasure and reduce all of that by 7. The treasure roll suggests 3 magic items.

In the same way that I rounded up $12/7$ to make two brigands, I round up the fraction of a magic item to one item. I roll for it and get a weapon and Mace + 1. This is a good treasure for a cleric, but it is in the hands of a brigand that I will have to defeat.

I first spot the brigands at 140 yds. It makes no sense for these to try and waylay me at such a distance, but if one blocked the path behind me and the other in front, that would be a suitable ambush. I now ask the oracle, did these two pick a good ambush spot? I think it is likely. The answer is a yes, and... . I interpret this as a narrow point in the road, with high hedges and overhanging branches. This has forced me to dismount from my horse, and I cannot turn left or right. I know my journey is 4 miles, so I also roll a d4 to see how far I am from my destination. I am two miles away, so about halfway between the column of knights and the holy house I am traveling to. I am very unlikely to get any aid.

I can now play through this scene, picturing the brigands blocking my way forward and back. I roll a d6 to decide if each is male or female and get one of each. It seems logical that they are a couple. This leads me to imagine that they call banter to each other, intending to intimidate me. Rolling a d6, I decide that the woman is ahead, the man behind, She has a spear, and he has a mace.

I dismount and loop the reins over a branch. I want to tackle the man first. They will be easier to track if she tries to steal my horse. I heft my mace and shield and advance towards him. I talk of him turning away from a life of crime and seeking repentance. I ask the oracle if he is dismissive, and it comes back with another yes, and... answer. I decide that he is becoming abusive and even more threatening. They obviously don't like the church! Does he charge me? Yes. We eventually clash, he has a spear and leather armor, and I have plate, shield, and mace. He wins the initiative, and we fight for a few rounds, during which time he strikes me once, and my second blow puts him down.

I turn to see what his partner is doing. Using the oracle again, I want to know if she is charging to the attack. The oracle says, yes, and she would be just about to arrive given the three rounds the combat took. I picture turning just in time to meet her charge. I roll initiative again. This time I win and strike out. We trade blows until I land a heavy strike putting her down.

I am down to 3HP. I cannot leave these bodies on the road, so try and find a way to drag them into the trees. I ask to oracle if I can see where they came from? It says no, but... they must have come over the hedge. So I leave them where they are. Snapping the spear and taking the mace. I don't want any of their companions using them against me. Forcing my way through the hedge near where the woman first

blocked my way, I look for signs of their tracks. I try a Wisdom check and succeeded. I find their paths and follow them back to a basic camp. It does look like it was just the two of them, two bedrolls, a small cold campfire. As I look around, I try and second Wisdom check to see if I discover where their loot is hidden. Another success reveals a small sack hidden in the leaf litter. I heft it, and it is heavy with coins.

To finish up, I drag the bodies back here. Remember its location, and head back to the road. Then, finding my horse, I ride on to the holy house.

CLOSED QUESTIONS

Closed questions can be answered with a simple yes or no. There are several examples of closed questions in the sample gameplay above. First, I used it to see if one of the brigands behaved as expected. Did they attack me? Because the terrain is being improvised as I play, I used to know whether I could see obvious signs of where they came from.

In addition to yes and no answers, you may notice that there were results such as yes and... and no, but... these are common modifiers in solo play and on-stage improvisation. Your question offers potential solutions, and the answers either accept that solution or attempt to build on it. There are three modifiers, and, but, and because.

The and... modifier amplifies the result. You can extend the and... to 'and, what is more... .' Depending on your question, this modifier can make your situation much better or much worse.

The but... modifier is used to tone down a yes answer to make it weaker.

The because... modifier applies to negative answers and prompts you to imagine a cause for the negative answer, and potentially a way of your character turning the no into a yes.

IS IT A QUESTION?

Before asking a question, you should try and hold in your mind what a basic yes and no answer would look like to your character. Don't bother asking the question if you cannot picture both options. The only answer you can see must be the reality.

I have also found that if I picture the answers before asking the question, it plays faster at the table than asking the question and then deciding what the answer means.

BEST/WORST SCENARIOS

Yes and no answers are not always the most fitting response. The oracle table also gives you a range of scenario outcomes. This column can compound many detailed questions into a single bigger idea. It can set the tone for an entire scene if that is fitting.

FORTUNATELY/UNFORTUNATELY

Closed questions are so named because they frequently do not provide any more information than the question asked for. For example, “Did you go to the store?” is a closed question and is either yes or no. On the other hand, “Where did you go?” is an open question. They may have gone to the store and then on somewhere else or were on the way to the store when they were kidnapped by goblins.

The fortunately/unfortunately answers retain the obvious positive and negative part of the answer, but they also invite you to fill in additional detail.

LIKELIHOOD

Not all questions are as likely to be yes or no. This is a common concept in OSE. For example, the chance of encountering a wandering monster is 1 in 6 in settled lands, 2 in 6 in the forest, and 3 in 6 in a jungle.

We treat this escalation as a +1 and +2 on the oracle table as the likelihood of an answer being yes increases and a -1 and -2 as the odds decrease.

Even when the odds are very likely or unlikely, there is always the chance of getting an unexpected answer. If a question is

so certain that it is without doubt, it is not a valid oracle question.

THE ORACLE

Form your question, and roll 1d6. If the answer is more likely to be yes or no, add ± 1 to the roll; if the question is very likely to be either yes or no, add ± 2 to the roll. For example, looking for an ax in a woodcutter's shack is very likely to be a positive result, so +2 would be appropriate. On the other hand, asking if the guard watching you falls asleep only an hour into their watch is unlikely, so a -1 is suitable.

Oracle				
1d6	Yes/No	Yes/No/And	Scenarios	Fortunately
1	No	No, and...	Worst case scenario	Unfortunately
2	No	No	Worse outcome	Unfortunately
3	No	No, because...	Bad outcome	Unfortunately
4	Yes	Yes, but...	Good outcome	Fortunately
5	Yes	Yes	Better outcome	Fortunately
6	Yes	Yes, and...	Best case scenario	Fortunately

SAMPLE OF PLAY #2

Having gathered the brigands' loot from their camp and collected his horse, Kallen rides on to the holy house. The land changes from scattered farms to a more formal layout of fields and drainage ditches. At the center is the holy house. I ask an open question about what I see, and I get Affect + Undeath. I interpret this as a gathering of priests around one of the burial mounds. They are performing a ritual. This could be an internment to prevent the body from rising or an attempt to put down an undead, that bit I don't know yet. Kallen approaches the group of priests but stays a respectful distance back. Closed Question: Is the Priest I was sent to deliver the letter to here? I imagine it is likely, I get a Yes, but... and my first instinct is that they are ill or frail. So I roll a d6 to decide if I see a priest or priestess. I chose 1-3 Priest, 4-6 Priestess, and rolled a 2. The Priest is here but not leading the ritual. He is being supported by two younger priests and looks quite frail.

At the end of the ritual, I imagine the old Priest motioning for me to approach. I dismount from my horse and approach, respectfully kneeling and kissing his ecclesiastic ring of office. When bidden, I rise and present the letter from the Bishop.

I wait while he reads the letter. Open Question: What is his reaction? I get Shift + Debate. I interpret this as the Priest is almost cursory in showing gratitude for delivering the letter and the Bishop's respect. Instead, he has his own idea or needs. Do these needs relate to the brigands or lawlessness in the area? I leave this question as a straight 1d6 with no modifiers. Yes, but... Not the pair that I dealt with; something else is raiding the farmers and priests. I take this moment to hand over the bag of money that I took from the two brigands. Is the Priest pleased with having the money

returned? Yes. I assume that this has raised his estimation of me. What does he want me to do?

OPEN QUESTIONS

Open questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. No single table could possibly hold every answer to every possible question. The solution is to use prompt words. The tables are split into themes. Ten are presented here, and you can easily expand them, customizing tables to fit specific regions of your world or factions and cults that feature in your adventures. These tables are called a Muse; oracles answer questions, and muses inspire the imagination. That is how the words are supposed to be used. You roll for one or more words; two is the most common, and then think about what could this mean in your situation. You pick the themes that together best match your situation. If the actual words do not inspire you, you can use word association to evolve the words you rolled into words that have more meaning.

The first column, Change, is the most generic and can be combined with any other themes to move a story forward.

In sample play #2 above, I used this table twice and picked the Change and Divine columns the first time and Change and Talk the second.

Muse					
1d6	Change	Social	Swords	Sorcery	Divine
1	Shift	Political	Battle	Magic	Immortal
2	Move	Culture	Struggle	Witchcraft	Sacred
3	Alter	Society	War	Necromancy	Eternal
4	Convert	Economy	Defend	Supernatural	Prophecy
5	Reverse	Friend	Conflict	Demonic	Mystical
6	Grow	Welfare	Duel	Enchantment	Resurrection
7	Deepen	Religion	Oppose	Trickery	Evil
8	Affect	Emotional	Clash	Incantation	Spirit
9	Improve	Family	Crusade	Ancient	Occult
10	Kill	Environment	Feud	Fanatic	Lord
11	Remove	Mask	Kill	Divination	Soul
12	Break	Morals	Argument	Dominate	Low
13	Improve	History	Attempt	Inspiration	Truth
14	Increase	Law	Encounter	Ritual	Curse
15	Cancel	Medical	Confrontation	Bewitch	Arcane
16	Stop	Romance	Death	Fantasy	Natural
17	Control	People	Grudge	Illusion	Eldritch
18	Reduce	Class	Prevent	Deception	Undeath
19	Replace	Relationship	Attack	Cult	Desolation
20	Save	Royal	Quarrel	Evil	Fate

Muse					
Id	Monstrous	Treasure	Wilderness	Talk	Place
1	Demonic	Loot	Forest	Discuss	Fortress
2	Freak	Artifact	Canyon	Chat	Mansion
3	Giant	Prize	Wild	Debate	Dungeon
4	Beast	Precious	Tangle	Rant	Tower
5	Person	Cherish	Bush	Argument	Noble
6	Villain	Relic	Grassland	Schmooze	Keep
7	Ghostly	Pirate	Mountain	Harangue	Abbey
8	Killer	Collection	Wasteland	Frank	Turret
9	Enemy	Hidden	Hunting	Monologue	Moat
10	Legend	Antiquity	Barren	Heated	Stone
11	Fearsome	Power	Trade	Question	Temple
12	Minion	Hoard	Austere	Cordial	Portcullis
13	Rune	Magic	Creek	Story	Cave
14	Horror	Secret	Trail	Friendship	Stronghold
15	Trap	Rare	Open	Small	Walls
16	Ferocious	Sacrifice	Untamed	Joking	Workshop
17	Insane	Trinket	River	Etiquette	Crypt
18	Ravenous	Quest	Camp	Opinion	Garden
19	Siren	Reward	Lake	Disagree	Lair
20	Brutish	King	Swamp	Lecture	Abode

I could use these tables to outline what the Priest wants me to do, rolling on a few columns to develop an idea. When doing that, I suggest picking two columns, then looking at the result, adding in a word from a third column, and keeping building the pool of words until an idea appears. You do not need to use every word. Discard those that don't fit, keep the ones that do.

For example, I start with Divine and Change because the Priest obviously wants me to do something, which is the Change element. I get Mystical + Reverse. That doesn't tell me much, so I add a word from the Swords theme as adventures nearly always have some kind of conflict and danger. I get Feud. Mystical + Reverse + Feud. This is starting to sound more like an adventure. I want to add a word from the Place theme to help me visualize the adventure. I get Tower. Mystical + Reverse + Feud + Tower.

That suggests that a wizard in a tower is holding a grudge against the priests here. The priests want to end the feud. Because I have already created the idea of Undeath and the priests performing the ritual, I am going to include the idea that the wizard is a necromancer. The feud has the Necromancer raising undead to terrorize the region. I have the outline of an adventure that a first-level cleric could handle in just four words.

SAMPLE OF PLAY #3

I want to name the Priest, to make him more real, and come up with Elder Godefrid Scully. He bids me walk with him back to the religious house. During the walk, he tells me that their closest neighbor is a mystic that works in the dark arts. There has been a long dispute about the site of this holy place and the Necromancer's Tower. Mostly the Necromancer remains in (1d6, 1-3 His, 4-6 Her) her tower. However, recently she has been more active. When a brother of the religious house passed away, she raised the corpse as a zombie. Then, she sent it into the village to terrify the residents. This is simply too much and has crossed a line. Godefrid looks at me in my armor and says that the priests here are simple men of peace, but God has obvious plans when I arrived on the very day when they laid their brother back in his tomb.

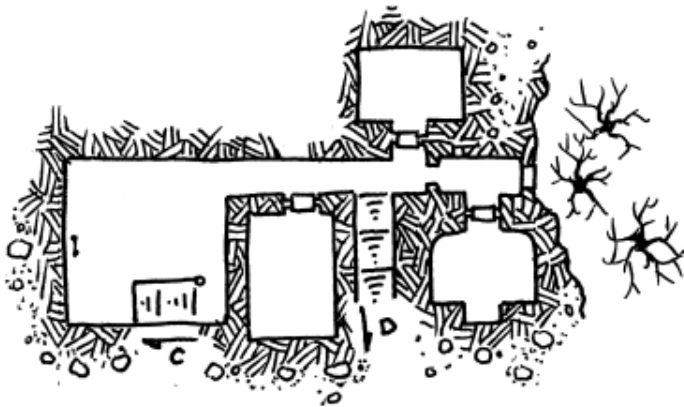
By this time, I picture that we have arrived back at the house. I also imagine it to be quite impressive and wealthy; I don't need to roll anything as what I am picturing fits the needs of the adventure. Finally, we end up in the Elder's office. Does he notice I am wounded from my fight with the brigands? I think this is likely as he is thinking of me as a holy warrior, Yes, and... he lays hands on me while uttering a prayer [Cure Light Wounds] and heals me.

Elder Godefrid shows me where the tower is on a map and tells me she has many inhuman and undead servants. Does he offer me any assistance? Yes. He can provide me with holy water, which will harm the undead. [I roll a d6 to see how many vials I get 6. This is less than the value of the coins I gave them, so it does not feel unbalanced. I add them to my equipment list.]

My Bishop wanted me to return to the knights by nightfall, so I take my leave of the Elder Godefrid and ride off to the tower.

Do I have a random encounter? (1 in 6 chance) 2, No.

I rolled twice on the Wilderness theme and got Trade and Grassland to get an idea of the tower. I picture the tower rising from grassland beside an old trade route. I have a map from Dyson Logos that I liked and have chosen to use. I am approaching the door on the right, behind the three bare trees on the map below. The tower is above the square room on the left, with the stairs marked c.



I cautiously approach the tower on foot, having tied my horse up some way back. Sneaking up to the door. The wood is so old that it is almost silver in color and studded with black iron rivets. Above the door is a gargoyle in the shape of the devil's head. I assume it is not locked. This is the tower of a Necromancer and filled with undead servants; who will try and break in? I try the door, and it opens. Does it creak? Yes, and... It creaks open, and immediately behind it is a... Skeleton.

SPECIALIST TOOLS

Broad or generic tables can suggest answers to many situations, but there are times when you want a specific answer that matches your situation right now.

I could populate the Necromancer's Tower using the wandering monster tables, but that would feel weird if I met wolves in the first room, orcs in the second, and then halflings in the third. A better solution is to make your own more tightly focused tables.

I suggest this format.

Custom Table	
1d6	Thing
1-2	Common Thing
3-4	Common Thing
5	Uncommon Thing
6	Uncommon Thing

A table with four entries is quick to make, and you can create as many as you need, as you need them.

For example, I imagine the lower level of the Necromancer's Tower to be pretty creepy. So I pick foes from the Dungeon wandering monsters table that I have a chance to defeat and fit how I imagine the location to be.

Necromancers Tower Level 1	
1d6	Encounter
1-2	Skeleton
3-4	Goblin
5	Spitting Cobra
6	Goblin (1d2)

Now I have a variety of threats. The random table means that I don't know what I will face, and the table's natural bias helps me set the tone of the encounters.

As I move through the adventure, I can create more tables to reflect the local environment.

THREE THINGS

Three Things is a technique used in improvisation that does not rely on random tables or dice. When you create something in your game, think of just three things that make it stand out. Three things are quick to think of and will not slow your gameplay down. You can start with the most obvious things, and if your character looks in more detail, you can create a further three things. For example, you may see a solid oak chest bound with iron and a solid padlock. If you examine the padlock, it may have scratch marks around the keyhole, gold leaves inlaid around the keyhole, and a makers mark on the bottom.

You can keep drilling down to ever greater detail. The more specific the question, the easier it is to develop the details.

It is much easier to remember an NPC if you have created a few memorable details like a stooped posture, arthritic knuckles, and half-moon spectacles. If this NPC becomes the focus of your scene, you may notice their garlic breath, dripping nose, and bloodshot eyes.

YOU TALKING TO ME?

When you overhear a conversation, intentionally or not, you may hear one or both sides. You can use the Talk theme on the Muse to set the tone for each conversationist, and then if you need details, pick a suitable theme to set the subject.

Sometimes you won't need a subject because your story has already defined what they would be talking about.

For example, if I tried to eavesdrop on the priests at the religious house, I roll twice on the Talk theme because I could hear both priests. I rolled Monologue and Chat. From

this, I can imagine Priest#2 asked a simple casual question, and then Priest#1 went on and on, not giving Priest#2 a chance to get another word in. Next, I can roll for the theme to see if it is interesting enough to pay attention to. I have no idea what they may be talking about, and there are 10 themes, so I roll a d10. I get a 2 which is Social, and a 4 which is Economy. I will leave these priests to their conversation; it doesn't sound thrilling.

Plot Twists

Solo adventures are the perfect open sandbox. You can go anywhere and do anything because you are the only character. Everything revolves around you. But, they can also feel very linear. Everything has to come from you. Plot twists are suggested changes to your adventure that tell you to make an unexpected change.

At the start of each scene, see below, you ask, "Is everything as I expect?" If the answer is a no, you roll once on each column of the Plot Twist table and combine both halves to make a sentence.

Plot Twist			
1d6		1d6	
1	An NPC	1	appears.
2	Your PC	2	alters the location.
3	An organization	3	helps the hero.
4	A physical event	4	hinders the hero.
5	An emotional event	5	changes the goal.
6	An item	6	ends the scene.

For example, I rolled a 4 and 3, which gives me "A physical event helps the hero."

Sometimes the meaning will instantly come to you; other times, you may want to consult the Muse for inspiration.

An NPC

If you already have a cast of NPCs, try and reuse one of these. If that is impossible, create a new NPC, and work out why or how they got into this location.

Your PC

Something you inadvertently did or said has an unintended consequence.

An Organization

Organizations can be big, like armies or guilds, or small, like a few village elders or cultists.

A Physical Event

This could be major and traumatic, like an earthquake, or as simple as something falling off a shelf causing a distraction. Think about your environment.

An Emotional Event

This is often the hardest option to quickly imagine. These normally relate to your character's wants, needs, drives, and motivations. Discovering the dark lord is your father is a major emotional event. Conflicts between duty and honor fall into this category.

An Item

Both simple equipment failure and magic items fall into this category. It could be someone recognizing something you are carrying or something breaking. Anything with an object at its heart qualifies.

Appears

This is a prompt to include the ‘thing’ in the scene. There is an odd combination: “Your PC appears.” The best way to treat this is to give you surprise in a combat situation or catch people unawares or unobserved in a social scene.

Alters the location

What you were imagining would happen in the location is somehow changed. How could the person or organization make that change?

Helps the hero

You are the hero, so this change helps you in some way. That could be a big help or a small one. However, you don’t want it to solve the adventure for you or unbalance your game.

Hinders the hero

This is the opposite of helping you. This could have someone unexpectedly discover your hiding place, or you accidentally knock an ornament off a shelf or disturb a wandering monster. Sometimes life just gets more complicated!

Changes the goal

Most of the time, heroes are operating on partial information. This is one of those times when what you thought turned out wrong or out of date. Or someone or something has shifted the goalposts. The goal could be your immediate goal for this scene, the goal for the entire adventure, or anywhere in between.

Ends the scene

We often know what we expect to happen next and what would logically follow from that. This result is intended to derail the scene you were expecting. This option curtails the

scene and possibly what you expected next. Examples could be an NPC preventing you from attending a meeting or the town guard raiding a warehouse you were about to sneak into. When your own PC ends the scene, look to your drives, goals, and morals and see what could turn you away or provoke you to a different course.

TIME

You will almost certainly be familiar with rounds of 10 seconds and turns of ten minutes. Then we have hours and days. In roleplaying, we also use sessions as a unit of time. Campaigns may last for hundreds of sessions.

Solo games are frequently marked out in scenes rather than sessions.

A scene starts and ends whenever you skip a block of time. That could be a few seconds or a three-month sea voyage.

In a solo game, you are under no pressure to play every minute of every day. In the samples of play you have seen, I skipped from the moment I left the column of knights until the ambush, then cut forward to arriving at the ritual, then cut to meeting the Elder in his office, and then skipped to the point where I was nearly at the front door of the Necromancer's Tower.

Each of these would be a separate scene.

You roll a closed question at the start of each scene, "Is the scene as I expected?" If you get a yes result, the scene proceeds as you would play it. If you get a no result, you can use the Plot Twist table to see what throws the scene off track.

If you have more than one character, there is also a second question for each NPC: "Does this character behave as expected?" If you get a no result for this question, you need to decide what they would do instead. To see how they react, you can use the full range of no, and... to yes, and... for this question. If your primary character is calling the shots as party leader, your relationship with the NPCs can act as

modifiers to the oracle roll. Your Cha modifier can be used to modify the oracle roll.

If you get a yes result, the fighters will be on guard against unexpected attacks, the thief checking for traps, etc.

PARTYS AND NPCs

Some players like to run an entire party. Others want to play a single character solo and see the world through their eyes.

I recommend playing a single character as the main PC and having a single PC sidekick.

This gives you someone to try and drag you to safety if things go bad or to mount a rescue mission if you are captured. It also gives you a wider range of class abilities.

For the sidekick character, create three new attributes. Greed, Bravery, and Honor. Roll these on 3d6.

Those numbers give you an idea of their drives and motivations. When you ask the oracle if they behave as expected, at the top of each scene, you can roll a d20 against each of these attributes to see if they succumb to one of these drives. If they roll over their Greed, they may be distracted by trying to take something for themselves. If they roll over their Bravery, they may be out of position, trying to stay close to you or nearer the exit. If they roll over their honor, they may be letting you take risks and look out for themselves.

These are not hard and fast rules but just a tool to help decide what to do when the characters are not doing what you expect.

ENCOUNTERS & NO. APPEARING

OSE is intended for parties of 6-8 characters. If your party at the start of the adventure is just one character, divide the numbers encountered and any loot found by 7. If you use a character and a sidekick, divide everything by 4, and for parties of three half, the numbers encountered. Always round numbers up to the next whole number; even 1.1 becomes 2. This principle applies even to published adventures. More about that later.

The reduction of foes and treasure is based on the number of characters you started the adventure with, not the number currently surviving. Therefore, adventures should not get easier the worse you are doing. On the other hand, this allows you to prepare set play encounters in advance, such as a woodland encounter or a road encounter. Then, when you roll for a random encounter, you can go to your folder of encounters and pick one at random. These will have more depth and variety than simply rolling on a wandering monster table and having to dress the encounter on the fly.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Most of the decisions in solo play fall on you to make the final call. Of course, the dice may shape those choices, but what all these prompts mean need to be interpreted.

The following rule pushes some important decisions completely out of your control. These are the chaos dice.

CHAOS DICE

Chaos Dice decide if and when an event happens. Examples are if the Necromancer's goblin servants detect my intrusion into the tower. If you are fighting orcs on a burning bridge,

will it collapse? If you are racing to the docks to capture a fleeing spy, will they escape?

To use Chaos Dice, you need to have an event that may or may not happen, an idea of how likely it is that the event will happen, and something called a trigger.

The event could be the spy's escape, the collapsing bridge, or the goblins shouting the alarm.

You now assign d6s depending on how likely the event is. The less likely, the more d6s you use. Very likely events could be 2d6, likely events 4d6, unlikely 6d6, and very unlikely 8d8.

The trigger will vary depending on the nature of the event. For example, the burning bridge is just a matter of time, so once a round would be a good trigger. On the other hand, the spy escaping could be triggered by every street your character runs along, so the town map controls the triggers. With the Goblins, every time I do something that a goblin may notice, such as forcing a door, fighting, or taking something, would be a good trigger.

Every time the Chaos dice are triggered, you roll all the dice and discard any showing a 6.

When the last dice are discarded, the event happens.

It is possible that during the first round of combat on the burning bridge, the masonry gives way and the bridge collapses, but that is very unlikely.

I could sneak through the tower and never alert the guards unless I did something obvious, like attacking them.

That is part of the point of Chaos Dice, you don't know, and the decision for when these things happen is not up to you. If I am careful in the tower, I may never trigger the dice; you

could get off the bridge as soon as possible or take the shortest route to head off the spy.

WORLD-BUILDING

If you are playing in an established setting such as Dolmenwood, then a lot of your world-building is already done. However, another option is to create the world as you play. This is what the samples of play are doing.

In either case, you want to try and bring the world to life. One way of doing this is to attach one or two sentences of world lore to every object. It could be as simple as adding a descriptive word to an item. For example, there is a very good chance that the phrase English Longbow creates a whole mental picture of a very long and powerful bow. Likewise, an Elven Cloak creates its own mental image as well.

You can do the same for every object in your world. Make each item somehow unique, give it a quality that ties it into a place or time. For example, the magic Mace+ 1 that Kallen found could have a family crest of a long fallen knight on the hilt or a grip wrapped in leather incised with dwarven runes.

The ideal description achieves three things, it anchors the item into a specific place, it has a potential drawback and a potential benefit.

The Mace+ 1 with a family crest could be recognized by a descendant of that noble house, claiming it as their own. Or, the same crest could be recognized, and I get granted access because I am mistaken for a descendent of the same noble house.

This is similar to the Three Things technique, but you want one interesting aspect about each item this time. Then, when

you create these aspects, record them on our character sheet. For example, do you buy a week's rations or black bread and dried salt bacon?

CAMPAIGN NOTES

If you have looked at solo actual plays online or just the samples of play in this book, you may think that you have to do a lot of writing for solo play. This is not the case. All you need are the same notes that any GM would make during a game session. You will need to keep track of hit points and combatants.

If you are world-building as you play, you need to keep track of the facts you create.

On the following page is a format that I have found is ideal for keeping solo game notes. You use one sheet for every scene and record the time in your game that the scene took place.

The main notes, such as monster stats, hit points, questions, answers, and Muse words go in the largest box. You can also sketch small maps here and roll up treasures.

The narrow first column is reserved for rulings you made during that scene that you may want to check up after your game and for any questions that are bigger than the game session. These are often world-building questions. For example, is the world round or flat? Has a god's avatar been seen during living memory? Once you decide these things, they could have repercussions for the entire game world.

The footer is filled in at the end of the scene and holds a one or two sentence summary of what happened in the scene.

When you come back to your solo game after a break, you only need to read each scene's summary to come back to speed for the campaign.

Game

Game Time

Game	Game Time

SAVING THROWS AND HIT POINTS

What is a hit point? What do 2 hit points of damage look like on a 1st level character compared to the same wound on a 12th level character?

There are different interpretations of what a hit point is and what they represent. The version that works best for solo is hit points equate to skill and luck. Wizards only get 1d4 hit points because they have little skill at avoiding being hit; fighters get 1d8 to represent their training at dodging and parrying. Hit points increase with level to show this greater combat experience and skill at avoiding getting hurt.

When an attack does 10 points of damage, it is so ferocious that it burns through 10 points of skill and luck to avoid being killed.

When an attack takes away your final hit point, that is when you finally get caught.

This version works well for solo because all the times you are hit but don't die, you can picture your character dodging, parrying, jumping over a low cut to the legs, or ducking under a monster's claws.

If hit points and damage represent meat and blood, higher-level battles become almost comic, with each opponent ripping great gashes in each other, yet they can run, jump and roll boulders as easily as if they had just had a month's vacation.

The skill version tells you that more hit points of damage mean more cinematic choreography, more movement, and more drama. It helps you imagine the battle.

SAVING THROWS

Saves fall into a similar category. A golden rule is that there is no save without movement. It is not just by chance that a character takes half as much damage from a fireball as another. Your saving through represents sheltering behind your shield or diving behind a pillar, using your environment to save yourself.

Saving vs. poison could be detecting an off taste, tipping the rest of the drink away, or jumping back just as the cobra spits.

Almost all saving throws can be imagined as moving to protect yourself, not just random chance.

These ideas do not change the rules of OSE, but they should help you imagine your characters as the fantasy heroes that they are destined to become or how they met their tragic ends.

MODULES

Playing modules is the holy grail of solo play. There is no one accepted best method for doing this. I present three ways below; try them out and see which fits best for you.

The appeal of playing modules is twofold. Firstly, there is a sense of community inclusion if you can share your experiences completing one of the classic modules. The second is that prepared modules take many creative burdens off you. The adventures are play-tested and refined and normally have strong and fun storylines for you to follow.

Some players lean towards sandboxes, organically evolving adventures, and total creative freedom. Others prefer the structure and storytelling of modules. In solo, you are free to mix and match to fit your tastes.

GM FIRST

In this method, you flip the usage of all the solo tools around. You are no longer trying to delegate the role of GM to the dice. Instead, what you do is play the part of the GM and use the dice to control a party of emulated characters. For example, if the party enter a room, you would ask the oracle does the thief check for traps. It is likely, so you roll on the oracle table. Does the fighter move into the room and check down the corridors? Again, roll on the oracle table. You can then proceed through the module, imagining how the characters react to each scene, threat, and conflict.

You get to imagine the characters' surprise when you reveal the great climax of the adventure and roleplay the interactions between characters and NPCs, but you are firmly behind the GM Screen.

BOXED TEXT AND STOP

In this method, you do not read the adventure in advance. Instead, you read as much as you absolutely need to imagine your characters in the first scene. If the module reveals any spoilers, you will just have to play to your character's knowledge and not what you know. Often this will amount to you reading the boxed text as you enter each location, then you imagine your course of action. Once you know what you would do or try to achieve, read the rest of that location's detail.

You will find yourself asking, "What would my character do?" when you have set a course of action, and the module then reveals something very bad if you follow that course.

You need to imagine and play through the evolving scene and play your character accordingly.

The strength of this approach is that you really are playing to find out what happens. There are two weaknesses. The first is that you can break the storyline. You could refuse the help of an NPC, who the module then assumes is with you throughout the adventure, or worse, you kill the NPC, who is then not present to spring the big final showdown.

The second weakness is that you can go off course, and there is no GM to recognize that you are heading in the wrong direction and try and steer you back to the right track.

Many modules include spoilers in the introduction, such as telling you that an NPC will attempt to befriend the party and pass information on to the villain or is the villain. This makes it harder to be unbiased and tempting to reject the overtures of the NPC.

Despite the pitfalls, this is often one of the most satisfying methods of soloing a module.

WAYPOINTS

This method takes the most preparation. Before playing, you read as much of the module as you need. Modules are often split into parts, so read an entire part. What you are looking for are events that must happen for the adventure to happen. These are your waypoints. You should arrive at the final destination as long as you hit all the waypoints.

In modules that include side quests, you can take a single side quest and treat that as a part, which will help you reduce the number of spoilers you read through.

If you go off the predefined plot, you can move key waypoints back into your character's path to bring them back

on track. For example, if you must get the golden acorn from the forest druid, it doesn't matter where their hut is, as long as you meet the forest druid.

You can break up a module into locations, encounters, and key waypoints. Writing them out onto index cards or sticky notes is helpful. At the start of the module, you will have a big pile of unused cards. You can move those cards into a discard pile as you complete the encounters and visit locations. The discard pile is useful for calculating experience at the end of your game session.

By breaking everything out onto its own card or note, you can rearrange things to fit how you play through the adventure. For example, if you must have a magic weapon to defeat wights in the final chamber, you will have to put one of the encounters where you can win a magic weapon in your character's path before that point.

When you reach the end of the section you have prepared, you should have visited some or all of the locations, had some of the encounters, and hit all of the waypoints. You can then prepare the next part.

This is a lot of preparation, and it does reveal spoilers. But, on the other hand, when you break out the individual encounters and locations, you can take the opportunity to rebalance the encounters and treasures to your party size. You can also look at the encounters and pick ones that look the most fun, use the best, and discard the ones that do not appeal.

Many GMs do not use modules as written but pull them apart for ideas and add their own spin to them. This method draws on that attitude.

SOLOING

These rules are intended to not get in the way. When you are playing an OSE adventure, it should feel like you are playing OSE, not a meta-game. There are only four tables you need, the Oracle, two for the Muse, and the plot twist table. Two are easy to copy out onto cards you can keep handy, and the Muse tables are on their own pages for easier printing.

There are as many different styles of solo play as there are soloists. These rules are intended to get you going and are meant to be easy enough that you can play anywhere. You can take these rules and extend them by creating random tables and all kinds of pen and paper or online generators. Even in the samples of play, I drew upon a map that I found online.

Character death is commonplace in OSE. It is no different in solo play, more so if anything. When you are on your own, you have a limited number of class abilities, limited carrying capacity, and no one to throw you a rope when you fall down a pit. So do not be surprised if you go through characters rapidly when you start, just until you adjust to how to survive alone in a dangerous world.