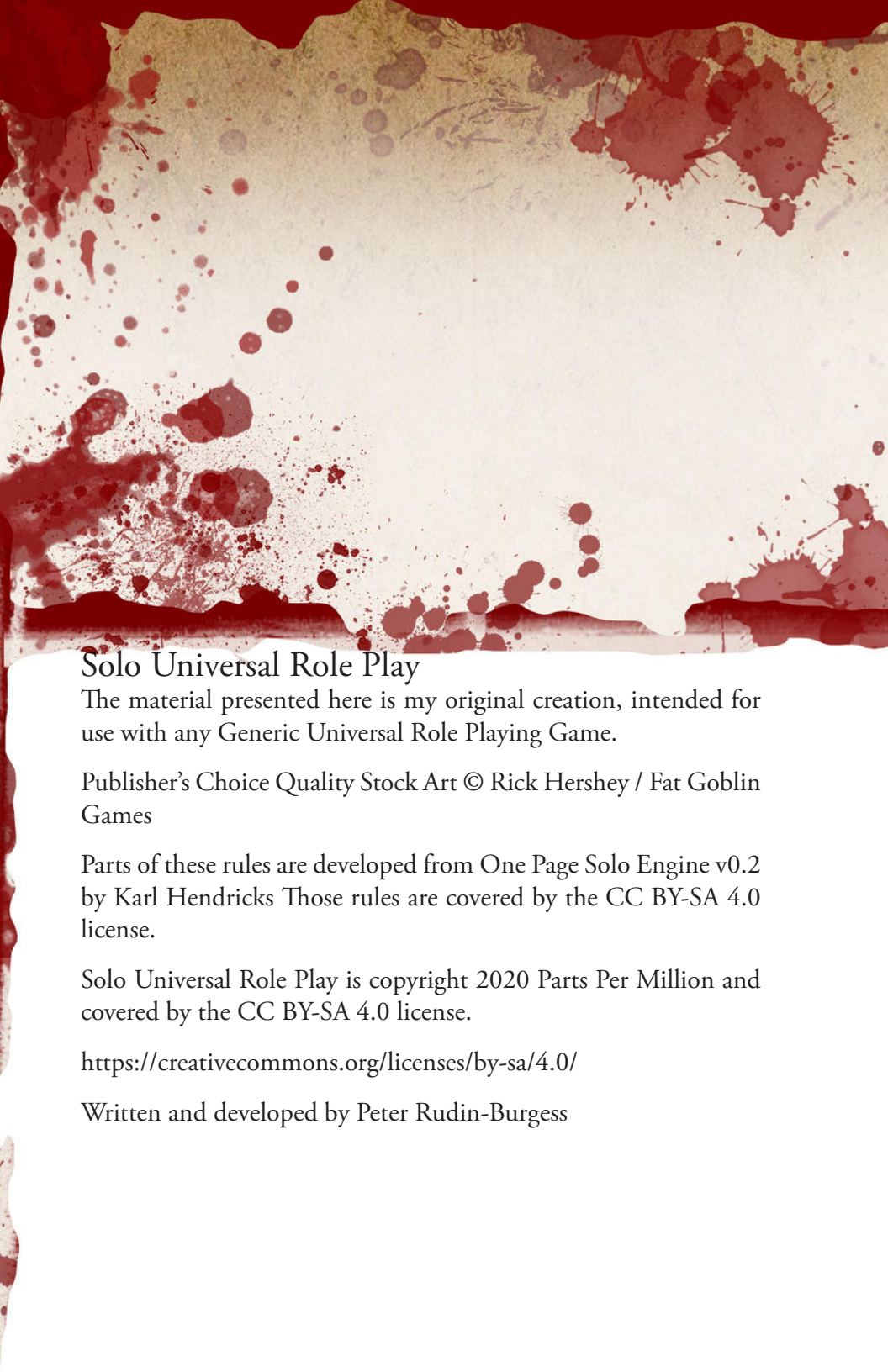


SURP

SOLO UNIVERSAL ROLE-PLAY





Solo Universal Role Play

The material presented here is my original creation, intended for use with any Generic Universal Role Playing Game.

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Written and developed by Peter Rudin-Burgess



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Introduction

I was asked by one of my twitter followers to create a set of rules for playing a popular Generic Universal Role Playing game solo. They also wanted something set in the modern era, rather than sci fi or fantasy.

I am rarely one to pass up a challenge! This challenge was doubly interesting as I had never played this particular universal game, but as soon as I started reading the players book, it listed *Champions* as one of its influences. Champions was one of the biggest influences in my early role-playing.

3D6 is a particularly nice dice set up. It feels nice in hand, and they shake and roll nicely. I could tell this was a book I was going to enjoy researching.

These solo rules are designed to be 'Rules Lite'. I am a fan of not letting the solo rules get between you and your character's story. You will see that they lean heavily towards the cinematic style of play.

Regarding points totals for building characters, in testing, I used only 100 points, with up to 50 disadvantage points. It should make no difference in how the rules behave, whatever power level you choose to play. My reasoning is explained in the NPC section.





What is Solo Role-Play?



Most people think of role-playing as a social, everyone around a table, interactive hobby. If you stop and give it a moments deeper thought and you will realize that the hobby is broader than that. Some people play by forum posts in PBP (play-by-post), others use virtual table-tops (VTT) to play with friends all over the world. Roleplaying itself emerged from the wargaming hobby, and solo wargaming was a staple of the game right from the start.

Solo role-play has grown out of these same roots. The core concept behind it is a question and answer game mechanic that emulates the role played by the Game Master [GM]. In a traditional game, the GM would describe a scene, you either describe your actions or ask the GM for some clarification, the GM then resolves any conflicts, and the process starts again with the GM updating the current scene. That sounds a bit blunt, but that is what is happening 'under the hood'. All the rules in games exist to give a framework for resolving conflicts. We can role-play negotiations or social interactions, but we cannot shoot magic from our fingers or play with guns around the kitchen table.

Where the GM would describe the situation or opening scene, in

solo play you start with your character, imagine the scene, talk to people and do whatever you want until you hit that point where you would ask the GM a question. At this point, the solo rules kick in, and you can use the GM Emulator to answer the question. That doesn't sound very exciting, more like a daydream than a game. There are things you can do in solo play that are a lot harder in a traditional game. There is no need for the party to meet, make friends and decide that they should risk life and limb together. There is no need to try and build characters that compliment each other. From the GM perspective, you don't have to try and cater to every players moment in the spotlight. A solo game works best if the very first scene is a moment of life or death drama. Don't start your game with your character sat in the office waiting for the phone to ring or for an offer of a job. Start your game with the character being held over the parapet of a skyscraper, 43 storeys up.

A traditional game will have a plot or storyline created by the GM, and possibly a world to support it. Solo games do not need that level of preparation. They are driven by questions and answers. The answers are used to feed your improvisation, which is the cornerstone of all role-playing.

Starting your game in an unexplained crisis, such as being thrown off a roof, creates questions, the questions drive answers, and the answers drive your imagination.

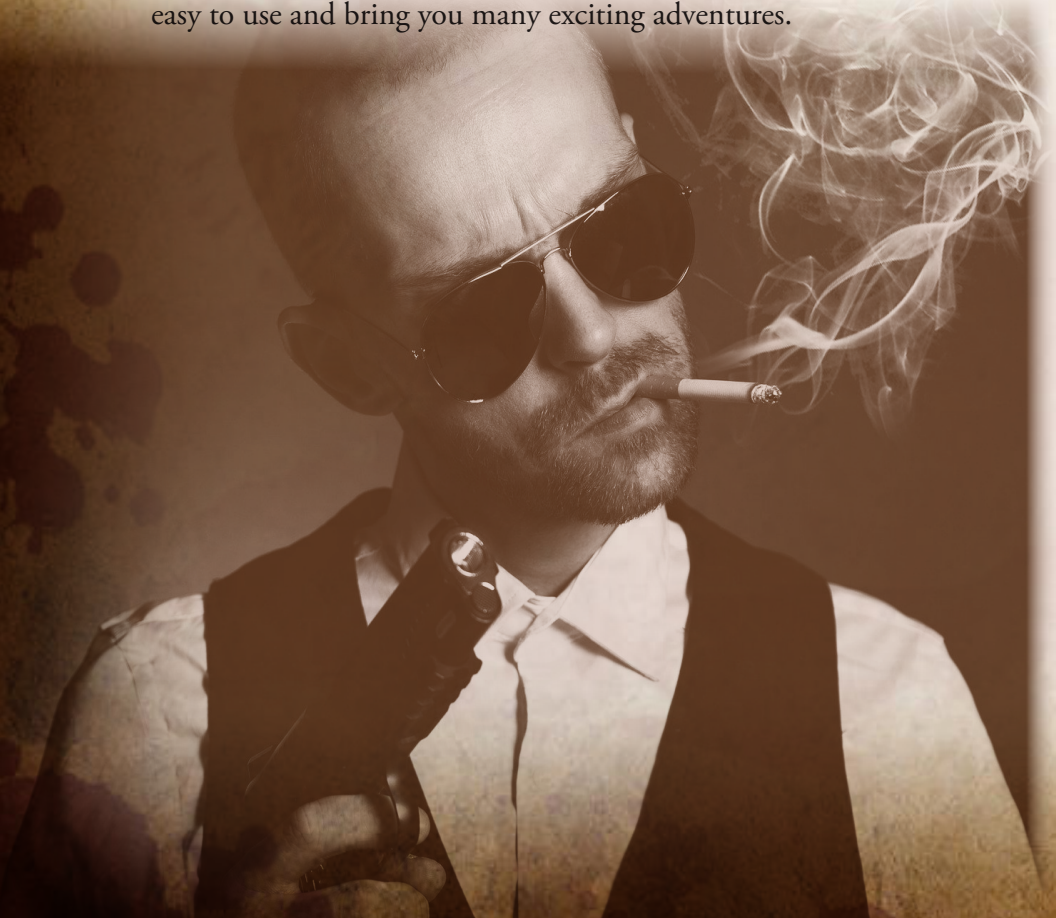
Most of these questions you won't know the answers to until you are forced to come up with them on the spot. How you answer them will drive your story forward. The experience becomes less about daydreaming about your character and more about experiencing their adventure and not knowing what will happen next.

Every time your GM, assuming you are not your groups GM. Describes a scene, what the GM sees in their mind's eye and what you imagine from their description will be very slightly out of sync. No one can describe every detail, nor would you want the GM to spend a quarter of an hour describing an NPC down to the brand of sneakers they are wearing. In solo play, there is no loss of

fidelity. You are both GM and player and what you see is how it is, the scenes are perfect, the accents on your NPCs are perfect, even the special effects when someone tosses a grenade too close to the glass balcony.

Solo games involve a lot of rationalizing what just happened, with what has gone before. When you are given an answer, you need to take the adventure so far into account as well as the answer you just got. If you are investigating Miami drug smugglers, you can probably already imagine the style of dress, how the goons look, and the bosses million dollar property. You can imagine the weapons they are carrying. I am seeing guys in black suits, talking into their sleeves and carrying Uzu machine pistols. Your goons could be very different.

If you have never tried solo play, I hope this has given you an insight into how much fun it can be. I hope you find these rules easy to use and bring you many exciting adventures.



Core Ideas

There are a few ideas that are used in every section of this book. They are covered here, to save explaining them repeatedly later.

Yes-No

Yes-no refers to a closed question that is normally answered with a variation of yes, no, and or because. Most of the questions you ask will be of the yes-no variety.

Asking if a vehicle is locked is a good example of a yes-no questions as the answer normally has to be one or the other.

Complication

A complication is an event that changes the situation. The guiding light should be that the complication should render the question that caused it irrelevant.

If you were to ask if a vehicle was locked, hoping to steal it, a complication could be a slavering rottweiler suddenly lunging at you from the back seat, covering the window with spittle, growling and barking. Not only does it make the idea of was the door locked or not, but the noise the dog is making is likely to draw attention.

And/because

Some answers come with modifiers. An 'and' make the answer more extreme,

If you asked if the vehicle was locked and get a 'yes, and...' you can see a pretty sophisticated alarm sensor on the dashboard.

The opposite of that could be 'no, because...' not only is the vehicle unlocked by you can see the ignition hanging loose and wires exposed as if the vehicle had been hotwired.

Closed Question

A closed question is a question that can be answered in a simple yes or no. Is a vehicle locked is a closed question. What is in the trunk of the vehicle is not.

Open Question

An open question requires a more detailed answer than a closed question. These are answered using prompts for your improvisation and common sense.

Asking what is in the trunk of the vehicle could give an answer like 'Social Failing' which could lead you to imagine it being full of fake watches, counterfeit handbags and other 'status symbols.'

Scenes

In most role-playing games we think in sessions, or adventures or campaigns, solo games tend to be played out in scenes.

Subverted

A scene can be 'interrupted', where an unexpected event changes the scene that you were expecting to happen next in an unexpected way.

Chaos

In many ways, this term which is common in solo role-playing is misnamed. It is a modifier to dice rolls that shift answers towards the yes end of the scale. Chaos tends to increase when things are not going the characters way. Chaos is a type of safety valve that can prevent your story from becoming stagnated. Chaos starts with a value of zero. It increases as play carries on and is occasionally reset to zero again.



Scenes

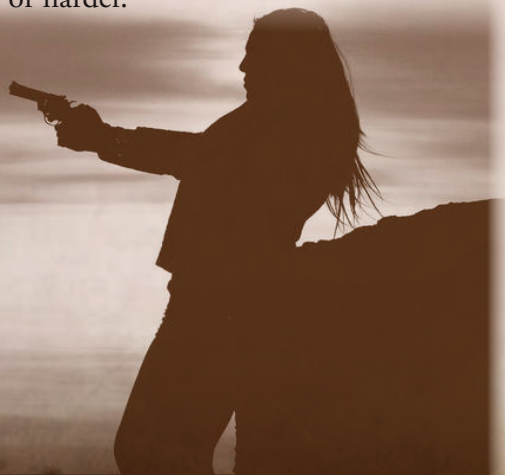
A scene is the basic unit of the solo game. A scene starts when you start imagining your character in action, and it ends as soon as you 'handwave' a block of time. How much time is not important. You could hear a noise downstairs and decide to go and investigate. If you imagine the character walking down the stairs, across landings, opening and closing doors, that is all once scene. If on the other hand, you jump from hearing the noise and deciding to investigate, to opening the door to the kitchen and seeing the burglar fleeing, that was two scenes.

Scenes are important. At the start of a scene, you should roll to see if the scene has been subverted, ask obvious and important questions and at the end of the scene you either gain bonus points of increase your games Chaos factor.

Subverting Scenes

Before you start a scene, you make a single roll [3d6], and on a 6 or less the scene has been subverted.

3. An unexpected event interrupts you.
4. The location is different or changed.
5. The NPCs are new or unexpected.
6. The situation is easier or harder.



An unexpected event interrupts you.

Whatever you were expecting the next scene to be has been interrupted but an unexpected event. In imagining this event, try using the first thing that came into your mind, but balance the type of adventure you want to have and the story so far. In a fast-moving, high action-adventure gunshots or explosions are often candidates for unexpected events. In legal dramas, surprised witnesses can serve in this role, just as examples.

The location is different or changed.

Even subtle changes to a location can have big ramifications for your character. Has someone moved the body? Stolen your vehicle? Has your regular bar shut down? Location changes can increase the drama or add realism to the game world.

The NPCs are new or unexpected.

At the start of a scene, you can ask some questions to set the scene up. You should typically try and limit these to no more than three questions. Some questions can have far-reaching consequences, such as 'Is everything as you would expect?' or 'Is everything normal?' If you ask questions like these, you have to be prepared to deal with the consequences if the answer you get is a No. You will learn more about the questions and answers in the next chapter.

Unexpected answers at the top of a scene can create opportunities to take your story into new and interesting directions.

The sort of questions you are likely to start with are yes-no style questions, called Closed Questions.

The situation is easier or harder.

This option can go either way, making your situation better or worse, harder or easier. Context is one of the more important factors to balance here, along with common sense.

Opening Questions

Once you know whether the scene you were expecting has been subverted or is going ahead as planned, you should ask a few questions just to set the scene in my mind's eye. The answers will

help shape the scene. You may have planned on meeting a contact as a bar but not given it much thought, now you can ask is it run down? Is it busy? Try and limit yourself to no more than three questions, or there is a temptation to turn the game from a role-playing game to a game of 20 questions! You just want to give your imagination enough to go on and challenge your improvisation with some unexpected answers.

Ending The Scene

If you could hear an imaginary director shout “Cut!” then chances are that the scene has ended. If you can imagine the scene fading to black and cutting to the next location, that was probably the end of the scene. If you skip a block of time, then that was the end of the scene.

At the end of each scene, you should reflect on whether the scene was successful for your character. Things could have gone incredibly badly, but they still moved the story along, maybe the character learned something important, made a new contact, or caused problems for the bad guys.

1. If you think the character made progress, award yourself a bonus point.
2. If no progress was made, the scene was played through, but the story did not progress, do nothing.
3. If the scene was a setback for the character and they ended up in a worse position than at the start, and they didn't gain anything in the process, increase Chaos by 1.

Recording Your Scenes

At the end of this chapter, there is a record sheet. This list should be used to record some key information:

1. How the scene started, called the entry point
2. How the scene ended, the exit point
3. Who was there

4. What happened
5. Where the scene took place
6. The current Chaos value

This 'Who, What, Where' format helps to bind your world together. If you know that a specific arms dealer hangs out in Lu's Diner, you know where to find them.

If the last time you were at Lu's you smashed the place up, you are unlikely to be popular.



Scenes List

Game:

Location	Action	NPCs	Entrance/Exit
----------	--------	------	---------------

		Bonus:	Chaos:

		Bonus:	Chaos:
--	--	--------	--------

		Bonus:	Chaos:
--	--	--------	--------

		Bonus:	Chaos:
--	--	--------	--------

		Bonus:	Chaos:
--	--	--------	--------

		Bonus:	Chaos:
--	--	--------	--------

		Bonus:	Chaos:
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Closed Questions

A closed question is one that can be answered yes or no. A game that was limited purely to these two options would be fairly limited, and you could play it with a coin toss. Thankfully **SURP** Solo is less arbitrary than a simple coin toss.

Things to consider when asking a closed question are:

1. Ask the question that is best for the game, not for your character
2. Is the answer more likely to be yes, no or truly 50/50?
3. Could this question break the game?
4. Question or a Test?
5. Do you need a follow up question?

Ask the question that is best for the game, not for your character

If you were sneaking around a drug dealers superyacht, the presence of armed guards is bound to come up at some point. Do you ask, Are there any guards?, or Is the way clear? If the result of the roll was a Yes, the two questions have very different implications for your game. There is no 'correct' way, but these rules are skewed towards yes answers. Asking the question from the universe's point of view, asking if the way is clear is a very personal question, will throw more challenges into the path of your character. Without challenges, there is no adventure.

Is the answer more likely to be yes, no or truly 50/50?

Rolls that are more likely to be a yes, gain a -1 to -3. This bonus is depending on how likely you think the yes is. If you were sneaking around the yacht and as yet no one knew you were there, the chances of running into a guard may be likely -1. If the guards start to suspect something is amiss, maybe you have thrown two or three overboard already, the likelihood may go to -2. Once the alarm has been sounded and the guards are actively looking for you, the bonus would become -3.

A question you really have no idea of the likelihood, you treat as a 50/50 and the roll is unmodified.

Questions that are unlikely receive a +1 to +3 penalty in much the

same way as likely questions are modified.

Could this question break the game?

It is entirely possible to ask “Did I wake up with \$1,000,000 under my pillow?”. It is highly unlikely, +3, but still possible. That class or question adds nothing to your game. If you want to be rich, spend the points on it during character creation.

Any question that is against the spirit of the game, or is illogical, should not be asked. Just because you can, does not mean that you should.

Question or a Test?

The solo rules are there to help shape the universe. They are not there to replace the core rules in the game. Perception is based upon your IQ. Do not circumvent the Perception skill by using a question like “Do I see any guards?” Firstly, that is a personal question, which is an indicator that it should probably be a test and not a solo question. Secondly, games have perfectly good rules for spotting people, avoiding detection and just about everything else.

Do you need a follow-up question?

If you asked a question and you get an unexpected answer, don't be shy of asking a follow-up question.

You have made it to the crime lords stateroom on his yacht and found the safe. You ask "Is this safe going to be difficult to crack?", you decide that it very likely is going to be difficult, so roll with a -3. The answer comes back as "No, because..." What does that mean? A follow-up question of "Is it locked?" makes sense; there is always a chance after all. This is very likely, -3, and comes back with Yes. So you have a locked safe, but it isn't going to be difficult to crack. The first thing that occurred to me was that the combination has been written down and is stuck to the front, on a yellow post-it note.

Without the follow-up question, I probably would not have thought of the note. In this case, it made perfect sense and provided a moment of humour in the game.

Making a Roll

To make the roll, called an Oracle Roll, roll 3d6. You add or any likelihood modifiers and deduct your current Chaos value.

Now consult this table.

<i>Roll (3d6)</i>	<i>Answer</i>
4 or less	Yes and...
5-9	Yes
10	Yes but...
11	Complication
12	No, because...
13-16	No
17 or better	No, and...
<i>Modifiers</i>	
-1 to -3	Likely to be yes
+1 to +3	Likely to be no
-Varies	Chaos

Yes and... Is the most extreme form or yes, it is what you were asking and more. If you were asking if there were guards, yes, and... they are coming this way. No, and... is the natural opposite. No, and... the camera seems to be out of order as well.

Yes and no are the simple answers to your question.

Yes, but... is a toned-down version. Such as yes, but... they are sleeping on a chair outside the door. Or yes, but... they are heading away from you.

No, because... is a no, but try and think of a way in which your character could reverse or use that answer to turn it into a yes. No, because someone just called them up on deck, maybe your scuba gear has just been discovered?

Complications are special. A complication should make the question you just asked irrelevant. A complication could be anything from your cell phone ringing at that moment; an alarm is triggered on the yacht, your partner who you thought dead, walking around the corner and almost right into you.

You can have fun with Complications, but they have a big impact on the style and tone of your adventure. If you are looking for a gritty and dark criminal underworld, you should make your complications fit that world. Introduce a corrupt cop or tie your drug lord into a respectable and powerful corporation.

Complications can be a wild or far-reaching as you want them to be. Balance the style of game you want, the story so far and what appeals to you right now and build that into a complication that turns your world upside down.

Or complications can be subtle and fleeting. A cell call from your partner may tell you that the crime boss is on deck and just getting into his helicopter. That may give you pause for thought. The sound of the call could have big implications for your stealthy invasion.

Chaos

Chaos starts at zero. If you have an unproductive scene, it can often be because you have rolled a series of No answers. Everything you tried was blocked by an unfortunate roll. At the end of an unproductive scene you can increase Chaos by 1.

From that point onwards you deduct your Chaos from all your oracle rolls. Chaos biases the rolls down towards the yes answers.

Chaos is reset to zero every time your character spends any accumulated Bonus points.



Open Questions

Open questions are much broader in scope than the yes-no format of the closed question. There is no simple table that could hope to answer every possible question from every possible campaign.

Open questions use prompts to your imagination to generate answers. Below is a table with four fields.

3D6	Action	Subject	Color	Adjective
3	Plotting with or against	an ally or colleague	Red	different
4	Exploiting	wealth	Orange	used
5	Exposing	a foe	Yellow	important
6	Revealing	a traitor	Green	every
7	Supporting	a new force	Blue	large
8	Lending aid to	an old enemy	Purple	available
9	Opposing	new technology	Brown	popular
10	Stopping or blocking	the people	Magenta	able
11	Blocking	politics or forces	Tan	basic
12	Creating or making	a death or murder	Cyan	known
13	Terrified of	technology or knowledge	Olive	various
14	Unveiling	an alliance	Maroon	difficult
15	Discovering	a surrender	Navy	several
16	Scheming with	friends	Aquamarine	united
17	Dealing with	an enemy or opponent	Turquoise	historical
18	Concealing	dark forces	Silver	hot

Using The Oracle

The open question oracle offers four columns. Roll 3d6, without modifiers on at least two columns. The most commonly used columns will be Action and Subject. Make two rolls and build a simple sentence. The most common result will be Blocking politics or forces. I will look at this result in more detail

Blocking Forces

Blocking could mean anything from physical restraint to just a passive stance. Forces could just be you or an entire organization. How you can use this depends on your situation. It is a prompt for your improvisation. What you have is someone resistant. Below are a few worked examples.

Example 1: You want a meeting with the Senator, you have rolled his PA's reaction, and you got a "General reaction: The NPC likes you and is helpful within reasonable, everyday limits." You ask the Open Oracle and get Blocking Forces. In this situation, the Senator has given the PA an order to block all his calls, cancel his appointments and don't let anyone in. Despite the PA being friendly and likeable, there is nothing he can do.

Example 2: You are in a biker bar looking for a known drug dealer. You have seen them head towards one of the back rooms as you go to follow one of the biker gang members steps in your way. You roll on the oracle to see their intentions and get Blocking Forces. The biker bars your way with an evil grin that says you have to go through me if you want to follow my boss.

Example 3: You have found the drug baron unconscious and beaten to a pulp. You do a quick search and find his cell phone pressing his thumb to the screen you unlock it and scroll through his text messages. The oracle says Blocking Forces. The drug baron has been sending orders to someone at the DA's office, to get pressure put on you to drop the investigation.

You can see how the same result can be applied in different ways, in different situations. It is the most common result because it can create opportunities for social conflict or force you to take a

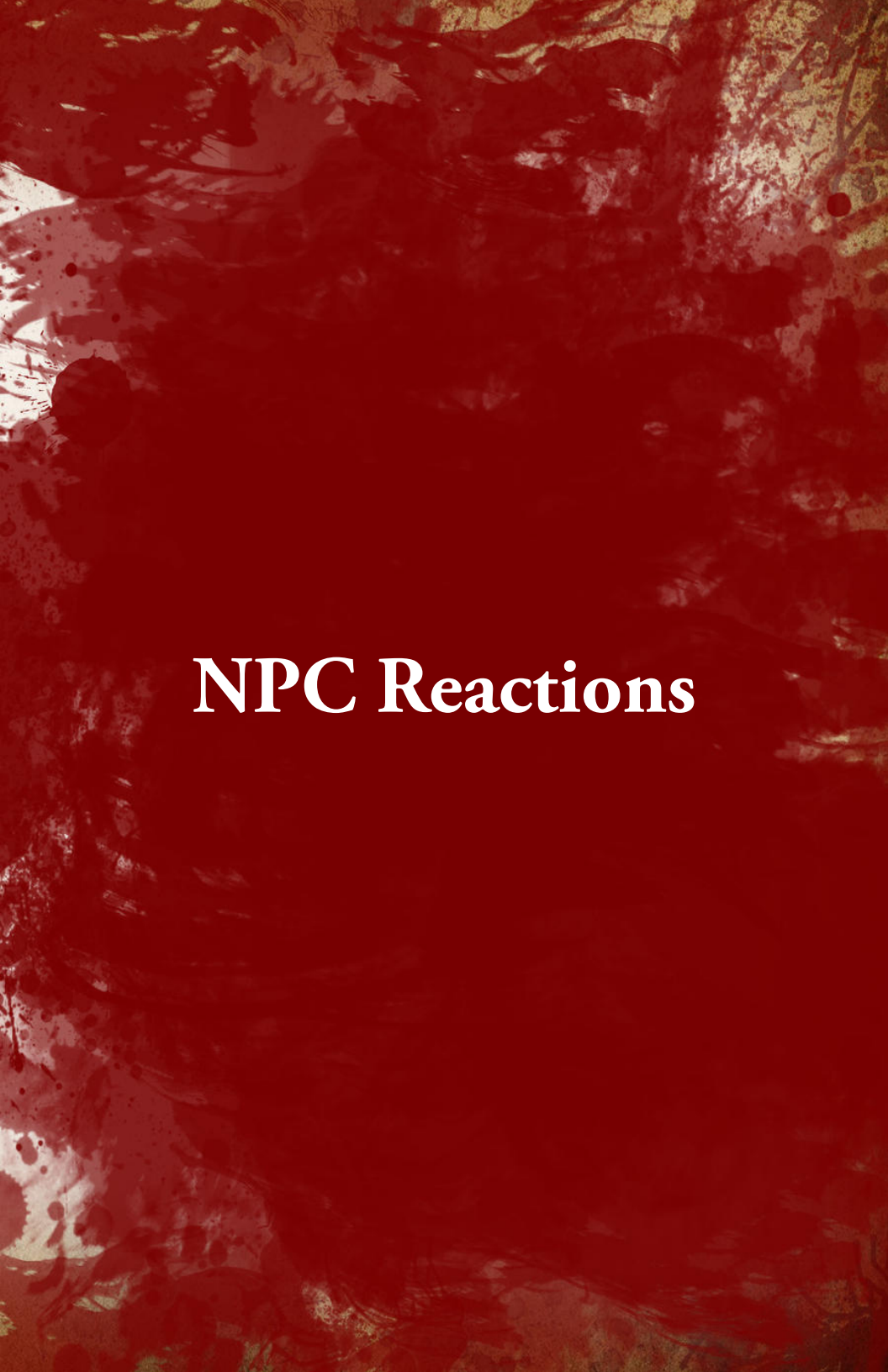
different approach.

Other columns include common colours and adjectives. These exist to prompt your imagination. One common suggestion is to roll once on each of these columns when you first start a scene and see if you can fit the colour and adjective into the scene somehow. This is not necessary, but it can serve to push your imagining of the scene to include things you may not have thought of otherwise.

The Open Oracle is the right tool to use for an NPC's deeper motivation, the contents of a diary, or what is in a safe. You can combine two, three or four rolls to get a viable answer.

When I was creating the boss for my adventure, I rolled on columns four, three, two (Adjective, Colour, Subject) to get Able, Purple, an old Enemy. I combined these to create a boss that I had arrested years ago. At the time he was shot and severely wounded, but recent medical advances had managed to remove a bullet that was pressing on his spine. He had spent years as a wheelchair user but was now able to walk. He blamed me for his injury. The colour purple is associated with wealth and power, that fits with a rich crime boss or drug baron.

The Open Oracle is possibly the hardest element in solo role-play to grasp. If you are new to solo play, do not be surprised if to start you struggle with some of the answers. Use some of it, none of it, or all of it. It exists purely as a prompt to your imagination and improvisation.



NPC Reactions

How NPCs react to you is going to be key to any role-playing experience. The following table is an extension to the standard Reactions table in Basic Set Campaigns (pages 560-561).

Roll	General	NPC Action
0 or less	The NPC hates you and acts in your worst interest.	Attacks without warning
1	The NPC dislikes you and acts against you if it's convenient to do so.	Threatens or harasses
2		Demands tribute or payment
3		Denies access
4	The NPC cares nothing for you and acts against you if they can profit by doing so	Tries to trick or deceive
5		Pursuing counter objective
6		Not interested in talking
7	The NPC is unimpressed. They may become hostile if there is much profit in it or little danger.	Tries to trick or deceive
8		Requests tribute or payment
9		Wants to trade
10	The NPC ignores you as much as possible. They are uninterested.	Needs a favour or has a job
11		Pursuing unrelated objective
12		Wants to trade
13	The NPC likes you and is helpful within reasonable, everyday limits.	Talkative or gossipy
14		Offers help or advice
15		Needs a favour or has a job
16	The NPC thinks highly of you and is quite helpful and friendly	Has a lead or a clue
17		Offers direct assistance
18		Interested in talking
19 or better	The NPC is extremely impressed by you, and acts in their best interests at all times, within the limits of his ability.	Offers extra aid

All your normal NPC reaction modifiers apply when using this table. The Action column is the most likely response to both successful or failed interactions. They may attack out of spite should you best them, or attack out of revenge should you offend them. This entry is not a set in stone reaction. It is a foreshadowing of that could happen, or what can be achieved.

Objectives

Sometimes you will get a reference to an NPC's objective. If you have something on your Story Arc list (see below) that the NPC could be involved in, use that as their objective. Otherwise think of something suitable. If you get several NPCs working on a counter objective, ask yourself are they working together?

NPC List

In addition to your scene list, the NPC list is a key record to keep in your game notes. You are going to be creating NPCs on the fly during just about every game session you play. To keep the workload under control, it is worth just taking a few notes during the game and then revisiting the NPC after the game.

The NPC list holds the NPC name, where you met them and a space for a template, skills and abilities. At the moment you need the NPC you can just create the barest minimal NPC and complete their build later.

Where you met the NPC is important. This list will tie in with your Scene list, and it helps to create a more coherent campaign world. It means that you know that your fence hangs out at Lu's Diner, the mechanic down at the harbour is an ex-marine and so on.

I recommend re-using NPCs as often as you can, in preference to creating more and more of them. If it is always the same sergeant on the front desk, it is easy to role-play that casual meeting. Eventually, that sergeant may become a quest giver or the victim of something horrible; at that point, the impact will be greater if they have had a bigger role in your adventure.

First Encounters

When you first meet an NPC, I suggest making three rolls. One roll is your standard Reaction Roll, and the second two are an Open Oracle roll, to ask what is their deepest motivation, use Action and Subject columns.

You may get a result like “The NPC ignores you as much as possible. They are uninterested/Exposing technology or new knowledge.” For all you know, this NPC could be a conspiracy nut, a hacker, or freedom of information campaigner. The answer, of course, is whatever is best for your game. This piece of added information could colour their reactions, and it may imply what skills or knowledge they have.

Some of these deeper motivations may never come out in play, and others will have a deep impact immediately. Both pieces of information should be taken into account, the reaction and motivation as you role play this encounter.

For an NPC you have already met, you do not need to make a new reaction roll, but you may want to ask a Closed Question, along the lines of “Is this NPC pleased to see you?” If you have a good normal relationship with this NPC then a No answer could imply that something has happened in their world.



NPC List

Game:

Name	Location	Template	Skills Abilities
------	----------	----------	------------------

Name	Location	Template	Skills Abilities
------	----------	----------	------------------

Name	Location	Template	Skills Abilities
------	----------	----------	------------------

Name	Location	Template	Skills Abilities
------	----------	----------	------------------



Story Arcs

Your adventure will become a mix of interlaced story arcs. Some will run for the length of your campaign while others will be completed in as little as a single scene.

Solo play favours sandbox-style play, and you do not need to do any preparation beyond creating your character and an opening scene.

What will happen in your adventure is that you will be thrown complications and unusual answers and to rationalize them you will have to create new story arcs?

If an NPC is pursuing a counter objective, for example, add this to the story arc list. If an NPC reacts badly to you, ask yourself why? If an Open Oracle answer mentions an enemy or group, ask yourself who do you think they are and what do they want. Then add them to the story arc list.

Your list of story arcs will grow quite rapidly. Between games, look at your list and see if any of these story arcs could be related. Are you seeing the same underlying plot but from different angles. Are you being thwarted by a superior and at the same time causing trouble for a rich industrialist? Are these related? Looking at your story arc list critically, enables you to relate events together and build more sophisticated plots. It also reduces the number of loose ends in your campaign.

I use highlighter pens to group events on my story arc list and add notes after a game session so I can see these stories developing. I try and have at least three story arcs on the list but no more than ten at any one time.

You may find that what you thought was the main story arc in your game turns out to either take a completely different direction or becomes just a subplot in a much bigger adventure after just a simple complication or chance question. I have had entire stories turned on their head by an unexpected No answer!

The Story Arc List uses a Who, What, Where format. It can tie together your scenes and NPC lists. I have put Who at the front of the list as I think that NPCs are the core of role-playing games.

It is finding and defeating that big boss that brings the most satisfaction.

What they are doing is the meat of the story arc, are they trying to steal a nuclear weapon, blackmail the President, or smuggle ship loads of drugs? It could be less impressive such as steal a car or murder an informer.

Where can tie into your scenes list. It can help bring your setting to life.

Before each game session it is worthwhile reading down your story arcs and getting a feel for what is happening in your world. When you use the oracles, it can make a lot more sense of the answers if you can relate them to what the dark forces are trying to do.

Story Arc Bonus Points

If you have completed a story arc, you may choose to award yourself a bonus point. If you have awarded yourself a bonus point for completing this scene, you do not get two points, one for the arc and one for the scene.

Occasionally, you will 'fail' the scene, the outcome was not very good at all, but it does resolve a story arc. In this case, you have to be honest with yourself and decide whether or not to award the point.



Story arc List

Game:

Who?	What?	Where?	Connections?

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Your Journal

Along with all the record sheets, I recommend that you keep a journal of your adventure. Your journal is your story. What it looks like is entirely up to you. Mine is normally little more than bullet points, key facts about the adventure, the questions asked the answers I got, scene numbers and such. It would mean very little to anyone but me.

I know solo role-players who roll a few questions at the top of a scene and then write the whole thing like the chapter of a book, they only stop for skill tests and combats. I even know one who is writing a kindle book using solo rules to generate the story.

How much you write and the format is a personal choice. Keeping a record of your adventure is important for a few reasons. The first of which is that you can read it back to recap what has happened before, this can help you get into character. The journal is the glue that brings the different lists together into a campaign.

Some people even put their journals online like an Actual Play report for a game.

If you are using these solo rules to playtest an adventure, they are a useful piece of feedback. You can even go back to a crisis point and change an answer to play an alternative universe ‘What if...’

Whatever you want to do, keeping a journal is an important part of solo role-playing. It is highly recommended.

Off-Screen Events.

Sometimes you will end up with lots of things to track while you are playing. The game world is not static just beyond the parts you can see and hear. To make tracking events easier, I suggest using progress clocks.

A progress clock is an idea from Powered by the Apocalypse games. They are wonderfully simple and make it very easy to track all sorts of events.

A progress clock is a simple circle that you divide into segments.

Each clock has an event attached to it. When certain triggers are met, you fill in one segment of the clock. When all the segments are filled, the clock is said to have run down, and the event happens.

How many segments depends on the event and how likely you think the event is to happen.

Some triggers will be blocks of time, and others will be more arbitrary.

Event-Driven Clocks

An event-driven clock is one that online counts down when certain events happen. Imagine your character is sneaking around a dock compound. Every time you fail a Stealth roll you tick the clock one segment, every time you do something that could be noticed, such as cutting a hole in a fence, hiding a body under a tarpaulin you tick down the clock. When the clock is run down, one of the security guards has discovered something and alerts the security office.



When you create the clock, you can decide how alert these guards are. Alert guards will need fewer segments on their clock as they are more likely to spot something out of the normal. Tired, bored guards will have more segments and are less likely to every spot your intrusion.

Time-Driven Clocks

Some events are based upon time. If you only have 14hrs to save the world you may play out a lot of scenes in that time, it could take you many days in real-time. A clock that you tick down every time you think an hour will have passed will keep track of your impending doom.

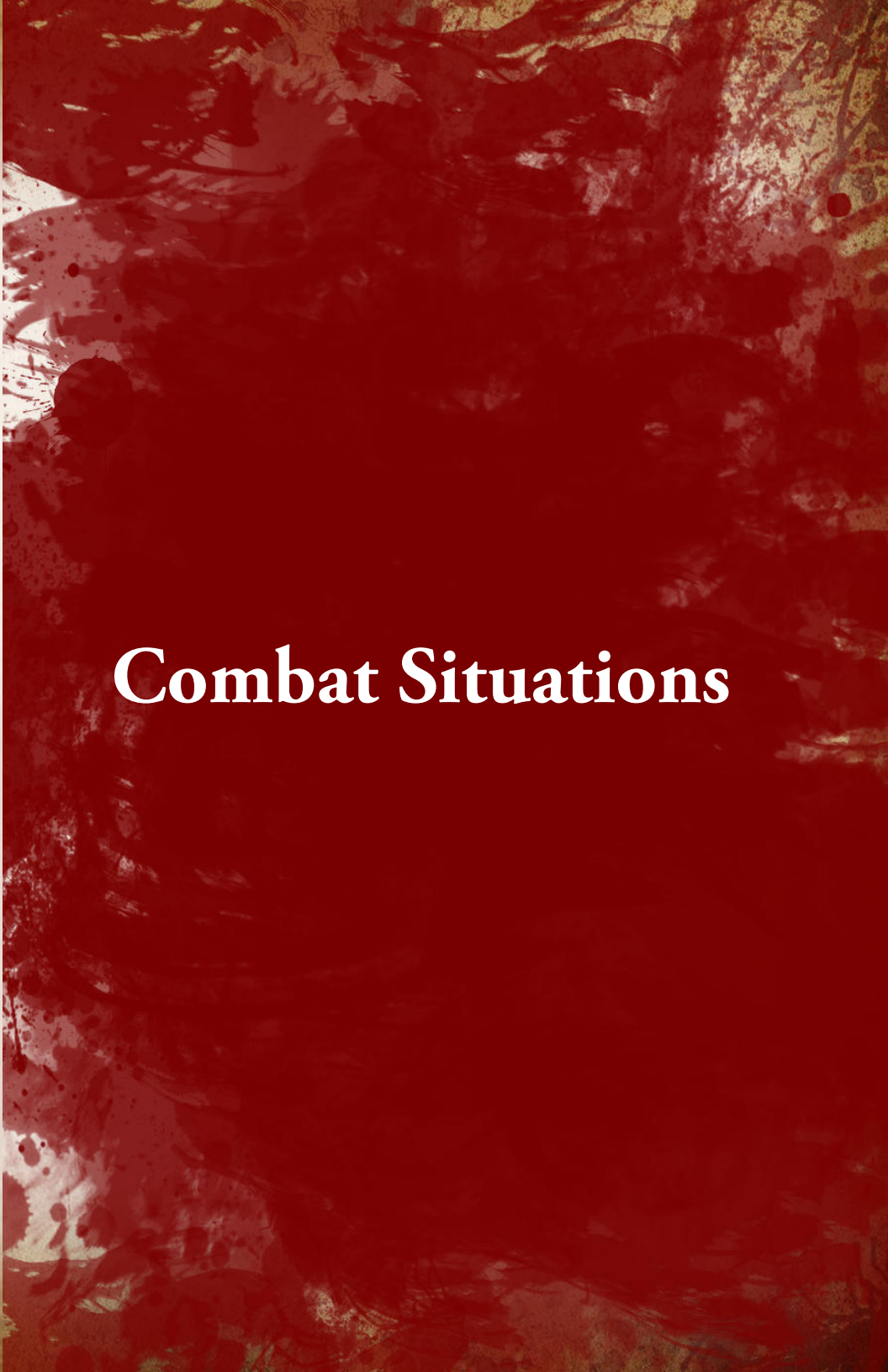
Story Arc Clocks

You can create a clock for a story arc if you can identify either a time frame or events, that will mark its progress. You also need an idea of what the counting down of the clock will mean.

For example, if the story arc is that the villain is bombarding a town, hoping for it to surrender. You decide that the town will withstand the bombardment for four days. Your clock is a circle cut in quarters. Each day, you tick the clock down. If you can break the siege before the four days are up, then the town doesn't fall. If you take five days to return with a relief force, you will find the town already sacked.

Some clocks will never tick down. You could sneak in and out without ever alerting security. With others, they are inevitable, and it is more a question of where you got to before the sub dives, the missiles launch or the train leaves.

Clocks are purely visual and extremely easy to maintain. Before your game, you check what clocks are running and what the criteria and events are—anything irrelevant you can discard.



Combat Situations

Most games at some point will resort in someone pulling a gun or drawing a knife. When combat starts the following rules will help you solo play the combat, not knowing what the NPCs are going to do.

To speed combat along, it helps to have a few default actions for common NPC foes. If your entire game is set during World War II, then you probably know who most of the people you are going to fight. Have an idea of what their tactics are, and it will save you a lot of work.

Decide on a default attack action and a default defensive action. This action could be rush forward to the next available cover and attack followed by a defensive action of fall back to find cover.

Each action does not need to be completed in a single second. You roll an action, and the NPC carries it out until you decide that the NPC would logically change tactic, or the action becomes impossible.

Roll	Action
3-5	Attack recklessly for max damage
6-7	Aid an ally or call medical
8-9	Default attack action
10-12	Default defensive action
13-15	Seek an advantage
16-18	Focus on a weak target

Attacking recklessly could be something like Whirlwind Attack or Jump Kicks. You can pick from the most suitable combat moves that suit your foes.

Aiding an ally or calling for a medic is similar to the Do Nothing action. You should portray it as one enemy assisting the another and either calling for a medic if that is suitable or using a cell phone for paramedics or just calling in more reinforcements.



The two default action results have the foe doing what you designed for them.

Seeking an advantage often implies that the foe is attempting to move, either for better cover, to close the range or try and get height or flanking advantage. It could also mean to get to a bigger or more powerful weapon if there is one on the battlefield.

Focus on a weak target can mean that the foes will target an innocent NPC or try and finish off a wounded companion of yours. If you are on your own, this result can be treated as Default Attack Action.

You do not need to roll for an action every second. It can be sufficient to roll at the start of each combat, once for each combatant. They can then maintain their stance until it becomes impossible or illogical.

Not to the Death

Most people will not fight to the death. If you put a bullet into someone and they are not likely to keep running around. Unless of course, their life depended on it.

Keep combats short and fast-paced. Drawn out combats can slow down a game dramatically.

Turn Sequence

The standard rules say that the character with the highest Basic Speed goes first. The problem with creating NPCs on the fly, as you need them, and using Character Templates is that you either don't know their Basic Speed or they all have the same Basic Speed. There is an elegant solution to this problem.

Unless there is an NPC that is designed to be fast and has a known Basic Speed higher than yours, YOU always go first.

This is not a cheat. It has two instant effects. The first is that it solves the dilemma of not knowing the correct order. You have a rule in place, and it takes away the problem.

The second effect is that it gives you a very small edge in combat. If you shoot first or strike first, you have a chance of putting down a foe before they act. When you are a solo hero, that small edge may be enough to save your skin. It doesn't make combat any less deadly, but any advantage should be taken.

Maps, Hexes and Facing

I recommend using 'theatre of the mind' for combat. Imagine the battle from the point of your character. Imagine the terrain, the cover and the placement of your enemies. This will make combat more narrative and less strategic, which may not be to your taste, but it will also make the combat slightly faster to play out.

In place of battle maps and tactical movement rules, you can insert Closed Oracle questions at key moments, like "Have they managed to get behind me?" Asking questions like that can throw up Complications and can spice up your combats.



Narrative Combat

Narrative combat is intended to be used for minor skirmishes. Many adventures have the idea of small battles that exist to do one or more of the following:

- Wear down the character's resources
- Warn the character of a bigger future threat
- Add in a bit of danger to an otherwise boring section of the adventure

Narrative combat can achieve all three of these objectives without having to resort to full-on tactical combat.

What all of the above have in common is that they are not intended to kill the character(s). They are just warm-up acts before the main event.

In narrative combat, you look at the encounter in its entirety and decide how would your character deal with this situation. Don't think in seconds, think of the entire combat sequence as a scene within a scene.

Once you have decided on your character's approach, you apply a difficulty modifier (-10 to +10) to the dominant skill that describes your approach. This is a Regular Contest with the other side rolling a relevant skill.

When you have the result of the contest, you role-play out what the result means.

Narrative Combat is only intended for situations where the intention is to add drama and colour to the game, not fights where your characters life or death is really at stake.

Try not to think in terms of a series of attacks, think more in terms of defeating the foes. There is a subtle difference. For example, closing in on one of the drug baron's operations at a construction site, I was stumbled upon one of his goons. Grabbing a plank of wood, I span one way, and stunned him with a blow to the face, spinning back the other way I batted him into a tench full of

liquid concrete. In looking at my skills, I considered that Brawling skill was the most pertinent and that the double blow was an extravagant ***Slam***. I gave myself a -5 to my Brawling and rolled the skill. The goon gets to roll his Dodge. In this case, My margin of success was the greater, so the goon ended up in the concrete trench, stunned, someone bemused and not knowing what hit him.

Narrative Combat should not be overused. The bonuses and penalties are rather arbitrary, and you can set them to the grittiness of your game. If you want a more 'realistic' campaign, dancing past fifty hired killers to get to the crime lord is not going to be satisfying to play. If on the other hand, you want to maximize the role-play and minimize the dice rolling, Narrative Combat can reduce twenty seconds of combat to two or three dice rolls.

It is an option, and there are times when it is the right choice and times when you don't want to use it.



Published Adventures

Part of the common culture around role-playing is having played, and possibly died during the same adventures as other people, of having reached different solutions to common problems.

Playing published adventures solo is a very different style of play to when they are run by a GM. Published adventures can challenge your role-playing skills! The process is quite simple but does require preparing the adventure for solo play.

1. Read the Adventure. You have to have a working knowledge of the adventure. I am afraid that this does mean that you will know the twist in the tail, or shock ending if there is one.
2. Identify the most important scenes, the things that absolutely must happen for the adventure to work.
3. Map out the adventure as a simple flow diagram of scenes. The adventure is not supposed to be a railroad from scene to scene, but if you know those essential scenes, you can always reroute your adventure to make sure you end up in the right place. Most published adventures are flexible enough that they contain conditional branches in case the characters go off in the wrong direction.
4. Now you know what is suppose to happen, who the NPCs are (from your read through), the scenes from plot hook to the showdown, and what you absolutely must do. You can now role-play the adventure.
5. Scaling encounters. You need to make subjective decisions as to when you can scale down an encounter. You can scale by reducing the number of foes you encounter or by reducing their power level. The former may be easier to do, as scaling the power level may mean recreating many NPCs.
6. Do not ask questions that will break the adventure, it may sound obvious, but when you need a complication, you have to be sympathetic to the adventure you are playing, the same is true for subverted scenes.

Solo Play Tips

The following tips are there to make your solo play game more fun. Some of these have been touched upon earlier, but bear repeating here.

1. Don't ask too many questions. Try and think "Three strikes". You should have enough of an idea of what is happening by the third answer to role-play the scene.
2. One character in a game build for entire parties is hard, consider giving your lone here some starting bonus points. 20 or so should give you an advantage.
3. Feel guilt about having 20 bonus points? You don't gain any more bonus points until you have earned your 21st point from actual play. The bonus points in (2) above were just a loan!
4. When faced with an odd answer, you should go with your first reaction. Just like playing word association, don't think too much.
5. Play with time. You game, your character, your adventure. If you suddenly think 'my character would have done X if I knew this'. You can play the missing scene, just like a flashback. Once it is over, you can jump back into your adventure where you left off.
6. Are you dead? Oh dear. Did you really like that character? Why not go back in time and play the same character but before their adventures started last time. The penalty is that you knock off some skills. These prequel adventures can flesh out things that you previously thought of as your backstory.
7. Getting going is often the hardest part. Start your adventure in a high intensity, high drama crisis. Maybe someone is holding you by the neck and dangling you off the side of a building? Maybe a marksman has you pinned down behind a pot plant. Or that truck is shunting you off the highway in an 80mph chase. Who they are, what they want and why this is happening will all come out in the questions you answer.

8. Don't spend all your character points. If you keep 10 or 20 points back, as you adventure you make think, "I wish I had this skill", that is when you spend those points held in reserve. You don't gain anything with this apart from having a skill you may not have considered but now know you need.
9. An extreme form of (8) above is to not spend any of your character points at the start of the game. Start playing and as you need skills or abilities, pay the price there and then. You can only spend up to your game's point limit. The same goes for the disadvantages. If you decide you are financially poor, through role-play, give yourself the disadvantage points. What will happen is that your character will be fitted perfectly to the adventure, and will have the skills needed to excel.
10. This works well with (9), I call it the Bourne Identity scenario. You start the game with no skills or abilities, but also no name or backstory. You just play, every skill you need you buy as and when you need them. Part of the story is learning who you are and what happened to you!

