Time And Relative Displacement In Solo

Solo Rules for playing the Dr Who Roleplaying Game without a Game Master

CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to TARDIS. I often work on a request basis, and I was asked how to manage Story Points when playing Dr Who solo. Ihad picked up the game as part of a Bundle of Holding but had never read it. So this sent me into reading the game and trying to play it solo.

The oracle was extremely easy as it is almost a core rule of the game. Skill resolution is intrinsically based on the No, and, to yes and spectrum, called the Drama Die.

I assume you have never played Dr Who The Roleplaying Game or role-played solo before. If you have, you may want to skip some examples and explanations if you are already familiar with these core ideas.

SOLO STYLES

The solo play style that I advocate the most is oracle-driven play. This is certainly not the only form or way of solo playing, but I consider it my 'go-to ' format for playing a new game.

There are many different styles of solo playing. One of the more common styles is the journaling game, which has you create a character in a particular situation, and then they throw questions or situations at you. You then imagine how your character reacts to these stimuli or scenes. Sometimes, you follow a set path through the scenes; sometimes, the prompts are on a deck of cards, and you draw them randomly. The greater the pool of questions or scenes, the greater the game's replayability. There are thousands of journaling games available. Many of them are free or at a meager cost. They often use familiar game mechanics, and you will notice that they usually have a naming convention to indicate that they use the same underlying system, such as all the games with Wretched in their names.

Another style is blackout poetry, closely related to cut-up solo. With these styles, you use a book in the genre you want to play, and then with black-out poetry, you have a sheet that masks most of the page, just revealing a few scattered words, and with cut-ups, the text is cut into snippets of about half a dozen words and jumbled up. You then take your seemingly random bits of text and try to construct new sentences and paragraphs to represent what the game master said to you. This can be easier with cut-ups as humans often have a natural ability to see patterns and connections between random information that may not exist. Once you have constructed a scene, you can imagine your character's reaction to that scene or the NPC, so the process iterates.

Together with Journaling, these fall under a broad umbrella called Non-Authoring Solo. That means that most of the creative process for the game world comes from outside of you. You do not have to create the game world and play the NPCs as well as your character. It can take a lot of the creative burden off of you.

Another option is to use a generative AI to replace the GM. AIDungeon was the first, but more have become available with ChatGPT and other open large language models. Many can be self-hosted and will learn as you play. What an AI can and cannot do is a moving target, and it is not worth trying to discuss limitations in a printed book as it will be out of date before the book is off the printing press. I am not a huge fan of AI in my games, but I tend to be on the rules-light end of the gaming spectrum and often play away from my computer and off my phone. That is an obvious hindrance to AI, but if you want to explore it, I am sure there are plenty of resources online to do it.

Another style of solo playing is freeform. You don't need a character sheet or rules. You imagine a scene, how you react to it, and how the NPCs react to you, and then you play both hats, the player and the GM, without the shackles of rules to stop you. This is the closest to how children roleplay when they want to be cops and robbers or play with action figures and tell their own stories.

This book's style is called oracle play, and it uses a set of rules to try to emulate the GM's decision-making. The rules are pretty simple, but there will be a creative burden on you to interpret randomized answers into what they mean for your character or the game world.

Almost every GM must have faced a situation where the players ask a question for which you have no prepared answer and no strong opinion, such as a player who suddenly asks if the school teacher is left- or right-handed. At this point, the GM will often roll a die and decide beforehand if high means left and low right, or some other decision process. The die lands, and you then know the handedness of the teacher. That, in essence, is a solo oracle at work. You form a question, decide the odds of the answer being yes or no, and then roll the dice. Once you have an answer, you turn it into something meaningful for the character. The responsibility for answering the question is delegated to the dice. In a solo game, every yes-no question becomes a branching point where you don't know what will happen next.

There are three core solo tools. The oracle that answers yes-no questions. The muse answers questions that do not fit the yes-no format. The timer controls when events that are outside your control happen. None of these tools are complicated to use or complex. Taken together, they give us

a system that allows us to play to discover what happens, which is the essence of roleplaying.

WHY?

Why play solo at all? Roleplaying games as we know them today started as solo games. They grew out of tabletop war games, and war games frequently, and still do, come with solo rules. Early games have rolls to check if there was a random encounter (oracle question), what the encounter was based upon the location or terrain (muse question), as well as morale checks to see how the encountered foes behaved (oracle) and often random rolls to decide the details of the encounter such as how foes were equipped or the makeup of the individuals in the encounter (muse). As group play became more common, these solo tools remained and became standard GMing tools.

For the next thirty years, group play was the standard method of playing for most gamers. The changing point for many was the Covid-19 pandemic, and the lockdowns that meant getting groups together became harder. Some people moved to play online via virtual tabletops; others discovered solo play. Solo-playing never went away, and it just went out of fashion.

Today, it is more unusual to see a kickstarted game without the promise of solo rules, at least as a stretch goal, if not in the core book, than a game without solo support.

The pressures of scheduling time to bring friends around a dining table only get more intense. Working from home can mean that your friends or colleagues may be in an entirely different state or time zone from you. Solo games can be picked up and put down as you wish. Play when you have the time and put them away for days, weeks, or even months if you have to.

Another benefit of solo playing is that if you want to run a new game for your group but have never played it, you can use solo play to help you get up to speed with its game systems. Once upon a time, creating a few characters, running a few test combats, and reading some adventures were all the options many GMs had before having to help new players build their characters and launch into their first adventure. With solo play, you can create a character and play them through one or more adventures, bringing in more rules and sub-systems as you play until all the rules are being used.

There are other times when you want to play a game or a scenario, and your players are not into it. Maybe killing player characters doesn't go down well with one of your players, but you want to play a game in 'hard mode' or on another day, you want to play a rom-com, and your regular table of alpha males is not into that either. Solo games only have to please one person, and they rarely have to compromise.

Solo games also allow you to emphasize the parts of the game that you enjoy the most. It could be all action one week and talking and puzzling the next, as your needs and wants change.

> **You can world build as you play or play to world build, filling details as you go, rather than creating an entire setting before you get to play.**

THE ORACLE

The oracle is based upon the Drama Die from the Dr Who core rules, but with a send die added.

The first roll is a yes/no roll. The default is 1-3 yes, 4-6 no. Still, you can change that from a 50/50 roll to 1-2/3-6 or 1-4/5-6 depending on how you see the chances of the question being biased toward yes or no. for example, if you absolutely needed a bullet for some jiggery pokery. There was a UNIT member near by, the chances of them have a gun is much greater than a 50/50 chance.

We shift the likelihood to match the scene we are in, or to match the story, not the wants of the characters.

Once you have the yes or no part, then a standard DramaDie can be rolled.

50/50	1-3 Yes	4-6 No
Unlikely	1-2 Yes	3-6 No
Likely	1-4 Yes	5-6 No
1	Success (Yes, But...)	Failure (No, But...)
2-5	Good (Yes)	Bad (No)
6	Fantastic (Yes, And...)	Disastrous (No, And...)

The oracle is a standard term in solo play for answering questions in the yes-no format. You can use the oracle if you try a door and want to know if it is unlocked. You need to decide if the event is unlikely, about 50/50, or likely to happen. Roll the d6 and that will give a yes or no. Then throw your Drama die

The result of the oracle roll will give you a range of results from "Fantastic (Yes, and...)" to "Disastrous (No, and...)"

The question should be in a yes-no format. It would be best to ask it so that yes creates the most exciting events in the game.

If you peer around the corner of a warehouse and ask, "Are there any guards in sight?" despite a positive result, it would be bad for the character. You then roll the oracle roll. If you are breaking into a Cyberman processing plant, the likelihood of it being all clear is low, so you would roll a Likely 1-4/5-6 for your yes/no roll, because it is likely that there would be guards stationed around the plant. If it were an old barn on a rural farm, it might be much less likely that Cybermen would be standing around guarding the place, or so it seems to me.

Before we look at the roll's possible results, you need to know how to use them. Solo play will test your improvisation skills beyond the improv we all do when role-playing. You can imagine your character leaning around the corner of the processing plant. Still, when you get a yes or no answer to your question, you have to take several things into account: the situation you are in, the story so far, the sort of game you want, and the actual result you rolled and decide what that yes or no means right here and now. It is often best to choose your first reaction that meets the criteria.

Your answer has two parts. The first is the yes, or no. The second is the modifier, and or but.

And...

The and... modifier makes the result even stronger (for better or worse) than the character hoped. Do you want to know if a door is unlocked? If you get a yes, then not only is it unlocked, but the keys are in the lock, giving you the chance to enter and lock it behind you. If you got a negative, no, and... then not only is the door locked, but you can see where there is an alarm (or booby trap) fitted. This is not going to be the easiest way forward.

But...

A but... modifier is the opposite of the and... The result is still a yes or no, but not as good or bad as it could have been. When looking out for the cybermen guards, maybe you didn't see them, but you can hear some approaching, or that door, is it locked, yes, but it is a flimse cheap lock and you could force it. That second option of course leaves evidence that you were here, and the first case it puts you under time pressure.

THE MUSE

Not everything can be answered with a yes or a no. If you want to eavesdrop on a conversation or open a computer file, a simple yes or no is not going to help move the story forward.

Complex questions need more complex answers. There is no suitable mechanic in Dr Who to cope with the hundreds of possible results. To counter that, I am going to introduce a new roll.

D666

The d666 is a 3d6 roll, but you read the dice as a three-digit number. It is helpful to have dice of different colors to tell your tens from your hundreds and your units. The result of a d666 roll goes from 111 to 666 and has 216 possible results.

NOTE: All the tables and images in this chapter are repeated in the References chapter at the back of this book.

WORD PROMPTS

Word prompts are two or more words that you roll randomly on the prompts table and then attempt to put together to create an idea.

For example, if you wanted to eavesdrop on a conversation between a cyberman and a human collaborator, you could roll for two words. In this case, I rolled 416 and 513, which gives Growing + Rivalry. That is a good combination, and they are talking about how the number of humans in the Cyberman force is starting to outweigh the number of Cybermen. The human is even starting to get a bit belligerent toward the cyberman.

A second example, you hack into a computer and find a password-protected file. Once you crack the file, what does it contain? I roll 235 and 423, which gives Broken + Connecting, which could mean that the file details how the owner has tried to drive apart the human collaborators and the Cybermen.

Interpretation

Prompt words often need a lot of interpretation. I consider this to be the hardest skill in solo playing. There are a few techniques that can help ease the burden.

Firstly, try rolling for six words before you start playing. When you need to answer a muse question, choose two of those six words to put together and create the idea. Then, roll for two replacement words to bring your pool back up to six words. This can help in two ways. First, you choose the two words from the six that speak to you the most and put them in the order that makes the most sense. This can also work because you know the words in advance, and your subconscious can chew them over before you need them. You are not coming at them cold.

Another method is to roll for two words, and if they do not immediately suggest something to you, roll a third word and choose the best two.

Give both methods a go and see which works the best for you.

111	Doubt	241	Bitterness	411	Harmonious	541	Dreams
112	Release	242	Emotional	412	Addicted	542	Apathy
113	Isolation	243	Greed	413	Contemplate	543	Complexity
114	Fear	244	Lack	414	Nature	544	Leaving
115	Passion	245	Save	415	Inspired	545	Close
116	Obstacles	246	Aid	416	Growing	546	Prosperity
121	Coldness	251	Confusion	421	Compassion	551	Passion
122	Loss	252	Stalling	422	Leaving	552	Collected
123	Fragile	253	Excess	423	Connecting	553	Hurting
124	Upwards	254	Reckless	424	Failing	554	Intuition
125	Recovery	255	Waiting	425	Grieve	555	Sacrifice
126	Reward	256	Jealousy	426	Hard	556	Union
131	Insecurity	261	Emotional	431	Hope	561	Innocence
132	Dishonesty	262	Finding	432	Truth	562	Movement
133	Rebellion	263	Despair	433	Morality	563	Courage
134	Destroyed	264	Clean	434	Defensive	564	Surprise
135	Punishment	265	Chaos	435	Navigation	565	Loss
136	Impulsive	266	False	436	Victorious	566	Beliefs
141	Lacking	311	Dissatisfaction	441	Leader	611	Strategy
142	Escape	312	Brutal	442	Object	612	Sharp
143	Incomplete	313	Deception	443	Build	613	Wealth
144	Disharmony	314	Resentment	444	Awakening	614	Luxury
145	Insecure	315	Jealousy	445	Patience	615	Happiness
146	Repressed	316	Results	446	Bravery	616	Curiosity
151	Stressed	321	Pursue	451	Unconscious	621	Ambition
152	Smothering	322	Prevent	452	Burden	622	Comms
153	Dependence	323	Pressured	453	Planning	623	Comfort
154	Purpose	324	Captured	454	Comfort	624	Diligence
155	Blocked	325	Mistaken	455	Choices	625	Knowing
156	Consequences	326	Endangered	456	Feelings	626	Crossing
161	Restoration	331	Enemy	461	Trauma	631	Shuttle
162	Commitment	332	Agent	462	Rest	632	Station
163	Suffering	333	Limited	463	Desire	633	Stars

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164 Bad Luck	334 Avoid	464 Disaster	634 Active
165 Authority	335 Outmatched	465 Fate	635 Cease
166 Transience	336 Environment	466 Authority	636 Collected
211 Differences	341 Infection	511 Home	641 Talking
212 Anger	342 Lost	512 Punk	642 Confiscate
213 Wrong	343 Revolution	513 Rivalry	643 Desert
214 Choice	344 Mistaken	514 Action	644 Destiny
215 Sadness	345 Fear	515 Scattered	645 Destroy
216 Decay	346 Disaster	516 Assemble	646 Eliminate
221 Aggression	351 Coerced	521 Celebration	651 Explore
222 Trickery	352 Unnatural	522 Change	652 Inform
223 Fatigue	353 Defeat	523 Control	653 Liberate
224 Creating	354 Obtain	524 Desire	654 Protect
225 Disappoint	355 Drifter	525 Resilience	655 Related
226 Moving	356 Sailor	526 Freedom	656 Save
231 Cruel	361 Farmer	531 Romantic	661 Sanction
232 Acceptance	362 Void	532 Healing	662 Ship
333 Evil	363 Environment	633 Discipline	663 Survive
234 Success	364 Drought	534 Entrapment	664 Stop
235 Broken	365 Distant	535 Choices	665 Disable
236 Awareness	366 Vacuum	536 Inheritance	666 Disarm

Game Icons

Game icons are images that you interpret. There are upwards of 3,000 available game icons online, but I have provided just 216 here. Reading the icons is extremely easy once you have had a little practice. If you have ever used story cubes, these work the same way.

Imagine you have stolen the diary or journal from one of the collaborators. You check the entry for yesterday, and get the following two images.

The mask could mean that a person is unknown, something is obscured, or it could refer to the Cybermen's uniform helmets. The second image could be a figurative backstabbing or something more literal. I interpret this as the collaborator thinks they may have plans to betray the Cybermen.

Below are the 216 game icons used in these rules.

Roll 3d6, it is helpful if they are different colours but not necessary just use them as hundreds, tens and units to find an icon.

111	112	113	114
115	116	121	122
123	124	125	126
131	132	133	134
135	136	141	142
143	144	145	146

151	152	153	154
155	156	161	162
163	164	165	166
211	212	213	214
215	216	221	222
223	224	225	226
231	232	233	234

235	236	241	242
243	244	245	246
251	252	253	254
255	256	261	262
263	264	265	266
311	312	313	314
315	316	321	322

323	324	325	326

331	332	333	334

335	336	341	342

343	344	345	346

351	352	353	354

355	356	361	362

363	364	365	366

411	412	413	414
415	416	421	422
423	424	425	426
431	432	433	434
435	436	441	442
443	444	445	446
451	452	453	454

455	456	461	462

463	464	465	466

511	512	513	514

515	516	521	522

523	524	525	526

531	532	533	534

535	536	541	542

543	544	545	546
551	552	553	554
555	556	561	562
563	564	565	566
611	612	613	614
615	616	621	622
623	624	625	626

631	632	633	634
635	636	641	642
643	644	645	646
651	652	653	654
655	656	661	662
663	664	665	666

NPC REACTIONS

There is a straightforward process for handling NPC interactions.

Depending on the situation, ask the oracle if they are hostile or friendly. Don't ask that as an either or question, pick one, option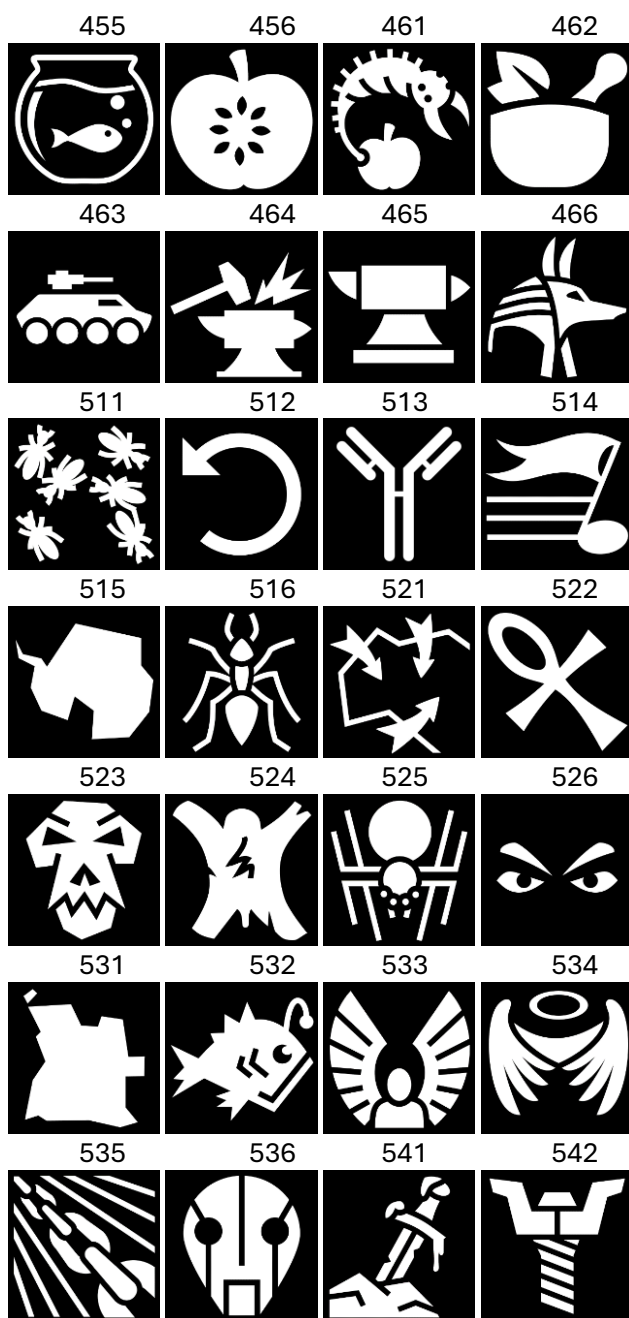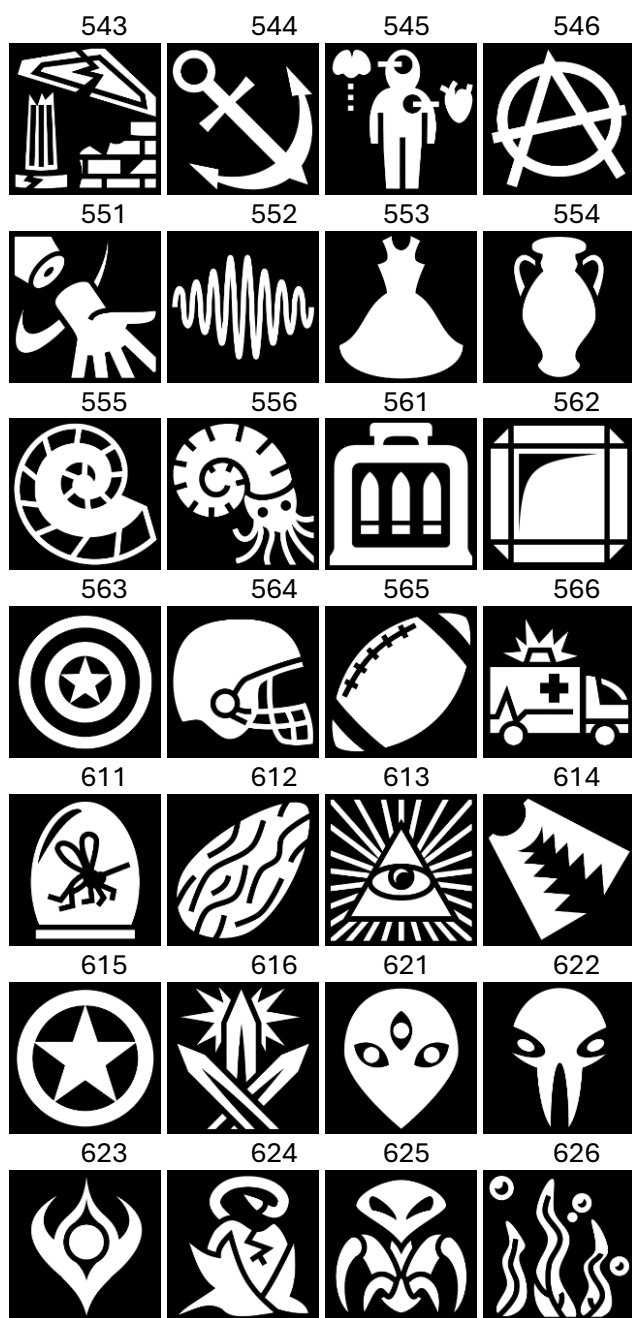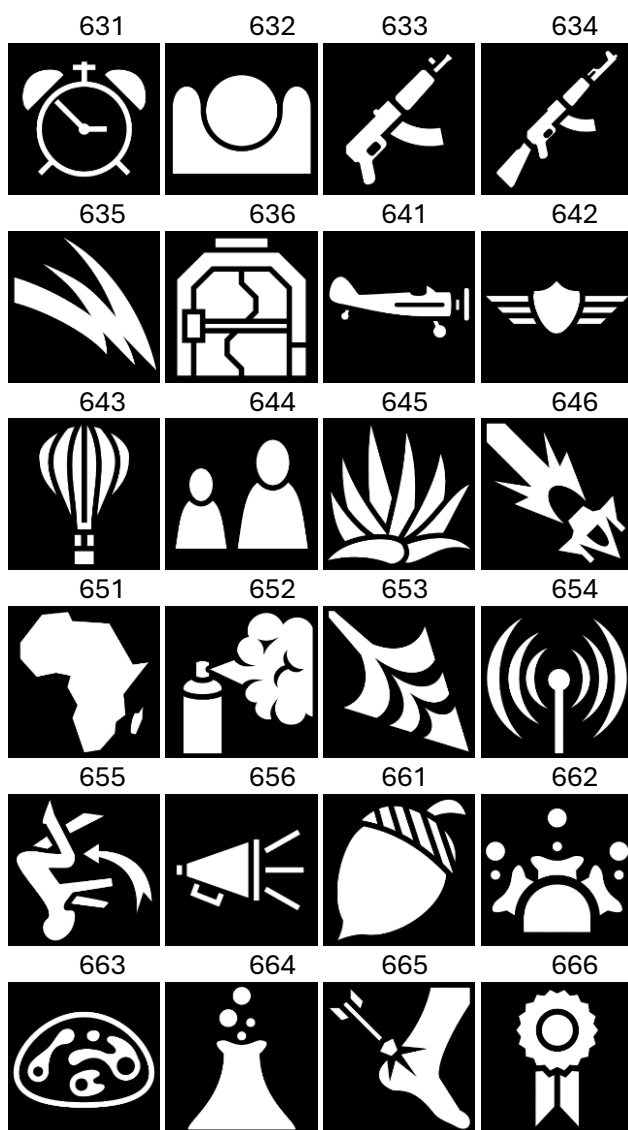, hostile or friendly, and ask the oracle. It will give you a yes no answer and maybe an and or but. Use this to decide their general attitude. Asking if someone is friendly and getting a yes, but... could mean that while they are friendly enough on first contact but are not going to put themselves out to help you or put themselves in any kind of danger. A no, and... answer to the same question could make them hostile, or prepared to inform on you or whatever passes for a very bad result.

You now know their general attitude.

SIGNIFICANT NPCS

There is another step for significant NPCs, people who will be encountered more than once and who have a name and a role in your story.

Each NPC should have a **desire or goal** and a **method or attitude**. To get these, we use the game icons or prompt words. A pair of d666 rolls will give you two icons or words.

For example, our character found the owner of the diary and wants to help them in their plans to defeat the Cyberman. To find the NPC's desire and method, we will use 2d666 and get 151 + 215. Those icons are:
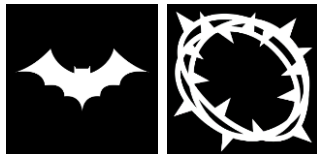
I am seeing a bat and a crown of thorns. Our Cyberman traitor enjoys things relating to the occult and black magic, but they have a reputation for behaving like a martyr.

Now that you have the attitude, desire, and methods, you can imagine how they would react, maybe even fill in details of the kind of place they live in, or their office, wherever you are interacting with them.

If we were using prompt words, they would be Stressed + Sadness (based on the same d666 rolls). I could interpret the contact's desire to be related to escapism and their methods relating to emotional blackmail. Of course, your ideas could be entirely different.

TIMERS

Timers allow you to push events outside your control. Some events will be fleeting and will either happen or not, in the same scene. Some could play out over minutes or hours, and others may play out over a time scale covered by an entire campaign.

In many respects, a timer is similar to a clock counting down.

We have three components to a timer. The first is the event. These should be things that are important to the story, and when they happen should be subject to some variability. If you have to complete a task by midnight, that is not a good subject for a timer because midnight is a fixed point. In contrast, a fraying rope rubbing across rocks as you climb it is a great example of a fleeting clock.

The next element is the trigger to make the clock tick. These can be skill or action-based or timed. You could check your fraying rope after every climb, Athletics, check as you scale a

wall, but if you are waiting to hear if the next world has fallen to an invading Cyberman army, that could be checked daily.

A clock is simply a quickly sketched circle that is divided into segments. You could halve it and have a two segment clock or divide it into as many as 8 or more sections.

Each event should have a clock created for it, with the number of sections reflecting how immediate the event is. Events that could happen quickly should have few segments, and events that are unlikely to happen should have more. When you check the clock, roll 1d6, and if the result is a 1, the clock ticks, and a segment is filled in.

When the clock is filled, the event happens.

The intention with clocks is that you should see the clock slowly filling its segments and get a sense of drama or anticipation that the event is becoming more likely.

You can use clocks for definite events, like a rope snapping, and for more intangible events, such as a rival's plan evolving. As your rival's (Missy?) clock fills in, their schemes become more advanced.

Timers can be used to control many things happening 'off-screen.' For example, how long before one of the Cybermen guards notices something you have done, or you get caught on a CCTV camera you didn't notice? How long will an official keep you waiting before giving you an interview?

TRACKS

Tracks are related to Clocks but are more linear in nature.

Tracks let you add a little more detail to a situation, or NPC, than the core rules have as standard. This could be a temporary attribute that you attach to foes or NPCs, or a permanent addition to the game.

Imagine you find yourself playing poker for high stakes, more than just money. You may not want to create all the players as significant NPCs, but you also want to make the game more detailed than a single dice roll.

You could create a track for how 'cool' each player is. A track is simply six nodes in a row.

O-O-O-O-O-O

Now, as you play this scene, you can adjust each poker player's cool up or down depending on how you are playing or based on how you play them. Can you ruffle their feathers by insinuating you know something about them and their dealings?

You can use the value of a track in several ways. You could use the value as the level of a skill if you need a skill roll for something as variable as the ability to play poker well or negotiate a contract. Or roll 1d6 against the value of the track, roll under it, and maybe the players throw in their hand, roll over it, and they think they have a good hand. You can use two tracks, maybe in this example, Cool and Cardsharp, to represent each player. Essentially, you have just created an instant NPC just for this scene. Roll a d6 for each track, and you have an attribute and a skill with which to play out your scene.

You can turn any narrative description into a track if having a value to roll against would serve a purpose. You could have a morale track that you slowly fill in each time a UNIT team member falls. Each turn, you roll a d6, and if you roll equal to or less than the current morale, someone on the team loses their nerve.

Tracks are a tool that you can decide how best to use, rather than a clearly defined game mechanic that has a specific use. When you need more details, you can create additional attributes on the fly and discard them when they no longer serve a purpose.

THREAT LEVEL

Threat level is an optional track you can employ. On a scale of one to six, set the level of danger at the start of a scene. Then, depending on what happens and how the scene plays out, move the threat level up or down a place on the track.

You can use this to inform the chances of random encounters, events, and NPC reactions to you. If the threat is high, innocent NPCs may look to your character for leadership, for example.

MINI TABLES

A mini table is a 1d6 table that you create on the fly. You could start with two options and use 1-3/4-6, or three options and go 1-2/3-4/5-6, and so on. These tables are quick to produce and give you something you can reference again and again. My favorite table is one with four entries 1-2, 3-4, 5, and 6. This gives you four options, two more common and two less common. It allows me to introduce bias. Imagine your adventures take you to Victorian England. You then create a mini table for who you are likely to encounter on the street.

You start off in a poor area and so your table looks like this:

1d6	Who?
1-2	Beggar/Homeless
3-4	Working Class Man/Woman
5	Middle-Class gentleman/lady or Tradesman
6	Wealthy gentleman/lady or Spiv.

As you move from the poor to a more affluent area, we change the table to look like this.

1d6	Who?
1	Policeman
2	Working Class Man/Woman
3-4	Middle-Class gentleman/lady or Tradesman
5-6	Wealthy gentleman/lady or Spiv.

The natural bias of the table allows us to create a more unique feel to different locations even within the same setting.

These tables are fast to create and can be written up on a post-it note or index card and you can carry them forward from scene to scene.

STORY POINTS

One of the core features of the Dr Who Roleplaying Game is Store Points.

We need a good ebb and flow of Story Points; spending them isn't an issue, but when do you give your character Story Points? If you are too generous, you can take away some of the challenge and drama of the game; give too few, and you are denying yourself the fun that Story Points can add to the game, and you could make some challenges insurmountable because you lack the Story Points to adjust failures into a Success.

I suggest three rules for awarding Story Points.

Rule One: At the end of each scene, look back and ask yourself was it a good scene? Did you advance your story? Were you faithful to the style of Dr Who? Did you play the bad guys the way they should be played? If it was a good scene, award yourself a Story Point. In the core rules it says that the Game Master should reward good roleplay, so this is our solo play version of that rule.

Rule Two: Whenever you roll an oracle answer that is the worst possible outcome, either a yes and or no and depending on which way around you asked the question, pout a Story Point up for grabs. Whether you earn that point or not depends on how well you deal with the threat or challenge the answer led to. If it was a mundane question and the strong answer was of no consequence, then you do not get the point. If the answer completely shifts the adventure, or wrecks your intentions, then give yourself the point.

Rule Three: Villains get story points. If you can force a villain to spend a story point, then you get the point(s) they spent.

This can work both ways. If you have to spend story points to save yourself from a villain, it gets the points you spent.

Optionally, depending on how you play, you may want to increase the maximum and starting number of Story Points to 15 for a solo character.

IMPROVISATION

All roleplaying is improvisation. The basic loop is that the GM describes a scene, the players improvise their reactions, the GM resolves any actions, and then improvises how the scene evolves. We then repeat.

The GM has an agenda. They know what threats lie ahead, some of the characters you may meet, and what they can tell you.

A good GM doesn't know what will happen next.

We don't want to know what will happen next until we get there.

Not knowing can create challenges. It can be a lot of work when you start building challenges, scenes, locations, NPCs, and consequences on the fly. You may have a vision of what the Doctor sees when he/they open the door to the TARDIS and the opening scene, but playing that scene creates many chances for things to go very wrong. The following techniques come from improvisational theatre and are tried and tested. Try them all and lean into the ones most appeal to you.

PAINT THE SCENE

This technique is about picturing the scene's most striking or essential 'thing'. It is much easier to go to town imagining just one thing in all its senses than trying to conceive everything with any level of detail. Once you have that one thing, much of the scene can fall into place because they would naturally exist around the 'thing'.

Start with that essential thing, then consider how it sits in its environment. Where is it? If the thing is a sound, like a siren

or monstrous roar, do you feel it through your chest, or does the ground reverberate with it?

Once you have it in its environment, place the NPCs. How do they react to it?

Once the NPCs are in the scene, place yourself and either the Doctor or your assistants (if you are the Doctor) into the scene.

Again, to use an analogy from the movie or game industry, something has the camera's focus at the start of a scene. This is probably the thing you should imagine in most detail. How does it look? How does it sound? Is it hot? Is it moving? Are there smells? Now think about where it is and what surrounds it. Does it affect its environment?

If you can imagine a great flock of Stormbats blanding en-mass in front of you, this has a mass of sensory information, from the noise, the wash of air from their wings and litter, dust and dirt being thrown around in the down draft. Are bystanders running and screaming? Are cars crashing and horns blaring?

Now, imagine a circus parade. This is another big, noisy, and bright centerpiece; it exists to attract attention. Once you can picture it, think about its surroundings. Is it in the street? Are there people stopping to watch? What is the weather like? A circus is exactly the kind of place that the Doctor will find something strange happening.

You may be surprised at how much you can create for your games without resorting to dice or icons. But there is no reason not to use yes/no questions to pin down details and let the dice make choices. Does the circus have stilt walkers? Is there a storm brewing?

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This method will help you overcome the 'blank page' feeling and make your games more vivid if it works for you. But, unfortunately, it doesn't work for everyone, and it can feel like you are just making stuff up rather than interacting with the game.

FORTUNATELY / UNFORTUNATELY

Straight yes and no answers can lead you to a dead stop. Imagine if you got a no every time you rolled for an answer. You would soon end up shutting down every possible avenue of progress. Are there any doors? No, Are there any windows? No, is there a trap door to a cellar? No, and so on. If you can think of positive answers as 'fortunately...' and negative answers as 'unfortunately...' this simple change of wording can lead you to fill in extra detail, and it is those details that you can latch on to and inspire you to come up with a solution.

For example, the Doctor needs to steal a horse from an inn's stables. Are there any suitable horses? The dice say No. I could leave it at that and imagine the stables as empty, with nothing to steal. But, if I swap No for Unfortunately, "Is there a horse I can steal?", "Unfortunately, the only animals in here are some tired old mules." The net effect is the same, but unfortunately... just draws out extra details.

The power of these words comes from their association with good and bad luck. We have all had good and bad lucky breaks. They are often not our fault; they are just things that happen to us. If you are late for a job interview, that is when your car battery will be flat, or on another day, you nearly miss the elevator, but by chance, someone spots your hurry and holds the door for you. Little things can appear to be the turning points for much more important events. Fortunately and unfortunately, can capture some of that feeling.

THREE THINGS

In some respects, Three Things is similar to Painting the Scene but has many more uses. I think this skill can be developed through practice.

The principle of Three Things is that it is easy to think of just three things about something you have just created. That could be an NPC, a location, or an object that has just become important. At first, these would be the most obvious things, but as your character's focus moves from thing to thing, you can continue to create groups of three things. This continues until you either change focus or have reached the limit of what your character could know.

For example, I created a locked door in the Cyberman processing plant. I now create three things that make this door unique. It is made from black metal, has a voice-activated control panel, and has a video screen built into it at eye level. The voice control panel interest me so I focus on that, it is silver metal, screwed into the wall next to the door and had a press stud to activate it. I want to know about the screws as I may be able to get it off and fiddle with the systems controlling it. The screws are silver, slightly knurled where they have been screwed in, and sit flush to the panel. I am infer some more things from this, the damaged screw heads suggest they were put in by humans, and not by Cybermen, but can I learn anything else just by looking or do I need to remove the panel to learn more? I don't think so, so I would have to move on.

Three Things works particularly well when you are running an investigative game. You may start with an unexplained event, something that is wrong or out of place, and the thing itself is the first clue. Three Things helps you examine the thing that is wrong in detail and suggest what or where you should start

to investigate. Everything you focus on could be an important source of clues.

CHEKHOV'S GUN

This is not strictly an improvisation technique, but it is handy for solo play. The principle of Chekhov's Gun is that you should not create something in your game if you will not use it. The quote goes, "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep." In the example of the black door above, I don't know where it goes, but it should lead somewhere that moves the adventure forward. Once I have created the door that is out of the norm, it is a loaded gun. What if I do not open that door and walk away? What if the contents of the room beyond turn out to be completely mundane? That door, its unique style, and the implied creator get added to a list of clues or loose ends. By keeping a list of unresolved clues, when I need to insert some added detail or need an extra connection between things, I can dip into my list and pull out an unresolved clue I already know something about. Recurring characters or ideas can make a universe or world feel more natural. NPCs that have been doing things while you were not there and living their own lives. For example, I may start poking around a different house and find a matching door behind a bookcase.

You can maintain lists of NPCs or rumors you have created but have not explored. Then, when you need a new rumor, try reusing an existing one, but maybe with some added information.

Recycling ideas in this way takes some creative burden off of you. For example, it is easier to meet the same NPC three times than to create three NPCs.

SPOILERS

There are two kinds of spoilers in solo play. The first is when you are playing a published adventure or campaign and you have read details your character doesn't know. The second is when you have created something for your game and know it because you wrote it.

Many GMs get enjoyment from creating their game universes: locations, factions, NPCs, and cool encounters. An encounter prepared beforehand is likely to be more detailed and interesting than one thrown together in an instant.

A technique can turn the information you know beforehand into something new. It is best summed up as the question, "Is that true?".

Is that true? It can be applied to anything that is prepared ahead of time or published. If you are trying to play through a published adventure, you can read the first part of a description. Decide on a course of action, and then read the rest of the GM information. Now ask, "Is that true?" If the dice say no, it isn't; is it better or worse for your character? Use the threat level to decide. For example, if your notes say The Cybermen guards are alert, but Is that true says they aren't, then maybe the Cybermen are getting new orders and are paying attention to the information they are getting rather than to their immediate surroundings.?

Now, you are reacting to a new situation, although you are still following the adventure in the book. If the Cybermen need to make important decisions, you can remove their confusion at that point in the adventure.

PREP

As I said earlier, prepared encounters, locations, and NPCs are always going to be more detailed and interesting than something created on the fly without the same level of forethought. Creating these things is also fun.

If you create something, put it in an envelope and label it on the outside with categories, such as "NPC", "Cyberman Encounter Slums," and so on. When you later need an NPC or an encounter in the slums, you can pick one of your encounters randomly, as long as they meet the criteria. Now you have an encounter with the benefits of being fully developed, but also a surprise. If you want to try this, create two new encounters for each you use, so the number of possibilities constantly increases. This keeps your library of encounters growing faster than you can use it. You can do the same thing digitally if you are good with spreadsheets or databases. If you select a random record, you can let it pick one.

PUBLISHED ADVENTURES

One way of playing published adventures is to use the "Is it true?" method above. Another way is to swap the emphasis from player to GM. Rather than viewing scenes from the character's perspective, you read each location or encounter as if you were the GM. Now, imagine how the characters would react to the initial information. You can use all the solo tools to control the character's actions, so they are not under your control.

The experience is like having a bird' s-eye view of the adventure. As long as you have fun with the characters and maintain their personalities, it is still roleplaying, but with more emphasis on the GMing side.

Mix this with more player-focused play in a sandbox, freeform universe, and swap to GM-led when you want to play a published adventure.

FREEFORM ADVENTURES

Much of the fun in Dr Who happens when things go wrong. From the moment the characters have to adapt and improvise, adventures can start to form and propagate.

In justifying some of the muse answers, I had created a rival timelord, one who was stepping into my timestream and interfering with my adventures. It was only a short leap from things going wrong and this being just lousy luck to it being intentional and part of someone's plan. At that point, I had an invisible hand trying to manipulate and harm me, my assistants, and the people I was trying to help. This was a plot that fell outside the scope of a single adventure.

I kept my character's goals in mind, and when opportunities came up to further their goal I took them. Day-to-day life continued in the cycle of adventures and time jumps, but behind it all was a timer running for when this unknown enemy would move against me. Whenever the muse prompts suggested interference or opposition, I could use the other timelord as an agent of that unseen hand and to rationalize the interference that the muse wanted.

The Threat level also played a part in this process, suggesting when situations should escalate, and that helped move the adventure forward towards and showdown and final confrontation.

CHARACTER OR PARTY

I find playing one or two characters easiest, but other people prefer playing more characters. There are strengths and weaknesses to both. When playing a team, you can choose a

central character for each scene and then control all the supporting characters using the oracle. You may have a good idea of what you expect each character to do, but then you ask the oracle if they behave as expected. If you get a negative answer, you think about what they have done? Is there something that has caught their eye? Did they think they heard something? If your team is working well, make this question Likely. If things are going badly, make this an unlikely question as the team risks falling apart.

I quite like playing a single character with an assistant. This gives me a second character to administer first aid, call for help, or drag my body out of danger. They also provide additional skills that my character doesn't possess. I can still control the sidekick character using the oracle to give them some autonomy.

SPLIT THE PARTY

It is conventional wisdom in roleplaying games not to split the party. In a group game, it isn't fun to do nothing while the other players are playing their scenes. Traditional character parties are often balanced with a mix of skills and abilities. Splitting the party can leave one or both parts vulnerable. In solo play, this is not a problem.

You can split your characters however you like. However, because your adventures are created by you and for you, you are not going to end up with a set of challenges you cannot possibly overcome.

One interesting form of play is to use three characters. Two are active in the field, and one is providing base support. The TARDIS itself can provide this base supporting character. Your characters can then communicate via the base character, depending on the world or time the adventure takes please on/in this communication could be by letter,

telegram, telephone, or advanced comms but otherwise have separate adventures. This can allow you to approach the same adventure from different angles. For example, you could have one brash and physical character and one that likes to use undercover methods and move about the underworld unnoticed.

You can play alternate scenes or sessions, swapping between the characters as you see fit. However, they only have very little direct communication via the third base character. Flip-flopping between characters scene by scene can help avoid time anomalies where both characters end up in the same place at the same time, but when you played it the first time, the second character wasn't there.

This is a method that is worth trying and seeing if you like it. It works for some people, not for others.

CLUES & MYSTERIES

A mystery or investigation is a common adventure format and standard fare for Dr Who.

There are three phases to a mystery.

Reaction

The first phase of an investigation is called reaction. At this point the character doesn't know what is really going on, and they are reacting to events.

During this phase, your character will be finding clues. The secret is to put the clues where the character looks. If you want to look for footprints in the mud, ask the oracle if you find any footprints in the mud. If there is a skill check involved, roll the skill first and the oracle question only if you are successful. If something is obvious, do not make your character roll.

Your goal is to explore your situation, come up with a theory, and use the oracle to create clues. Clues are defined here as obvious evidence left by the antagonist but evidence that does not provide clear answers. By this, I mean the knife in the body is a big clue, but it does not reveal the killer by itself. Witnesses can give you clues, but it should not be so obvious as to reveal the antagonist. A great mystery should have a disparity of clues.

When you have a number of clues, it is your character's task to create a theory that can explain all or most of them. Once you have a theory, you transition from reaction to action.

Action

This is the middle section of an investigation or mystery. At this point, you have a theory, which may or may not be true, but you do not have all the evidence you need to prove it.

Your character can now start to look for evidence to prove their theory. If, for example, your theory says that an assassin had to enter through an upstairs window to avoid the guards on the street, then you can go to the upstairs rooms and look for the evidence. That is an active decision. You can ask the oracle if you find the evidence, but the better your theory fits the clues, the more likely you make the oracle roll and the more likely you are to find the evidence you are looking for.

This can often be the biggest part of the investigation gameplay.

Resolution

At some point, you will feel that you have all the evidence you need. You have a theory that fits the clues and the supporting evidence that proves your theory. At this point, you have solved the mystery. What needs to happen is that you need to play out these scenes. Who are you proving this to? Does this now lead to a second mystery in the form of a manhunt to find the criminal you know killed your friend?

This whole process is often called an adventure in three acts, and it is common in movies, books, and theatre. It also works well for a solo play.

The key takeaway should be not to make your character roll to find obvious clues. If a body is lying in the middle of the floor, you do not need a skill check to see it.

Clues should be where you look for them. The fun will start once you have enough clues to form a theory. Often, this is three obvious clues.

You can use the oracle to place evidence, but weight the answers depending on how good you think your theory is.

Consider what the antagonists are doing while you are investigating. Are they going to stop you? Are they fleeing? Do they even know you are investigating? Until you have a theory, you do not know who did it or why. Once you know this, you can also use the oracle to control their actions.

Most adventures can be treated as a mystery or investigation; it is only the setting trappings that change.

RECORDING YOUR GAMES

There are two tools I find that work well for recording solo games. One for digital play and one for physical play. I will talk about onscreen digital play first.

OBSIDIAN APP

Obsidian is a personal wiki app. It is cross-platform, meaning it will run on a Mac, Windows, Linux, iPhones, Android, and others. All the files it creates are saved in the Obsidian vault, and if you save your vault in a cloud service, such as iCloud, Dropbox, or Google Drive, you can pick up the same game on your phone, laptop, tablet, and desktop PCs. The cloud

services also allow you to restore deleted or corrupted files, giving you some resilience about losing your games.

When you create a file in Obsidian, you use plain text, but you can also use markdown, which gives you some formatting options, such as headings, subheadings, bold, italics, tables, etc. Unlike a word processor, it is not What You See Is What You Get.

You can also type a pair of square brackets [[and then the start of a filename, and it will insert a link to that file. You can also ask it to merge the files so the contents of the linked files are inserted into your game notes at that point.

This may sound complicated and techy, but in practice, it is simple to do. If you name your files by type so all NPC descriptions start with NPC-, and your Locations start with LOC—etc., not only do they group neatly in the list, but when you want to insert a reference to something, you can start to type its prefix, and Obsidian will filter out the files that do not fit.

As you play, you can create a new file for each scene and link in NPCs, locations, clues, and any other elements you have made. I also like to link each scene to its previous scene.

The number of small files you have will grow as you play, but that list of files serves a helpful purpose. When you need an NPC, you can immediately see which NPCs already feature, and it is always better to reuse an existing NPC than create new ones. The same is true for locations.

Whenever you choose to do your game maintenance, either between scenes or when you don't have time to play full scenes but want to be a part of the game, you can look down the file list and look for elements you can fill out or add to. Is

there an NPC without a character sheet but needs one? Is there a location that is only a few words long?

One of Obsidian's cool features is the node map. This shows you how each thing is connected. If you do as I have done and connect each scene to its previous scene, these will form a chain. As you link to NPCs and places, you can see the node map from the web for your conspiracy or mystery.

In this map, the first scene is on the far left. The story started off quite linear, with one scene leading to another, but by scene five, I started to find clues and introduce recurring NPCs, and you see the connections start to form.

Mysteries are supposed to be a tangled web, and Obsidian will allow you to see your games as a linear list of scenes, NPCs, locations, etc., and as that tangled web.

Inside each file, you have as much space as you need to write your notes in any format you like. I prefer short notes and bullets.

Some scenes will be short, and the notes will be minimal; others will be extensive, and the notes will reflect that. You have as much space as you need inside each Obsidian file.

BULLET JOURNALS

A bullet journal is often a physical notebook or, in my case, an exercise book.

Bullet Journaling is a technique for organizing many different types of information in a single book. It is also designed to be built and added to incrementally, making it ideal for keeping game notes, with character sheets, maps, and scenes all jumbled together.

You start a bullet journal by reserving the first few pages for the Index or several indexes. If you like to use maps, you have an index of maps. If you want an index of character sheets, you keep pages back for them, and so on.

So, label page one as Index and leave it blank for now.

On the next page, you can label it if it is a specific kind of Index.

After you have your index pages, the next page is your key. List the colors or abbreviations here if you use color coding or short-hand. Now, add the key to your main Index and its page number.

When you create your PC, put their character sheet on a new page, then add them either to the main Index or an index of characters.

When you start a scene, give yourself a double-page spread and add the scene to the Index.

As you play, if you create an NPC, give them their own page, and then add them to the Index.

You should be able to find anything in your game by simply turning to the front of your book and looking in the Index.

Color coding can be extremely useful in a bullet journal. A set of highlighter pens will give you a palette of colors, making it easy to spot key points. I find it worth highlighting questions, their answers, and NPC names.

A particular class of questions goes way beyond the scope of the current scene. These can be questions that come up in one scene but apply to the entire mystery. It is worth pulling these questions out and giving them their own index and a page to answer each one. The answers may change over time. You may learn a 'truth' from one NPC, but later, that could prove to be only part of the truth or simply a delusion. So, the true answer evolves as your game progresses. Essentially, these are world-building questions as the secrets and truths that make up your version of the game setting are asked and answered as you play.

CONCLUSIONS

What you have here is a guide to one style of solo playing. This style is intended to be rules light, just like the Dr Who Roleplaying Game.

This is just a guide to get you going. You will undoubtedly take these tools and evolve them to fit your style.

Just as each GM will have their library of resources and settings, you will build a solo toolbox. Some tools will be muse oracles, and others will be random tables. These can be bought cheaply on DriveThruRPG, and they come with detailed entries for each result. I like using random tables from Azukail Games as the results can easily be expanded into entire scenes, and these are ideas that I didn't have to think of myself.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Solo play does not have to be a solitary hobby. We may have our adventures alone, but tens of thousands of solo role-players are out there.

Join Me On Discord

https://discord.gg/zM5vjJ4

I have a very different philosophy about solo play. I don't want to use one set of solo rules for every game. I want my solo rules to be the lightest touch possible, not get in the way or feel like they are from a different game.

For that reason, I make rules on a system basis. Yes, it means that there are subtly different rules for every game. I appreciate that you paid good money for this booklet. Buying one of the larger, more expensive sets of rules would have set you back nearly $20 compared to this free booklet and all

the others I have created. My logic was that you could buy half a dozen of these little booklets and still have paid out less than just buying one mega system. Solo play does not need 150 to 300 pages of random tables.

If the way I work appeals to you. I have an email announcement list:

http://www.ppmgames.co.uk/newsletter/

Please consider subscribing if you have a shelf full of games you have never played or not played in a long time.

Patreon

Patreons get all my content for free as a PDF and discounted Print on Demand via DriveThruRPG. You can check out my Patreon at https://www.patreon.com/PPMGames.

REFERENCES

ORACLE

50/50	1-3 Yes	4-6 No
Unlikely	1-2 Yes	3-6 No
Likely	1-4 Yes	5-6 No
1	Success (Yes, But...)	Failure (No, But...)
2-5	Good (Yes)	Bad (No)
6	Fantastic (Yes, And...)	Disastrous (No, And...)

111 Doubt	241 Bitterness	411 Harmonious	541 Dreams
112 Release	242 Emotional	412 Addicted	542 Apathy
113 Isolation	243 Greed	413 Contemplate	543 Complexity
114 Fear	244 Lack	414 Nature	544 Leaving
115 Passion	245 Save	415 Inspired	545 Close
116 Obstacles	246 Aid	416 Growing	546 Prosperity
121 Coldness	251 Confusion	421 Compassion	551 Passion
122 Loss	252 Stalling	422 Leaving	552 Collected
123 Fragile	253 Excess	423 Connecting	553 Hurting
124 Upwards	254 Reckless	424 Failing	554 Intuition
125 Recovery	255 Waiting	425 Grieve	555 Sacrifice
126 Reward	256 Jealousy	426 Hard	556 Union
131 Insecurity	261 Emotional	431 Hope	561 Innocence
132 Dishonesty	262 Finding	432 Truth	562 Movement
133 Rebellion	263 Despair	433 Morality	563 Courage
134 Destroyed	264 Clean	434 Defensive	564 Surprise
135 Punishment	265 Chaos	435 Navigation	565 Loss
136 Impulsive	266 False	436 Victorious	566 Beliefs
141 Lacking	311 Dissatisfaction	441 Leader	611 Strategy
142 Escape	312 Brutal	442 Object	612 Sharp
143 Incomplete	313 Deception	443 Build	613 Wealth
144 Disharmony	314 Resentment	444 Awakening	614 Luxury
145 Insecure	315 Jealousy	445 Patience	615 Happiness
146 Repressed	316 Results	446 Bravery	616 Curiosity
151 Stressed	321 Pursue	451 Unconscious	621 Ambition
152 Smothering	322 Prevent	452 Burden	622 Comms
153 Dependence	323 Pressured	453 Planning	623 Comfort
154 Purpose	324 Captured	454 Comfort	624 Diligence
155 Blocked	325 Mistaken	455 Choices	625 Knowing
156 Consequences	326 Endangered	456 Feelings	626 Crossing
161 Restoration	331 Enemy	461 Trauma	631 Shuttle
162 Commitment	332 Agent	462 Rest	632 Station
163 Suffering	333 Limited	463 Desire	633 Stars

164 Bad Luck	334 Avoid	464 Disaster	634 Active
165 Authority	335 Outmatched	465 Fate	635 Cease
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211 Differences	341 Infection	511 Home	641 Talking
212 Anger	342 Lost	512 Punk	642 Confiscate
213 Wrong	343 Revolution	513 Rivalry	643 Desert
214 Choice	344 Mistaken	514 Action	644 Destiny
215 Sadness	345 Fear	515 Scattered	645 Destroy
216 Decay	346 Disaster	516 Assemble	646 Eliminate
221 Aggression	351 Coerced	521 Celebration	651 Explore
222 Trickery	352 Unnatural	522 Change	652 Inform
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225 Disappoint	355 Drifter	525 Resilience	655 Related
226 Moving	356 Sailor	526 Freedom	656 Save
231 Cruel	361 Farmer	531 Romantic	661 Sanction
232 Acceptance	362 Void	532 Healing	662 Ship
333 Evil	363 Environment	633 Discipline	663 Survive
234 Success	364 Drought	534 Entrapment	664 Stop
235 Broken	365 Distant	535 Choices	665 Disable
236 Awareness	366 Vacuum	536 Inheritance	666 Disarm

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