

FRUSTRATION TO FREEDOM

30 DAYS TO LEGENDARY SOLO ROLEPLAYING ADVENTURES



Solo Roleplayer

Kenny the Solo Roleplaying Sage

FRUSTRATION TO FREEDOM

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DAY 1 – KNOW ROLEPLAYING

Maybe you know solo roleplaying is possible. Maybe you're interested in seeing how solo roleplaying is possible. Either way it's good to see what roleplaying is.

This is one of the moments when pictures speak a thousand words. But before you get to the pictures let's take a short while out to talk about story.

Story

The first thing to talk about is the idea of story. Story differentiates roleplaying games from board and card games. A story is a narration of a series of *events* a *character* takes to *overcome* a *problem* and reach a *goal*.

Events

Events build up the core of what you'll be roleplaying.

Character

Your avatar, or proxy, for the story you'll be telling via solo roleplaying.

Overcome

Dealing with, in a successful manner, the *problem*.

Problem

Something, or better still someone, stopping the character getting what they want.

Goal

The final destination or outcome the character wants. Something the character wants but cannot get. Or something the character wants relief from.

Roleplaying

In a social roleplaying group the story is an ensemble piece with many different stories going on at once. The beauty of a solo game is the focus upon a single story allowing greater depth and interest.

Social Roleplaying

To start off the discussion of roleplaying you'll have to look at social roleplaying.

In social roleplaying there are 2 kinds of players.

PC

GM

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Day 1 – Know Roleplaying

They work together to create a story.

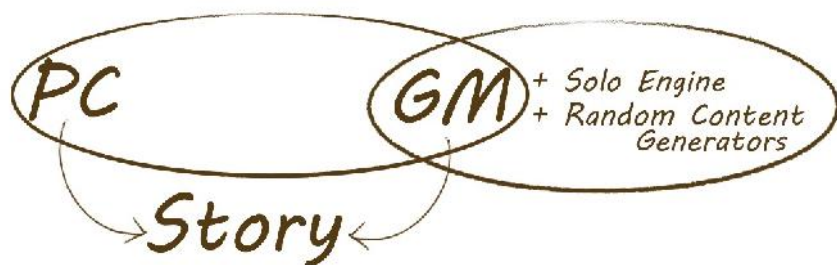


Solo Roleplaying

In solo roleplaying you'll have to take control of both types of players.



The problem is there is nothing outside of you to create surprises or long-term interest. To counter this there are elements which take *some* control out of your hands.



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Day 1 – Know Roleplaying

The lessons which follow go deeper into all aspects of solo roleplaying. Adding extra depth and special tools which will keep you coming back for more!

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Most of the lessons have this section at the end; this is 'homework' and it helps you get the most out of this course.

Extra Credit

Some lessons might have an extra credit section. These help you go deeper and further.

DAY 2 – CREATIVE TOOLS: BRAINSTORMING AND FREEWriting

Today you're going to look at the 2 great tools for creativity: brainstorming and freewriting.

Both of these tools help you get ideas out of your brain and onto paper (computer / phone).

As you're going to be in your head so much whilst solo roleplaying you might as well get comfortable in there! These tools help you think. They help you get rid of the stale ideas which float around on the top of your mind. In the end you'll be glad for the freshness brought to your roleplaying by these techniques.

Brainstorming

This is no more, and no less, than getting ideas out of your head and onto paper.

These ideas consist of words, short phrases, and maybe (even) sketches.

The idea here is to push yourself to get as many ideas out as you can. To start with you might only get 20 to 50 ideas. Over time you might get much more if you work on it. You don't need to do lists (which I do) but can jot ideas, at random, over an entire page. As I mentioned before you can even draw sketches.

A 'secret' of brainstorming is when you get to a point when you cannot get any more ideas keep pushing. Once you break through the block you'll get new and fresh ideas. So if you're stuck keep pushing. Also never self-censor yourself, if you think an idea is stupid put it down. You can always remove it later but the 'stupid' idea can, and will, spark off many great ideas.

For brainstorming I recommend a list length rather than a time length.

Example

Here are the first 20 items in my brainstorm as for why I enjoy solo roleplaying

1. *Fun*
2. *Enjoy it*
3. *Freedom*
4. *Help other people*
5. *Play what I want to play*
6. *Ability to explore worlds that seem interesting*
7. *Gives me reason to learn history*
8. *Allows me to explore feelings*
9. *A hobby I enjoy*
10. *Allows me to tell stories*
11. *Takes control out of my hand*
12. *Freedom from responsibility*
13. *Allows self to kick back and enjoy spare time*
14. *Forces me to have me time*
15. *Gives me a chance to create worlds*

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Day 2 - Creative Tools: Brainstorming and Freewriting

16. Gives me a chance to explore new and interesting worlds
17. Gives me a role model of someone to live up to
18. Allows me to turn off my brain for a while
19. Allows me to forget about what's going on in my life
20. Allows me to have safe freedom and exploration

Freewriting

Freewriting differs from brainstorming in 1 important way. You record your stream of consciousness (or train of thought) rather than the key phrases.

To freewrite start with a question and answer it. The answer isn't a quick sentence but rather a length of writing. During freewriting whatever is in your head goes onto the page. (These include: umm, uhh, personal sayings, swearing, 'I don't know', and so on.) Again it's important to not self-censor or self-correct. Leave whatever you've done alone and carry onwards.

For freewriting I recommend a time length rather than a page count.

Example

This is the first 4 paragraphs of a freewrite asking: Why do you want to solo roleplay?

I want to solo roleplay so that I can enjoy life. This is important to me so that I not be tied down and bored and fed up all the time. It gives me a release that isn't dependedant on TV films or computer games. It's something e active to do not active in the body but active in the mind. It forces my mind to work and not just veg out on brainless tv or films. It makes my work hard and thinko f new ways to do things. It makes my me push forward and be more creative.

It teaches things about me that I wish to learn aobut and about things I need to know. Part of this is because of theings like this but other things will be when I do and learn as I go.

I want to be a better do and not so always planning. That is my weakness. Do, do, more doing and less planning. More action. Thinking is important too and that is why I struggle.

I always want things to be bperfect abut this isn't always the case and I need to learn to let things go and adapt to new situations with as much grace and flexibility as I can. Solo roleplay can also open my eyes up to new philosophies and ways of living as I'm living my lief amongst the characters I play.

Getting Stuck

If you get stuck ask questions relevant to the main question, or topic, you're dealing with. Some example questions can be found in *Putting the Lesson into Practice*.

Other methods of breaking through blocks is to use tools such as Rory's Story Cubes; random words, pictures, or quotes; or looking at items around you and use them to kick-start a new train of thought.

Finally: Have Fun!

Seriously have fun. This is meant to be a hobby and enjoyable. Also you're more creative if you're happy...

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

This is the first homework of the course. Each lesson from now will have some action steps to complete relevant to the days topic.

As today was about brainstorming and freewriting you'll be doing some brainstorming and freewriting.

-)] Do a 20 - 50 list length brainstorm on why you love roleplaying
-)] Do a 15 minute freewrite on 'why do I love roleplaying?'

If you become stuck ask yourself a question, or two, from the following list:

-)] What moments stand out to me right now?
-)] What moments did I dread?
-)] What moments did I love?
-)] What kind of characters did I love to play?
-)] What kind of characters did I end up playing all the time?
-)] What was my favourite character ever and why?
-)] What was my most enjoyable game I played in and why?

Extra Credit

Use some methods in *Getting Stuck* to help you double the length of a brainstorm you're stuck on.

DAY 3 – CREATIVE TOOLS: ELIMINATION

Today's lesson builds upon yesterday's lesson. In fact, each lesson in this course builds upon the lessons before it. So please make sure you've completed the previous lessons before you carry on.

The creative tool we're talking about today is not a tool in its own right. It's a tool which helps you make sense of brainstorming lists and chaotic freewrites. Today's work is built within the lesson rather than being at the end. Get yesterday's work (you have done it haven't you?) and get ready.

Passages to Lists

There are a few different ways to use freewrite passages:

1. take out key ideas and themes into a different document,
2. do a short paragraph analysis at the end, top, or in a different document,
3. leave it as it is, or
4. list the keywords and key phases.

It's this latter method we're doing today. Though you can try some of the other methods too.

Go through your freewrite and highlight everything which is important to the question. (Which was: why do I enjoy roleplaying?).

Then take every highlight and put it into a different document as a list.

You should have 2 lists to complete the next step with.

Elimination

Yesterday when brainstorming I told you not to censor yourself. This is when you go through your list and take out all those 'stupid' or 'off topic' answers.

Go through your list and cross out (with a single line) all the ideas which:

-) you don't care about,
-) are repeated,
-) don't make sense,
-) are off tangent, or
-) are weak compared to the other ideas.

You might not want to do this with the freewrite but do it anyway. The more you go over your lists the more they sink in. Also you never know you might get more ideas and if you do put them in.

Go over the list again and look at the ideas. If ideas are related to each other you can either pick one and delete the others or combine them to form a single idea.

You can either leave the list as is or you can take it a step further. Tomorrow you'll look at this further step.

DAY 4 – CREATIVE TOOLS: CLUSTER MAPS

Welcome back to the last day of looking at creative tools. Before we get into today's lesson I want you to look at the 2 lists you created yesterday.

Cluster Maps

Everyone has different ways to make sense of things. I find cluster maps the most useful method to make sense of a dry list of ideas. Sometimes just doing the list is important. Sometimes, though, a cluster map is essential.

Today, instead lots of text, you've got a short video to show you how to do a cluster map.

Before you watch the video there's a couple of points I want to bring up. 1st I'm using a program called *Scapple*; it's a multi-platform program and makes creating cluster maps easier. I recommend you trying it out L&L gives you a generous 30 non-consecutive day trial period.

Scapple's URL: <http://www.literatureandlatte.com/trial.php?displayMode=scapple>

Rather than doing a long list I've taken 10 items from my freewrite list and used them.

There's 2 more things I want to say. Items linked together with a line are linked but they may not be related. Related items are close together but they don't have to be linked.

Watch the video here <https://vimeo.com/155945474>

The password you need to watch the video is: **FtF30**

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Compare the freewriting and brainstorming list
2. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What list seems better to you?
 - b. What method did you enjoy the most?
 - c. Will you do both methods or only one?
 - d. What method will you pick to do the most?
 - e. Combine the 2 lists and use the eliminate tool
3. Create a cluster map of your megalist

DAY 5 – DISCOVER YOUR IDEAL ROLEPLAYING CAMPAIGN

Some advantages of solo roleplaying are:

-) the ability to have a great story
-) a focus upon a single character.
-) play when and where you like (or can).

A final advantage, the one you'll be looking at today, is you can craft your ideal roleplaying experience: campaign, adventures, sessions, and everything else.

You build a solo campaign around *you*. You're both the GM and PC. All the wants and needs of the game are yours to pick. Anything you don't want to use you don't have to use. There's no compromise needed.

Today you'll be looking at what you want out of solo roleplaying. You've already started upon this path while doing the Creative Tools work ending with the cluster map you created yesterday.

The most important thing to understand is you don't have to do what you don't want to do. Do things you want to do. That means you can ignore any advice anyone (yes, even me) gives you.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Here are some questions for you to answer:
 - a. What type of character have you always wanted to play?
 - b. What genre of games do you love playing?
 - c. What ruleset do you want to try?
 - d. What setting would you love to try?
 - e. What issues, or themes, would you love to roleplay?
 - f. What do you love about the stories you love?
 - g. What do you hate when it comes up in social roleplaying?
 - h. What do you dislike when it comes up in social roleplaying?
2. Answer the above questions with a single sentence or paragraph. Dare yourself to go further and brainstorm and/or freewrite the answers instead.
3. Use the answer above to write a scene in which your ideal character does something cool in a setting you love in.
4. Once you've done that think back over the scene and see what you enjoyed most about the scene, write it down.

Extra Credit

If you have *Guide to Playing Alone* look over the *Player Type* section. Do a freewrite about what type of player type you are and how you can use that knowledge in your roleplaying games.

Complete eliminate and create a cluster map on any brainstorms and freewrites you complete today.

DAY 6 – GM & PC TURNS

It's time to move away from the overview and into the meat of solo roleplaying.

Today you're going to look at the concept of Turns. This topic is a deceptively deep framework.

In brief turns operate like social roleplaying: the GM sets the scene and you say how your PC reacts to the set scene. The GM then responds to your comments, questions, and actions. Then you respond to the unfolding situation. An important thing to keep in mind is each turn should keep the story moving forward.

It's as simple as that yet there is more to it than that.

Don't worry you'll get more information about both GM and PC turns in the coming days.

This framework also helps when you want to have GM led or PC led games.

GM led games are when you act as a GM and lead an automated PC, and other NPCs, through an adventure. To some solo roleplayers this is the holy grail. For me it's not. I solo roleplay to get into the story. The best way for that to occur is through playing an adventure through the eyes of a PC. This is the other type: you're a PC and automate some of the duties of the GM.

This course focuses upon PC led games. Not only is this because I believe it produces the most enjoyable adventures. The fact is it's easier and most of the solo roleplaying tools available support this model.

Dean Salisbury, whom you'll meet below, will be your guide through some of the upcoming examples.

GM: It was a small pub, barely a window and a door wide. The door closed and the lights dimmed. In the distance a crowd of giggling female students passed by.

PC: It looked closed, unwelcoming, and grotty. A type of pub that Dean seemed to spend so much time in. Why did bad guys never go to nice pubs? He pushed opened the door.

GM: The bar was quiet, not just quiet, almost dead. Behind the counter stood a young, and grumpy, barman staring into space.

PC: Dean glanced around at the four inhabitants of the bar. It was much too quiet for a city centre on student night. She was there, like he'd been told she would be.

GM: She was sitting in the darkness of the corner. A beautiful lass, with long black hair, over a bright summer dress. She was staring at the bottle of Diet Pepsi she was cradling in her hands.

PC: He glanced around and saw no signs of trouble. Everyone seemed to be in their own little world. Dean looked back at the girl: another time, another place she'd be a pleasure to meet. If she was human. Tonight, though, was business. His hand brushed his pocket checking for the comforting weight of the knife. He walked over to her.

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Day 6 – GM & PC Turns

GM: The girl looked up as Dean reached her. ‘So you’ve come for me then. I heard you were after me.’

PC: ‘I know it wasn’t you. I just want to know who it was.’

GM: She looked at Dean, ‘I can’t tell you. You may kill be but it’s nothing as to what he’ll do to me if he knew I talked.’

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Day 6 – GM & PC Turns

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

An easy one today. Read the above example and continue it by a couple more PC and GM turns.

DAY 7 – GM TURNS

Welcome to the end of the 1st week of Frustration to Freedom: 30 Days to Legendary Solo Roleplaying Adventures. Congratulations! I hope by now solo roleplaying is becoming more understandable. By the end of the next week you'll have everything in place for you to be able to solo roleplay. From now onwards you'll be adding tools and other knowledge to add depth to your games. To raise your games from okay to legendary.

Think back to your social roleplaying experiences what did the GM control for you in the game? Go ahead and write some things done they done for the game.

Your answers would include these (and much more):

-) NPCs
-) Monsters
-) Scenery
-) Weather
-) Combat
-) Skill Outcomes

Rather than giving you a long list I'll cut the list down. The GM controlled these 3 elements:

1. Action
2. Dialogue
3. Description

Everything occurring during the GM turn happens outside the PC.

To make it easy to know what happens during the GM turn there are a couple of guidelines.

These guidelines are:

-) Everything occurring outside the PC.
-) Any concrete details which 2 characters standing next to each other would both be able to sense.
-) Anything which your PC can sense by their senses:
 - sight,
 - sound,
 - touch,
 - taste,
 - smell, and
 - any extra-sensory senses gained by magic, psionics, racial abilities, or superheroic powers.
-) The outcomes of any skill or combat rolls.

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Day 7 – GM Turns

When describing things there's one extra step: look through the lens of your character. If walking down a street and your character comes across a group of kids what would your character notice? If your character would notice what kids are wearing, then describe the clothes on the kids. If the kids are a nuisance, then have him moan a bit. If your character would look for parental figures, then mention scanning the area for them.

Back to Dean. After the talk with the vampire in the bar Dean heads back to his car through a park:

The street lights were hidden by the trees that lined the path. The light reflected from the damp tarmac pavement. Shadows chased the light across the ground where the wind rustled and moved the branches. Other than the rustling branches it was silent. The damp in the air gave the wind a chilly bite like that of death.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Other characters notice other things. Rewrite the example from Dean above to take into account what other characters might see.

To give you a start think about:

1. An elderly man whose wife passed away a year ago. When alive they always sat on a particular bench in the park.
2. A semi-drunk woman who is on her way home walks through the park. She's half way through the park before realizing she should've gone around.

DAY 8 – PC TURNS

There was a small point I mentioned at the end yesterday but want to point out again: As you're seeing the world through the PC everything within the GM Turn should be seen through their senses.

Look at the Action Steps from yesterday. Did you frame the descriptions through the character's senses, emotions, and/or thoughts?

If you haven't go back and try again. See if things get more interesting and deeper.

Within a PC turn there are only a few things which can happen.

In order these are:

-) Instinctive Action
-) Feel Emotions
-) Think Thoughts, and
-) Take Action or Speak

Social roleplaying games focus upon 1 and 4. However solo roleplaying is able to get into 2 and 3. These colour your adventures and making them deeper and more enjoyable. So please don't overlook them in your games.

If you have noticed there is no mention of outcomes. If Dean rolls to see if he can spot if anyone is in the park: the roll occurs in the PC turn. The result of the roll (success or failure) occurs in the GM turn.

BONUS LESSON: SKILLS AND COMBAT

I mentioned that skills and combat rolls are covered by the PC Turn but the outcomes are covered by the GM Turn. An easy way to think about it would be while the dice is in your hands your PC has control. When the dice leaves your hand it's up to 'fate'.

Once the dice land, however, the GM decides what the number means to the character.

Depending upon your game system a failed roll could mean anything. Let's say Dean is fighting a vampire and he fails an attack roll it could mean:

-) Dean misses.
-) Dean went to attack but pulled back because of the vampire attacking.
-) The vampire dodged Dean's attack.
-) The vampire parried Dean's attack.
-) The vampire blocked Dean's attack.
-) Dean hits the vampire's clothes.
-) Dean stumbles.
-) Dean hits the target but doesn't cause any damage.

For whatever reason Dean's attack doesn't 'work' as it should do.

A failed spot roll, for another example, could mean Dean sees the vampire but doesn't notice them. (I'm guilty of this: I was sure the mayonnaise wasn't in the fridge but my wife came in and grabbed it from a place near the front. A really obvious place near the front.)

It's the GM Turn which decides the outcome of any roll. The rolls which affect the PC's body (fear checks for example) treat the body as if it was an external opponent. In that case the mind wants X to happen but if the roll fails the body does Y instead.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Do 2 of the following:

1. Go over the example in Day 6 and your addition and add more relevant detail to the PC turn.
2. Go to the example in Day 7 and add a couple of GM and PC turns which follow.
3. Add some following PC turns to your Action Steps from Day 7.

Extra Credit

There are times when skill results can occur within the PC turn. How many different skill types can you find?

DAY 9 – USING GM & PC TURNS

By now you know everything you need to know about GM and PC turns. Today you're going to see how you put them into action in your adventures.

You'll have to complete today's lesson as you go along.

First get a copy of your favourite book. You'll see the author doing something like GM & PC turns to drive the story forward. The character does something and the 'world' responds and so on. It's subtle which is why most miss it but it brings clarity.

It is this clarity you want to bring to your games.

When you go through the book you might notice there are moments when no action is going on. These 'nothing' moments are important. They add colour, increase immersion, and allow you to understand the world better. These moments are moments: they don't last long and the story kicks off shortly.

Let's go back to solo roleplaying. It's best to start with a GM turn to set up what's happening. If it's a moment of colour and world deepening still make the character react to it.

For example, Dean knows there are vampires and can tell them apart from normal humans. If Dean spots a vampire being open about his status and does nothing, you'll deduce vampires are common and not all are evil. However, if Dean reacts with shock his reaction shows something else about him, the location, or the world.

To best understand this do some GM and PC turns about colour building. Do a short scene (a couple of back and forth GM / PC turns) for the following:

1. A vampire acting openly in a world where those creatures hide themselves.
2. A vampire who's ashamed of their status when vampires act openly.
3. A werewolf shifting into its human form when Dean has never heard of werewolves outside of folklore.
4. The first time Dean saw a ghost who can take actions (and talk) rather than being mindless.

Yesterday you learnt skill results occur within the GM turn. To reinforce this, do a short scene for each of the following:

1. Dean thinking there's a person trailing him but there isn't (a failed spot roll).
2. Dean spotting a vampire hiding waiting to ambush him (a successful spot roll).
3. Dean sweet talking a waitress into giving him some information (a successful investigation or flirting roll).

Take one of the short scenes and use it to drive a story forward for a few more GM and PC turns.

DAY 10 – SOLO ENGINES: INTRODUCTION

On day 1 I talked about how you as a player are both the PC and the GM. Over the last 4 days you've seen how you control both sides of the roleplaying formula. The problem is it's hard to surprise yourself: it can, and does happen, but it's hard. To make surprises and random events occurring you need a solo engine.

In fact, a solo engine is what makes solo roleplaying feasible and enjoyable.

All solo engines have a way of answering yes/no questions.

They might also have:

-)] Outlier answers: yes, and; yes, but; no, and furthermore.
-)] Odds scale: making yes or no more or less common.
-)] Random event generation: when something changes the direction of the scene, adventure, or campaign.

Solo Engines

There are 4 main solo engines:

Mythic GME: The gold standard in solo engines.

The Covetous Poet's Adventure Creator and Solo GM Guidebook: It's often called CP or Cov. Poet. Lots of good content inside its covers but the solo engine is shallow.

CRGE: Conjectural Roleplaying Gamesmaster Emulator: Quick and simple system with an interesting twist.

Fate Solo: My solo engine designed for use with Fate. It's a small, lightweight, and quick system (much like Fate).

Questions

The most important thing to remember when asking a question of the solo engine is you have to phrase the question to have a yes or no answer.

There are 4 more factors you've got to keep in mind when you ask questions.

1. Leading questions
2. Elements involved
3. Depth of questions
4. Amount of questions asked

Today you'll be looking at the first 2 factors. The next 2 factors will be covered tomorrow.

Leading Questions

Leading questions can be both bad and good.

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Day 10 – Solo Engines: Introduction

Leading questions are when you ask a question and set odds to almost guarantee for it to happen. Instead of doing that if you want something to happen just make it happen. You're the GM after all. However if you would like something to happen and are not sure if it should happen then feel free to ask. Just make sure you stick with the answer (even if it goes against what you want to happen). Then again if you're disappointed with the result add it in anyway...

Elements Involved

On day 7 I introduced the 3 main elements which occur during a GM Turn. When you ask a question of the solo engine make sure you focus the question around those 3 elements. It'll make it easier for you, as a GM, to answer and move the story onwards.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Use this simple Solo Engine.

Roll on the table for each question. If something is unlikely to occur roll 2d8 and pick the lowest dice. If something is likely to occur roll 2d8 and pick the highest dice. If the odds are about even roll 1d8.

1	No and something bad occurs
2-3	No
4	No but something good occurs
5	Yes but something bad occurs
6-7	Yes
8	Yes and something good occurs

Using a starting point of either Dean's walk in the park or his time in the pub ask (and answer):

-) 2 questions to drive the story forward.
-) A leading question.
-) A question for each of the 3 elements.

Extra Credit

Pick a solo engine for you to use.

In these lessons I'll give you the essential information about how to use solo engines. If you want to know more, see some detailed examples, and have a recap about GM and PC turns read *Master Solo Engines*.

DAY 11 – SOLO ENGINES: SHALLOW VS. DEEP QUESTIONS

Solo engines are an important part of solo roleplaying. These 2 days of lessons should help you get more confidence in asking questions. It is often said you should pick the 1st answer you come up with. There are times when you should. I believe though most times you should go further. When answering questions do a 5-10 item brainstorm and pick, or combine and create, the answer which makes you intrigued.

The best way though is to experiment and see how things go. Try asking different questions and even going against the guidelines from these 2 days. Also try with different ways of answering the questions.

Yesterday you learnt the basics of asking solo engine questions. Today you're going to learn some more advanced topics.

Depth of Questions

All questions you ask of the solo engine fit on a spectrum of depth.

On one end are the shallow questions where not much changes in response to the answer. On the other end are the deep questions which change everything: the adventure, the campaign, or the world.

Shallow questions go around an issue adding depth and interest to your story. They slow the adventure down and add interesting layers of interest for you to explore.

Deep questions cut straight at the core of the issue. They speed the game up, clarify complicated issues, and solve mysteries.

Amount of Questions Asked

How many times in your life have you ever acted with full information?

Why then should your PC know everything before they act?

To keep this truth alive you should always ask the least amount of questions you need to get on with the adventure.

A rule of thumb to keep in mind is the deeper the question the fewer you should ask. Deep questions should be asked alone. Shallow questions can be asked in conjunction with each other (no more than 5 or 6).

Another rule of thumb: if you jump from shallow questions to a deep question do some roleplaying first.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Continuing from your work from yesterday ask (and answer):

1. A shallow question
2. A middling question
3. A deep question
4. d4+1 shallow questions in conjunction

DAY 12 - RULESETS

This will be a short lesson today.

Short but important.

It's to do with the ruleset you're going to be playing with soon.

For quick and easy solo roleplaying you should use a ruleset which fulfills these guidelines:

-) Generic
-) Simple
-) Fast
-) Low Bookkeeping

To help you know where to start to look within the vast realms of rulesets start with these:

-) Basic Roleplaying
-) D6 System
-) Fate
-) Fate Accelerated
-) HeroQuest
-) Lester Smith's D6XD6
-) Mythic (the RPG not the GME)
-) Risus
-) Savage Worlds
-) TWERPS

As these are guidelines, the choice of ruleset is yours. If you don't want to use any of the above rulesets it's okay. To help you narrow your choice answer the following questions:

1. What do you want out of your rule set? (Rules heavy vs. Rules light, Narrative vs. Simulationist)
2. What rulesets do you want to use?
3. What rulesets have you enjoyed playing in the past?
4. What rulesets have you been recommended to try?
5. Are there any rulesets which look interesting?
6. Are there any rulesets you've got to test?
7. Are there any rulesets you want to learn?
8. Is there a ruleset everyone's talking about you want to try?

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Research the recommended rulesets and see which ones sound interesting. Add them to a list.

Answer the questions and add any rulesets which you come up with to the list.

DAY 13 – JOURNAL STYLES

So far in this course you've been writing things down. There is a reason for this; writing is a common medium which is easy to do. Writing isn't the only method of recording your story.

Instead of journaling a story by writing you could:

-) Draw
-) Talk
-) Internal Visualisation

This course, however, focuses upon written journaling. There's lots of reasons for this for a start it's the 'default' way of solo roleplaying. It's also easy, adaptable, and requires the least amount of learning.

Within writing there are 3 methods of journaling:

1. Story
2. Review
3. Notes

Story

This is what you've been doing so far in this course: writing a story out in full as if it were a novel. In some ways this is the best method. This is because you can write / type quite fast and can keep up with the thoughts in your head. You can also go deeper and explore more. It also produces the fullest record of what's going on.

Some people may not like this: they feel it's too much like writing a novel or short story. If you're one of them try doing it another way like one of the options below or use an option from above.

Review

A review is when you create a:

-) log,
-) journal, or
-) diary

Instead of a moment of moment record of the story you take highlights and include them into a review. Before starting a review figure out what type of review you'll like to do and who's writing it. You could also brainstorm and/or freewrite to discover more. Use these thoughts to build the foundations of your review.

This method can be linked with visualisation. Once you've done enough roleplaying, or you get to a good point, you're able to create a written note.

Notes

A story records every relevant detail and a review provides an overview. Both of them still contain the personality of the character. Notes removes all personality out of the story and records the events which occur.

As notes is different from story and review you can use notes to show *how* your story progressed.

Notes can be confusing so here's an example. Before we get to the example let's move the story forward a bit. Dean has found a vampire lair. He's going in to have a look.

Example:

Sk:+Sn

+V:W

Sk:-Sn

-V:B

Tr

Translation:

Dean sneaks closer to the lair, he gets closer, fights a vampire and is wounded. He then tries to get closer but he's spotted. The vampire beats Dean and takes him into a room where he's trapped.

To create your own note system think of all the things you think are important to you and the ruleset. Make a note of how you can record them in as short a space as possible. Then use it. In use if you find you need to add things add them. After a while of using your note system review it and see what you like and don't like.

Notes also link in with tomorrow's lesson...

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Figure out what method of journaling your adventures you want to try out.
2. Using the basic Solo Engine included in the course, or your own pick, try out at least 2 different methods over the course of a scene.

DAY 14 – RECORDING INTERACTIONS

You've made it to the end of week 2, congratulations!

Last week you learnt a framework and techniques to make solo roleplaying easier. You also started choosing a ruleset, a solo engine, and how to record your adventures. From now you'll add tools to make your adventures more random, easier, and quicker. In fact tomorrow you'll learn a method of creating an adventure. The day after you get to roll some dice and solo roleplay.

Before then though there's one last thing to look at: recording your game interactions.

Yesterday you learnt about taking notes. Most of those notes were game interactions with some colour added.

Game interactions include interactions with:

-) solo engine,
-) random content generation, and, of course,
-) the ruleset.

Levels of Detail

These recordings are in addition to the journal style you picked last time (if you didn't pick Notes). There's a continuum of depth of recording these interactions. It's easier, though, to split them into 4 levels.

The 4 levels of detail are:

1. None: you don't record any interactions.
2. Brief: you take only the most important interactions.
3. Detailed: all interactions which impact the adventure get recorded.
4. Complete: every interaction, roll, and outcome gets noted. The working outs can also be recorded.

Methods of Recording the Detail

Once you know how much detail you want to record you've got to choose where you record the details.

The 5 ways of recording the detail are:

1. Alongside
2. Inline
3. Footnote
4. Separated
5. Repeated

Alongside

You have a table or half an open book. On one side are the notes; on the other side is where the journaling occurs.

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Day 14 – Recording Interactions

Inline

Journaling breaks when the notes get recorded.

Footnote

A mark is made where the action occurs and the notes get inserted at the end of journal page.

Separated

A mark is put where the action occurs. The notes get written in a separate document or at the end of the journal.

Repeated

Either the notes, or the journal, is written first. Afterwards the other occurs.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Figure out what level of detail you want to record.
2. Then figure out how you want to record the details.

Extra Credit

1. Experiment using different levels of interaction, recording, and ways of recording the interaction.

DAY 15 – RATS IN THE BASEMENT

You are now half way through the course. It's also almost time for your first adventure. Before then you're going to be learning an adventure generating method.

Getting going in solo roleplaying or creating an adventure, even if you're not stuck, is hard. Today's lesson is a method to create a defined adventure which is easy to set up and know when you've finished. To do this think about computer RPGs: there's often an introductory adventure which sets the game in motion. This is the Rats in the Basement mission. And this makes a perfect introduction to solo roleplaying.

A Rats in the Basement adventure has 4 stages:

Stage 1: Getting the adventure

Your PC is called, or stumbles upon, a situation where they're able to help out. It doesn't have to be the shopkeeper who calls the adventure. In fact a passerby or flyer can lead the PC to the shopkeeper.

Stage 2: Tooling up

This is where your PC gets the tools needed for them to complete the adventure.

Stage 3: Completing the mission

This can be the longest part of the adventure. This is where your PC enters the basement and faces the rats.

Step 4: Getting the reward

Your PC gets their reward for completing the adventure.

Creating the Adventure

To create a Rats in the Basement adventure you need 7 bits of information:

1. The Setting
2. The Basement
3. The Rats
4. The Shopkeeper
5. The Tools
6. The Deadline
7. The Reward

The Setting

The first step is to choose a genre and setting.

You should already have an idea for this as you've done your cluster map at the start of the course.

The Basement

The basement is a smallish enclosed space. It defines and contains the 'win' conditions for the adventure.

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Day 15 – Rats in the Basement

The basement needs to make sense in your setting.

The Rats

Rats are normally simple enemies who you can overcome without much effort. But rats don't have to be bad: they can be good, or be inanimate objects.

In a traditional adventure you kill the rats though you could also:

-) trap,
-) round up,
-) rescue,
-) steal,
-) spy upon,
-) convince,
-) guide,
-) map the location of,
-) toggle,
-) scare, or
-) chase away the rats.

The Shopkeeper (Deadline and Reward)

The shopkeeper needs help because the rats are eating, destroying, or keeping them from their stock.

Your shopkeeper can be anyone, or anything, which sets the adventure off. They also set a deadline and your reward.

The deadline is the time when something occurs which makes your PC win or lose the adventure. It could be by the time the stock is eaten, before a hostage gets executed, or when the town guards appear.

The reward can be anything from respect and thanks to becoming heir to the kingdom! Make sure the reward is relative with what your PC had to complete and who the shopkeeper is.

The Tools

You don't always need to tool up. It's here to aid in NPC interaction. So feel free to ignore this step.

Tools you can get include:

-) equipment,
-) information, or
-) help

Tools don't have to be NPC related. Your PC can use the tools section to find out more information by using skills. Skills like research, tracking, or sneaking.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Using your cluster map as a basis brainstorm and/or freewrite settings.
2. Once you know your setting brainstorm (or freewrite if stated):
3. 10 to 20 different types of basements.
4. 10 to 20 different rats to infest your basement.
5. Freewrite to discover a method to rid the basement of the rats.
6. 5 to 10 shopkeepers who need your help.
7. 5 to 10 reasons why they need your help.
8. Freewrite what rewards you can get.
9. 5 to 10 different deadlines.
10. Put your chosen answers from above into this sentence:

In a 'setting', 'rats', are in 'basement' and 'shopkeeper' needs them 'method of removal' before 'deadline' you need 'tool' to complete the adventure and gain your 'reward'.

Extra Credit

Create another adventure sentence, or two, either based on the lists you created for the first sentence or using fresh lists.

DAY 16 – YOUR FIRST ADVENTURE

This is what you've been waiting for! Today you get to try solo roleplaying for the first time.

No real lesson today just solo roleplaying...

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Complete the following sentence, alter the words within the speech marks, and write it down to help you know what you're doing right now.

'solo engine' and 'I' will 'work together' to create a story using 'ruleset'.

2. Below that write the sentence you wrote yesterday from your Rats in the Basement.
3. Keep these sentences safe as you'll need them later.
4. Now get solo roleplaying!
5. When you've finished rate the adventure out of 5 and keep this with the sentences and your journaling.

Extra Credit

Create another adventure sentence, or two, either based on the lists you created for the first sentence or using fresh lists.

DAY 17 – EXPERIMENTATION

Throughout this course you've been hearing about experimenting.

I want you to know it's fine to experiment. It's fine for something to fail. It's fine to 'waste' time on a 'mistake'.

What's not fine is doing what you're doing just because you've always done it that way. If you've thought about things, explored your options, but decided not to change: that's fine. Once you've changed things compare them. Have things got better or worse; faster or slower; more confusing; or more interesting.

To do this:

Make a note of what you're changing.

It's best to change a single element, or at most 2 or 3 elements, each time.

After you've finished rate your adventures either as a whole or split into different elements. These elements could include:

-) speed of play,
-) ease of play,
-) immersiveness,
-) enjoyment,
-) surprise,
-) depth.

Once you've got at least 2 adventures (or sessions) to compare, compare them. See what was better than the other. In the future do more of what you love and enjoy and less of what you dislike.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Have another adventure!
2. Before you start change some, if not all, of the following:
 - solo engine,
 - ruleset,
 - PC,
3. method of removing the rats,
4. journaling style, and/or
5. recording method.
6. This is a special case and so you can change lots of elements. This major change should highlight the differences between the adventures as easy as possible. In a normal situation it's best to change a couple of elements per adventure.
7. Make a note of what you've changed before you start.
8. After you finish rate the adventure out of 5.
9. Do a quick comparison to see which one you'll rather base future games off of.
10. Write this down ready for you next adventure.

Extra Credit

1. Look over the past lessons and see what options you want to change either in this adventure or future ones.
2. Make a list to try out in the future.

DAY 18 – TOOLS: INTRODUCTION

The solo roleplaying you've done in the last couple of days can be better, deeper, and more enjoyable.

This is because you've been playing 'shallow' games using the bare minimum of resources required to play. These resources are your creativity/imagination, a solo engine, and a ruleset. Now you're going to go explore tools to make your games deeper, faster, and smoother. Making them better and easier in the process.

Tools types are split into 4 areas:

1. Rules
2. Random Content Generators
3. Source Material
4. Other Tools

Before you get an overview of the types of tools you need to know any tool has a certain reach. A reach indicates how relevant a tool is in your adventure.

The 4 reaches are:

1. *Specific*: linked to a specific world.
2. *Contemporary*: linked to the played genre.
3. *Generic*: can be used for any genre.
4. *Different*: not linked to the genre in use.

Just because the reach doesn't match doesn't mean a tool is useless. It could be an even more powerful because it forces you to make sense of it in your game. Brainstorming is your friend here!

Rules

There are 3 types of tools:

1. Rulesets
2. Solo Engines
3. Drivers

You already know about rulesets and solo engines.

Drivers are optional: they frame and drive adventures. Some solo roleplayers love using drivers, others don't. *Rats in the Basement* is a basic driver. In this course you'll not hear anything else about drivers: unless you read the Extra Credit section.

Random Content Generators

These create random words, ideas, phrases, or images to help your brain dive off in new and interesting directions. You'll find out more about them later in the course.

Source Material

Source material is anything which tells you about a setting.

These include (but not limited to):

-) RPG source books
-) Artwork
-) Fiction books
-) Non-fiction books
-) Movies
-) TV series
-) Ideas
-) Dreams
-) Maps
-) Freewrites
-) Brainstorms
-) The world around you
-) A place you've been
-) Somewhere you want to go
-) An inspirational city

Other Tools

These are tools which don't fit in any of the above categories. Most of these tools will fall under the label of being a game aid (GM screen, counters, cheat sheets). Some other tools also go into this category. Tomorrow you'll start to explore helpful tools which fall into this much overlooked area.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Go through your RPG library and start to categorise your tools into the above buckets.

Extra Credit

1. Put your tools into the different reaches within the buckets.

DAY 19 – TOOLS: CHEAT SHEETS

Instead of the standard tools found in a roleplayer's library you're going to look at often overlooked tools today. These tools will help you in different areas of your solo roleplaying.

Cheat Sheets

The first of these tools are cheat sheets. An example of such are GM screens.

Cheat sheets holds details needed for your games easy to hand speeding up access to them. In fact cheat sheets hold rules, setting rules, and setting details. Other cheat sheets keep track of existing NPCs or NPCs your PC has yet to meet.

There are 7 kinds of cheat sheets:

1. Rules Holder
2. Fact Holder
3. Description Holder
4. Character Holder
5. Location Holder
6. Setting Detail Holder
7. Miscellaneous Information Holder

There is another type of cheat sheets: lists.

Lists

Lists contain short lengths of information, often lots of them, but little other information. The most common type of lists are name lists.

You can also have lists of:

-) NPCs
-) Locations
-) Plot Threads
-) Races
-) Spaceships Classes
-) Character Traits

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Today you're going to make a couple of cheat sheets. Or, at the least, templates to help you make cheat sheets in the future.

1. The first thing you need to know is why you're making the cheat sheet. What kind of cheat sheet do you want to make?
2. What is your ideal outcome of using the cheat sheet?
3. What type of information do you want on your cheat sheet?
4. Do you want your cheat sheet to be a brief overview or a detailed information holder?
5. Does the information on the cheat sheet link to another cheat sheet to go into more detail?
6. Does the cheat sheet contain full length text, abbreviations, pictures, charts, tables, or something else?
7. Create a series of lists for male, female, and family/clan names for each of the major cultures which occur in your future games.
8. Write a list of lists which you think you'll find useful in your upcoming campaign.

DAY 20 – TOOLS: CHECKLISTS

Checklists are powerful tools. It's why a pilot flying a plane seldom has any major problems whilst taking off despite having so much to do. It's also why giant buildings go up fast and stay up.

A good quality checklist:

-) Focuses on a certain task.
-) Produces a repeatable list to do every time a situation occurs.
-) Keeps steps in a certain order.
-) Makes things hard to forget.
-) Makes sure things flow well.

Checklists are useful for rules which rely on many steps to complete. Most of your checklists will be for your ruleset. You will use some checklists when you create a PC, major NPCs, a location for your game, or an adventure.

Look back at Day 15 (*Rats in the Basement*). I provided an 8 step checklist in how to create an adventure. I took a process and streamlined it into 8 simple steps. These steps help you start an adventure, play it, and know you've finished the adventure.

Some Drivers (whoops talked about them again) are a flexible checklist to help shape an adventure.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Study the Rats in the Basement checklist and see if you can change it to make it better for you.
2. Find a simple rule in your ruleset, or solo engine, and create a checklist for it.
3. Find a complicated rule in your ruleset, or solo engine, and create a checklist for you to use.

DAY 21 – RANDOM CONTENT GENERATORS

Right back on Day 1 you learnt that Solo Engines and Random Content Generators take some GM control out of your hands. You're living in a great time for roleplaying randomness: there's lots of publishers selling random content generators. There are also lots of fans producing, and sharing, their own random content generators. There are entire books dedicated to random content generators. You can also find them within books as chapters or sidebars.

There are times in your games when something boring and normal stereotypical behaviour occurs. These times can include people like:

-) overconfident pilots,
-) annoying righteous paladins, or
-) scruffy loin-cloth wearing barbarians.

It's in these situations when random content generators are useful. They force you to stop making predictable choices by making your brain look at things in a new way. They do this by allowing something outside your mind to influence your thinking and your game.

For all their good points random content generators also have their weaknesses. By design they're limited. Even the most expansive only have 100 options; maybe even up to 1,000 for mega lists. It's also hard for them to fit your game, or your vision for your game, exactly. Maybe you want a pulp sci-fi game but the random content generators out there focus on hard sci-fi only. It's also possible they slow your game down as you find yourself rolling little details or stopping to figure out how to use the result in your game.

For all their problems for solo roleplaying random content generators are worth it.

Types

There are 3 types of random content generators:

1. Card
2. Computer
3. Dice

Card based random content generators is when you pull a random card out of a deck of cards and use what's on said card. These are not so common, adaptable, or flexible compared to dice based generators. However they're able to provide more information quicker than dice based generators.

Computer based random content generators cover a vast field. They can be anything from a simple list based generator to a generator which creates universes and every world within it...

In this course you'll be looking at dice based random content generators. The reason being is they are more adaptable and flexible than card based generators. You can alter, expand, contract, or combine

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Day 21 – Random Content Generators

them. (These topics will be coming over the next couple of days.) You can even create your own with a minimum of effort.

Dice based random content generators come in 5 flavours:

1. *Images*: the face of the dice contains an image, or text, to describe what's happening.
2. *Lists*: a straight list of a certain length.
3. *Location*: the result depends upon where the dice lands.
4. *Multi-Lists*: a random content generator which requires multiple rolls to create something.
5. *Table*: requires 2 dice to tell you the result; one along the top and the other along the side.

How to Use Random Content Generators

There are 2 major ways to use a dice based random generator:

1. Rolling
2. Picking

Rolling is the 'default' way of using random content generators. It is something I recommend to do as it forces you to think. Something great to do.

If something stands out from the list, either before or after you roll, feel free to pick it. Solo roleplaying is a hobby and it's meant to be fun. When using the random content generator and something seems fun or interesting pick it and go for it!

With the result you've got you can either use the first answer that comes into your head.

Better yet brainstorm 5 to 10 answers and then pick one of them (or combine a couple of them together).

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Take a moment from your Rats in the Basement game.
2. Look through the random content generators you have and pick one to use which is relevant.
3. Roll a result and put the first thought into your head into the adventure.
4. Pick a result, brainstorm 10 options, and put your favourite option into the adventure.

I used 10 as a long answer to show you how good this method can be. If it takes too long for you to get 10 results when you start solo roleplaying use 5.

DAY 22 – RANDOM CONTENT GENERATORS: CUSTOMISING

Welcome to the 1st day of advanced random content generator training. Yesterday you learnt the basics. Today you're going to look at customising random content generators. The advantage is you can change a good enough generator into a great generator which works for you. The problem is you can take elements out which force you to think harder to fit them into your game. You'll also normalise things to your way of thinking.

There are 6 ways of customising a random content generator:

1. *Adding*: items get added to the generator.
2. *Altering*: changing the odds of an outcome occurring relative to other outcomes.
3. *Changing*: swapping out a items with other items.
4. *Combining*: taking 2 random content generator lists and putting them together.
5. *Removing*: taking out items which don't work for you or your game.
6. *Splitting*: a random content generator gets split into multiple parts.

Most of the above should be clear. There's one which deserves a longer explanation: splitting.

Splitting

There are 2 ways of splitting.

1. Take a list and split it into 2, or more, lists. This can be useful if you want a focused list.
2. Take a long and detailed item and splitting it into its component parts.

An example for the second method of splitting is if a random content generator gives a detail NPC description: Tommy is a young man who wears scruffy jeans and t-shirt; he's walking down the street and is carrying a bag over his shoulder.

This could be split into 7 parts:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Style
5. Clothes
6. What Doing
7. Items Carrying

The advantage of this is you've got a framework which you can use to build more descriptions with ease. Of course you can then add or combine to these lists to get a much larger sample size.

You can then alter this modern NPC generator to fit any genre. You're able to do this by changing lists and adding elements (like race).

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Get 7 of your favourite random content generators.
 -) 1st RCG add items to it.
 -) 2nd RCG change items in it.
 -) 3rd RCG alter the odds of outcomes occurring.
 -) 4th and 5th combine them. If you cannot combine them find a RCG which matches 1 of them and then combine them.
 -) 6th RCG remove items from it.
 -) 7th RCG split it: if the one you got cannot be split look for one that can and split that one.
2. Try 2 of the RCGs from above, both the before and after, in 2 different scenes. (One scene uses the before the other after.) What's the difference in results?

DAY 23 – RANDOM CONTENT GENERATORS: CREATING

By now you've seen a few random content generators and seen how they work. You've even altered a few. Now you get to create your own.

Maths

Before you create your own let's look at some maths. This isn't to scare you just to help you be aware of the options available.

To make things easy let's look at 3 methods of rolling:

1. 1d6
2. 2d6
3. d66 (There are 2 ways you could create a d66. The first is a list with 1-1, 1-2, to 6-5, 6-6; the second is a table with 1 through 6 on the left and 1 through 6 along the top.)

All of these use d6. The latter 2 requires 2d6, the first needs just 1d6.

If you roll 1d6 the odds of rolling x is: 16.67%

If you roll 2d6 here are the odds of rolling a certain number:

2 =	2.78%
3 =	5.56%
4 =	8.33%
5 =	11.11%
6 =	13.89%
7 =	16.67%
8 =	13.89%
9 =	11.11%
10 =	8.33%
11 =	5.56%
12 =	2.78%

If you roll a d66 the odds of rolling a x on the first d6 and a y on the second d6 is: 16.67% of 16.67% or 2.78%.

Each of the 3 options have different amounts of options:

)	1d6 = 6
)	2d6 = 11
)	d66 = 36

Creating

There are 6 steps in creating a random content generator:

1. Area of interest
2. Focus
3. Range
4. Multitude
5. Filling
6. Mapping

Area of Interest

The first step in creating a random content generator is to know what area of interest you want your generator to cover.

These areas can include:

-) NPC traits
-) Building traits
-) Types of locations
-) Culture traits
-) Colour of vehicle
-) Anything else you can think about...

Focus

The next thing you need to know the focus of your random content generator. What regions in the area of interest does your generator cover?

Range

Once your area of interest and the focus you need to know the range. The range is how long a certain list is. For example the sex of a person is a short list: male or female. Skin colour is a longer list: pale, ruddy, tanned, olive, chocolate, and so on. Character traits is longer still: slender, tall, fat, blind, dedicated, lost, scarred, angry, calm, stressed, dirty, and so on.

Multitude

Does your random content generator need more than a single list? If creating a vehicle random content generator you could include colour, make, model, cleanliness, occupants, what's the vehicle doing. Or you could just have a simple colour and type list.

Filling

Now it is time for you to fill out your lists.

To do this you can:

-) brainstorm,

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Day 23 – Random Content Generators: Creating

-) research, or
-) 'steal'.

To 'steal' use other random content generators. Lift ideas, or get inspiration from them, to fill your generator.

Mapping

There is 1 last thing to do: mapping. Once you got your ideas you can figure out what items you want where. If something happens often and you are using a 2d6 list it's best to put it near the middle (the 6, 7, or 8). If something seldom happens on a 2d6 list put it near the edges (2 or 12). If you're using a straight dice (like a d6 or a d66) you can put an option covering a range of numbers.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Go through the above and create a random content generator of your choice.

If you're stuck pick one of these options:

-) NPC creator
-) Building detailer
-) Vehicle detailer

Extra Credit

1. Create 3 random content generators of different types.

DAY 24 – RANDOM CONTENT GENERATORS: STACKING

Yesterday you had your first experience of stacking; even if you didn't know about it.

Multitude is like stacking. The vehicle creation example took different lists and linked them together. The difference is multitude is a single random content generator, stacking uses multiple random content generators added together to form a single outcome.

Stacking helps add depth and a multi-pronged direction to describing your scene or description. Using multiple random content generators, especially those from multiple sources, you gain depth. This depth is hard to build when using a single random content generator.

The problem of stacking is it slows your game down by giving yourself too much information.

In general stacking is a powerful tool to help immerse yourself in your adventures: as long as you don't misuse it.

Not every use of a random content generator needs stacking. One of the times when stacking is useful is when something important to the story gets introduced.

These moments could include:

-)] A location either for a major scene or important in the future.
-)] A major new NPC.
-)] A NPC being elevated from unimportance to importance.
-)] A plot twist.
-)] Coming across a culture for the first time.

When stacking it's best to do what you feel is a bit too little not a bit too much. When you get to a point and you start to get a clear vision stop and move on. Allow your internal vision to grow during your adventure. If you struggle you can always add more details.

There is an important point which links back to days 6 and 7. You shouldn't focus just on description (colour building). Remember you also need to focus on action: what's happening at the moment and why it's of interest to your PC.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Using 2 or 3 random content generators create a static scene in which the PC can enter.
2. Add action to the scene use:
 -) a random content generator,
 -) brainstorming, or
 -) freewriting.
3. Bring in your PC and have them experience what's going on.
4. Have your PC interact with the scene. Make them want something and have the scene pushing back against what the PC wants.

DAY 25 – PRE-CREATING

Yesterday you learnt about stacking random content generators. As you saw it can take time to get a detailed image; especially if you brainstorm to make things interesting. There is something else which is useful. You could choose a pre-created module.

A pre-created module could be:

-) An NPC
-) A detailed village
-) A spaceship
-) A detailed location
-) A street scene
-) A situation

Pre-created modules are powerful but they need to be created in advance. This takes prep-time but speeds up your solo roleplaying sessions. If you have 5 or 10 minutes to yourself then you've got time to create some pre-created modules.

There are many ways of getting inspiration to create these modules. Within this lesson you'll learn a couple of methods. As you begin to understand them you'll find other methods to create pre-created modules.

Method 1: If you're watching TV, reading a book, or playing a computer game and you come across something which wows you stop. Make a note of it including as much detail as you feel comfortable. Later you can then write it out ready for inclusion in your adventures.

Method 2: Stack a few random content generators.

Method 3: Look at pictures on the 'net using Bing Images. Go here <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=forested+river&FORM=HDRSC2> and look at the multitude of images of rivers in a forest. I bet you can find many different ways to think about scenes in your games which could use these.

Creating Pre-Created Modules

It's best for you to find your best way to record these pre-created modules. Record cards and Evernote are 2 good options for you to start exploring how to record your modules.

To create a pre-created module try to get as much detail as you can into the fewest words possible. You also need to keep the spirit of the scene alive. 300 words should be long enough for this. When describing the scene remember to include 3 to 5 senses: it's not all about sight and hearing.

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Day 25 – Pre-Creating

These modules are best used if they help to drive the story along in some manner or allow you to focus on what's of interest to your PC. In this spirit write a short (150 word) description of what action is occurring (if any) in the scene. These can be below the main text or in a new module.

Using the Pre-Created Modules

When you come to use the pre-created modules you don't need to use all the details written on the card. In fact it's better if you don't. This allows you to use the same card multiple times in the same adventure.

To do this:

-) Read what's written,
-) take a few keywords,
-) expand the description again,
-) then put it into your adventure.

You could also use 2 similar modules to mix up the description.

Once you set your scene it's time to add action.

Action either comes from an action description module, a random content generator, or what's going on in your story.

Using the pre-created modules in this way means you can reuse these modules time and time again. In time you'll create a large library of these modules. If you're using record cards: on the reverse write down 2 or 3 keywords (or tags) and sort the record cards into larger buckets. These keywords could be: river, forest, mountains, waterfall, bridge.

Buckets like:

-) Nature (split into more diverse elements if lots of time in nature)
-) Villages
-) Urban Settings
-) NPCs (split into more diverse elements if have lots of NPCs)
-) Action (if you separate description from action--you can also have buckets like Action: Nature)

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create a few modules and tag them.
2. Using a module create a static scene in which the PC can enter.
3. Use an action module add action.
4. Bring your PC in. Make your PC interact as if they want something and the scene pushing back against to what the PC wants.

DAY 26 – CREATING YOUR TOOLBOX

You're almost to the end of the course now. Congratulations in making it this far.

So far you've got all the tools required to make a great adventure. In the coming days you'll learn a couple more tactics which will drive your adventures into the realms of legends!

Before we get there though you've got to look at creating your basic toolbox.

A toolbox holds all your tools needed for your solo roleplaying adventures. Go back to the work you done in day 18 and see what tools you've got. Not all of these tools will enter your toolbox only the best few will.

There's no final homework today, you'll need to create your main toolbox as you go along.

Once you've created your main toolbox go over the steps again. This time create specific toolboxes: genre, creating NPCs, creating locations, worldbuilding, and so on. These toolboxes should seldom remain static. Try new tools, if they help great: keep them. If not drop them. If you find you don't use a tool or don't like it then drop the tool.

Building Your Toolbox

What kind of toolboxes do you need?

Figure out what toolboxes you think will find useful. A good guide to this will be looking at the tools you already use.

What is the purpose of your toolbox?

A core toolbox holds the essential tools used for most of the games you'll play. This will include your ruleset, your solo engine, and any generic random content generators.

Specific toolboxes help you in certain areas: worldbuilding, NPC creation, location detailing, adventure building.

What is the genre of the toolbox?

Toolboxes can either be generic or focused around a genre: fantasy, superhero, sci-fi.

How big is the toolbox?

The fewer the tools the better: too few tools though is bad. A good rule of thumb is 3 to 10 tools in the toolbox. If you've got more than that, and are unable to remove any, split your toolbox into 2 more focused toolboxes.

Extra Credit

Use your toolbox(es) a couple of times to see how well they work. If your toolboxes don't work as well as you hoped modify them and try again.

DAY 27 – PLOT THREADS

Today you're going to be looking at a special, and important, kind of cheat sheet. These cheat sheets help you know what's going on in your adventure and campaign. They give direction to your adventure and campaigns to follow and help keep things clear. These cheat sheets focus upon plot threads.

Plot threads keep the story moving forward. They do this by focusing your attention on the important things in your story. Remember: if something is on your list it's important to your story. So don't put everything thing which happens on your master plot thread list; just what's important or interesting to you.

This focus stops unimportant 'side quests' from overshadowing your main quest. Side quests can be useful if you want a break or they sound fun. If you're playing a side quest because you've got no main quest refocus and redo your plot threads list. A plot thread cheat sheet can also show you what's important in your campaign. It also allows you to have fun when recurring secondary threads pop up time and time again.

As plot threads drive your story you need to keep their numbers low. If you've got too many threads you'll struggle to get a great campaign outcome. Because your focus, energy, and fun will drain from your campaign.

Plot Thread Cheat Sheets

There are 2 ways of recording plot threads. You can do one, the other, or even both.

1. Have a list of threads with a descriptive name.
2. Have a cheat sheet per plot thread. Each cheat sheet then lists the events of what's happened so far. There could even be a section for future ideas. Each plot thread can have a descriptive or an interesting name. For interesting name threads, you need a descriptive sentence to clarify what's happening.

If you're doing both then make sure the names on the list of threads and the plot thread cheat sheet are the same.

The descriptive or interesting name is great if you have a direction for the thread. There are times when threads don't have any solid direction when this happens you can set up a question. These can draw you forward as you work to figure out the answer to the question.

Once you've answered the question the thread can either:

-) morph into a descriptive thread,
-) an interesting name plot thread, or
-) the plot thread gets closed.

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Day 27 – Plot Threads

If something interests you about your campaign, adventure, world, or about the PC (or a NPC) put them into a mega-question plot thread list. You don't have to answer these at once (or at all). In fact these could be great side quests when you want a change of pace. Don't be surprised if asking these questions they get answered throughout your campaign...

Closing Plot Threads

As it's important for there not to be too many threads in operation at any one time you need to close plot threads. Most plot threads should be simple to know if they're open or closed.

Maybe on your plot thread list you'll have threads which have been open for a long period.

If so:

-) if it interests you focus upon it and move the thread forward.
-) if it doesn't interest you drop the thread.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create, and fill out, the following for either your campaign or for Dean:
 - a. A list plot thread cheat sheet.
 - b. Convert a plot thread into a plot thread cheat sheet with a descriptive name.
 - c. Convert a plot thread into a plot thread cheat sheet. Don't forget an interesting name and the descriptive sentence.
 - d. A list of questions plot thread cheat sheet.

DAY 28 – NPCs

Today you're getting a brief overview of NPCs. Instead of a single day on NPCs there could've been an entire course dedicated to NPCs. This is because relationships are the core of stories. Here's some tools to make NPCs work better for you.

NPC Depth

As in life, films, and books you don't know everyone to the same level. There are those whom we see for a few moments and then never again. There are others we interact with from time to time and know to a reasonable level. Yet others we know as well as ourselves--if not better.

In reality this is a spectrum but to make things easy let's look at them as distinct dice types.



A shallow NPC which you don't know much about. Most of what you know about them is their:

1. Dominate Impression,
2. Appearance (their physical body type, clothing, and style choice),
3. their overt attitudes, and
4. their way of speaking.



These NPCs you interact with on a semi-regular basis. You know their:

1. Dominate Impression,
2. Appearance (their physical body type, clothing, and style choice),
3. their overt attitudes,
4. their way of speaking,
5. some knowledge of personality, and
6. some public knowledge about them.



These NPCs are personally important to your PC. You know their:

1. Dominate Impression,
2. Appearance (their physical body type, clothing, and style choice),
3. their attitudes;
4. their way of speaking;
5. some knowledge of personality;
6. public knowledge about them;
7. some of their secrets; and
8. could even know some of their hidden side of their personality. Such as their weaknesses, hopes, dreams, and future plans.

The more important the NPC is the campaign, and the PC, the higher the dice type they deserve. In your campaigns most of the NPCs will be of the d4 and d6 level. There will only be a few d8 NPCs.

Dominate Impression

For all the NPC levels above the Dominate Impression has been mentioned.

The Dominate Impression is what you first notice about a person when you first see them. It's their overt personality. For some very minor bit players, those who don't even deserve to be a d4 NPC all you know about them would be their Dominate Impression.

To create a Dominate Impression pick a descriptive word and add to it their primary occupation or role.

If you were to imagine a Vain Bodybuilder you'll get a different impression than a Friendly Bodybuilder. Also a Dedicated Office Worker would dress and act differently than a Dedicated Father; even if they both work side by side in the same office. For example one would work late, dress well, and always be on time. The other would be late occasionally, always try to leave on time, have photos of their kids on their desk, and might not dress as sharp as their neighbour; sometimes they might wear a kid-dirtied suit at work.

Friendliness

Along with the depth NPCs also fit in 1 of 3 buckets:

Helpful

These NPCs help the PC whenever they can.

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Day 28 - NPCs

Neutral

These NPCs either don't know much about the PC or they don't care what happens to them. Most NPCs will fit in this bucket.

Hindering

These NPCs, for whatever reason, want to stop the PC getting what they want.

Activeness

Even though a NPC wants to help, or hinder, the PC they have a different level of activeness.

They can be *active*, in which case they go out of their way to help, or hinder, the PC.

They could also be *passive* in which case they only help, or hinder, the PC if their paths cross.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to make NPCs more lifelike and interesting in an adventure:

-) All NPCs need to be hero in their own lives. They got their own story they're living and so don't make them revolve only around the PCs desires.
-) Whenever you meet a NPC always remember they're doing something they want and not just waiting for the PC to appear; unless of course they are, for their own reasons, waiting for the PC to appear...
-) All d8, and most d6, NPCs need traits to make them stand out so they're different than other people. This helps create a unique character which is easy play and identify.
-) Each NPC has their own desires which may run counter to PC's desire. Even if they're friends there could be times when they hinder the PC. Or they could call upon the PC for help just when the PC needs help from them. There might even be times when a hindering NPC could act to enhance the PCs aims.
-) Over time NPCs can grow, or shrink, from a d4, to a d6, to a d8 or vice versa. If you like a NPC, keep running into them, or find them interesting grow them.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create the following d8 characters:
 - a. Villain (just because you, as a GM, know this information the PC doesn't need to know it)
 - b. A mentor
 - c. A friend
2. Create a d6 character
3. Create a d4 character

DAY 29 – PCs

Like NPCs this is a brief introduction to PCs; again like NPCs a whole course could be written about PCs. But while NPCs reach the heights of a d8, PCs are d10s (if not a d12 or d20). PCs are the most important characters in the story. So time spent crafting them to become interesting is well spent.



1. Dominate Impression,
2. Appearance (their physical body type, clothing, and style choice),
3. Their personality
4. Outer attitude
5. Inner attitude
6. Their way of speaking
7. What's known about them by others
8. What secrets they're hiding
9. Their weaknesses and flaws
10. Their hopes, dreams, goals, and future plans

Before you go too far there you need to know PCs are larger-than-life characters. They can be an everyman but if they are they're a larger-than-life everyman. They're more normal, more dull, more crowd following than anyone else.

Secrets

Secrets don't need to be life shattering secrets or even embarrassing. Just that no one knows about them. That said, it's more interesting if the secrets are indeed life shattering.

How Many PCs?

It's best if there is only 1 PC per game. If you need an adventuring group get rid of many characters as possible. If you can't get rid of them then make them NPCs.

Don't forget as relationships are important, don't get rid of all supporting NPCs.

Creating PCs

When creating a PC work through the 10 items listed up above. Each of them is important and you need to have a sentence, or a paragraph, for each one. Together they round out a character and make them interesting, likable, and usable.

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Day 29 - PCs

The weaknesses and flaws help drive your story. These change over time during your adventures as you force the PCs to face and overcome them. They also make your character more interesting. A uber-powerful character who cannot be beaten is boring. It's those characters who have major limits and overcome them are those you who stay with you.

Along with weaknesses and flaws your PC's hopes, dreams, goals, and future plans drive the story. Once you know these your PC will have a direction in which to go. Weaknesses and flaws hold the PCs back. External NPCs or circumstances also stop the PC from getting to their destination.

It's best that once you've completed the 10 elements do you focus upon the game stats for your PC. Story first: roleplaying second.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create a PC for your campaign.
 - a. If you've got a PC you like expand them using the guidelines above.

DAY 30 – ADVENTURE CREATION

Congratulations to making it to the end of Frustration to Freedom: 30 Days to Legendary Solo Roleplaying Adventures. By now you know everything you need for a legendary campaign. Within the last 30 days you've covered lots of ground. You don't have to do everything you learnt but before you drop something try it. Once you've tried something a few times and it still doesn't work for you then drop it.

Today, though before you finish, you'll be looking at creating an adventure.

Right back on Day 1 I defined story like this to you:

A story is a narration of a series of events a character takes to overcome a situation and reach a goal.

Towards an Adventure Framework

Expanding this definition outlines a framework which'll help you create an adventure.

Focus

The first thing to notice is everything is built around overcoming a situation. If an event occurs which isn't there to help overcome the obstacle then it shouldn't occur.

There is one exception to this: character building. Near the start of the adventure it's possible to spend time exploring the characters.

Situation

There is one situation, not many.

The situation is where the PC finds themselves in, or the world they're inhabiting. The world doesn't have to be a physical world it could be an emotional world. Most of the problems, the obstacles, the PC faces comes from their situation.

Goal

A goal helps keep the PC on track.

The goal may change during the adventure, but there is only a single goal. At the start it might be best to focus upon a single goal and not worry about shifting goals.

Overcome

If there are no obstacles to overcome then there is no story.

It's the striving towards a goal, getting knocked down, and the PC picking themselves up which makes enjoyable stories.

Events

Each scene should be focus upon a single event. When something changes then the scene changes.

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Day 30 – Adventure Creation

In fact each scene should be a mini story with its own goals, situations, and obstacles. Each of these mini stories build up and form the story as a whole. (If you're working on a campaign each campaign needs its own goal, situations, and obstacles. Each story then becomes a single event within the campaign as a whole.)

Creating an Adventure

From all of this it would be easy to assume you need everything planned in advance. This isn't the case.

1. You need to understand the situation in which the PC will find themselves in.
2. You also need to know what outcome the PC wants from the adventure.
3. Finally you need to have an idea about what obstacles could stand in the way of the PC during the adventure.

There's 2 special things to think about:

1. *The Arena*: this is the confines of the adventure, it could be physical or psychological.
2. *The Motivation*: why doesn't the PC give up when things go bad, and they should get bad.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create an adventure for the PC you created yesterday.

To do this you need the following:

- a. An understanding of the Situation.
- b. What the PC wants. (The Goal)
- c. Why doesn't the PC just give up? (The Motivation)
- d. What kinds of obstacles the PC *could* face.
- e. What is the Arena which is holding the PC

Extra Credit

1. Expand upon the adventure idea, using the framework, to create a campaign.
2. Based upon the adventure idea use the framework to plan the first scene of the adventure.

DAY 31 – START A CAMPAIGN

Yes, it's Day 31, and yes you've got another lesson!

In the previous 30 days you've learnt the basics of creating legendary adventures for you PC. Now it's time for you to start a campaign. Yesterday you learnt one method, today you'll get another. This is because there are many different ways of creating campaigns. Today you'll find out how to grow one whilst playing...

To start look over work done about what want in a story. Then look at your cluster map and make some notes about the direction you want to go.

1. Start with Rats in the Basement (or yesterday's adventure creation method) trying various:
 -) story ideas,
 -) characters, and
 -) settings.
2. When you find one you're excited about wanting to know what happens move to the next step.
 -) Do brainstorming and freewriting about what you liked about the adventure.
 -) Do another Rats in the Basement. If you still enjoy it do a third one.
3. You now have 4 options:
 1. Carry on with Rats in the Basement until you find, or create, a meta-story to run in the background (or foreground) during your adventures.
 2. Create some plot thread questions for you to start to answer on your way to discover a meta-story.
 3. Set up some plot threads to shape the direction of the adventures and campaign.
 4. Find a goal the PC wants which has internal resistance to and set up an external blocking force.

Remember story first. The rules, solo engine, and everything else is there to support the story and make it interesting. They are not there to override the story.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Go through the steps above and create a campaign for you to play.

DAY 32 – THEME AND THE UNIFIED STORY

Yes, another bonus lesson today. You'll going to brief look at an advanced topic. This topic often gets overlooked by many people in roleplaying (not just solo roleplaying). This is theme. All great stories have themes; an underlying framework which keeps everything focused.

A lack of clarity of focus is the main reason why many people find solo roleplaying unfulfilling.

So how do you go about getting clarity?

Find a theme which you want to explore.

Themes

A theme can be:

1. A question
2. A proverb
3. Song lyrics
4. A quote
5. A Value Equation

A theme focuses your mind, and story, in a certain direction. Think about a light bulb shining out. If you don't have a focus it lights the whole room. This means you've got focus for you game. Now think about a torch. It contains a smaller light bulb than the one lighting your room. Because of the focus of the torch it brightens up any patch it's shining upon. This is what your theme is: a focused light shining in one certain area.

When you look at the torch light the centre is brighter than the edges. As it is with your game and theme. You should focus most of your attention at the centre: this is the main thrust of your theme. You can then explore some of the outsides of the theme.

This is how you get unified stories. Keep your focus upon the core of the theme.

The Value Equation Method 1

Above I talked about your theme being a *Value Equation*. This can be a powerful way to create a theme. In fact there are 2 different Value Equation Methods.

To create your *Value Equation* figure out a primary value you'll want to focus upon. Then find another value, or a counter-value, in the equation. The next thing is to figure out how they're connected: either in conflict (- or vs.) or how they work together (+).

X+/-/vs. Y=Adventure

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Day 32 – Theme and the Unified Story

Examples:

) Love vs. Honour = Adventure

What wins love or honour? Is a man's love so powerful he's willing to do things which brings him into disrepute?

) Greed - Honesty = Adventure

This story is about a person who desires greed but hasn't got honesty to temper their desires. How far does this person fall?

) Faith + Conflict = Adventure

This story is about how faith brings out the best in people allowing them to triumph.

Your forthcoming adventure is your answer. To discover the answer all you have to do is play the adventure...

The Value Equation Method 2

Instead of 2 random values, this method requires a virtue and its opposing vice.

Once you've picked a virtue and a vice plug them into the following sentence:

'Virtue' leads to success, whilst 'vice' leads to defeat.

If you desire you can expand the sentence further by defining what success and defeat mean for your PC.

For example:

) Honesty leads to tight integration with society whilst dishonesty leads to becoming an outcast.

) Honour leads to higher social standing whilst dishonour leads to disgraced.

) Faith leads to survival whilst apostasy leads to death.

The PC and the Theme

Your PC is the vehicle of your story. The theme is related to your PC. It reflects something which the PC holds dear and is being threatened or troubling them.

In the example of the torch your PC is the mirror which reflects the light to shine on a certain point. The get the light of the theme and shine it upon the story giving it a direction and focus. Without the PC it's hard to figure out what you're meant to do or focus upon. With the PC's help you'll find it easier to focus upon certain areas.

What Comes First: The PC or the Theme?

It doesn't matter. If you have a strong PC then the theme can flow from that. If you have an idea for a great theme then the PC can flow from that.

Just remember: at all times your PC needs to embody the theme.

The Villain and the Theme

If your PC embodies the theme the villain embodies the counter-theme; a negative theme. They can also fail to live up to your theme whereas your PC manages to live up to the theme.

In the case of the Value Equation Method 2 your villain already has their counter-theme mapped out.

PUTTING THE LESSON INTO PRACTICE

1. Create a library of themes to aid you in your current, and future, adventures and campaigns.