OSR SOLO

Rules and tables needed to play OSR/0D&D/D&D B/X games without a Dungeon Master

OSR SOLO RULES

Contents

Credits

Introduction

These rules are intended to allow you to play an OSR, in this case meaning 0D&D, B/X style games, without a Dungeon Master.

The game you will get using these rules will be a sandbox style adventure, you will not need to do any Dungeon Master [DM] style preparation although having a few stock NPCs or appropriate level would be helpful.

No DM?

The normal cycle of play is that the DM describes the scene and asks what do you do? The players describe their actions. The DM describes the effects of those actions and the cycle repeats.

In solo play there is just the single character and no DM. You start by imagining your character in the game setting and play them through all the social interactions, all the NPCs and events that would normally come up. At some point you will reach a point where you would normally ask your DM for more information. Are there any guards? Are there any ways out? What can you hear? At this point the solo rules come into play. You pitch your question in a Yes/No format. The solo rules will then return an answer to your question much like a Magic 8 Ball toy. It is then down to you and your improv. skills to decide what does this answer mean right now? Often the first thing that comes into your head is the answer to go with.

If you just got yes and no answers things would get boring quite quickly. These rules are designed to throw up twists and turns into your character's story.

Tools of the Trade

You are going to need just 2d6. It is helpful if they are different colours or sizes. In some respects, if you have been a DM before you should be used to random dice rolls changing the narrative of your games. When you roll for wandering monsters and bad fight can completely change the characters chances of success or failure. Rolling for surprise can completely change the outcome of a fight. All these rolls are just 1d6 and these rules continue that tradition. The d20 may get all the glory in a battle but it is the humble d6 that runs the world!

There are several parts to these rules. The most commonly used part will be the Oracle. The Oracle answers your questions.

Likelihood

Before you roll any dice you need to decide if the answer is more likely to be a yes, a no or whether it is a 50/50 chance. If you are in an orc hold and you are asking if there are any guards on the exit the answer is more likely to be yes than no. Glancing up and down a street to see if there is an unattended horse you can steal is more likely to be a no (most of the time).

A likely result gives a +1 to your roll. An unlikely result gives -1 and a pure 50/50 question has no modifier.

1 or less	No, and…
2	No
3	Complication
4	Yes, but…
5	Yes
6 or more	Yes, and…

You can see immediately that there are more than yes and no answer.

The 'and…' modifier means that the result is more than you expected. If you wanted to know if the guards were alert and you get a 'No, and…' maybe and officer has just demanded that the guards follow him and marches off. If you got a 'Yes, and…' maybe not only are they alert but one of them thinks he heard something in your direction.

The 'but…' is the opposite of the 'and' modifier. The answer is a yes but it isn't as good as you had hoped. Think of it as adding some kind of drawback.

There is also a complication. A complication should stand between the character and the subject of the question. The Complication is the first way in which the solo engine can take your game in an unexpected direction. For example, you look down the street and ask "Is there a horse I can steal?" The result is Complication and the first thing that comes into your mind is that looking down the street you see your arch nemesis riding into town with half a dozen of his mercenary followers.

Plot Twists

At the same time as rolling the oracle d6 you also you roll a second d6. On a 1 result there is a plot twist. Roll both dice again and consult the following table.

First Die	Second Die
1 An NPC	1 appears.
2 Your PC	2 alters the location.
3 An organisation	3 helps the hero.
4 A physical event	4 hinders the hero.
5 An emotional event	5 changes the goal.
6 An item	6 ends the scene.

With your two results put them together to make a short sentence such as "A physical event changes the goal."

Most of these results need some explanation.

An NPC. You should be familiar with what an NPC is. You can either introduce a new NPC or reuse an existing NPC in your story (See record keeping below).

Your PC. Somehow the root cause of the even comes from your characters actions, intentionally or otherwise. Have you ever seen a scene in a movie where a character leans against a bookcase only for it to shift and reveal a secret passage? That is the PC driving a twist.

An Organisation. An organisation can be anything from a village council to an entire army or just a single representative of the organisation. Most fantasy settings have guilds and secret orders that easily fit into this category.

A Physical Event. This is a external physical event, it could be a door opening somewhere in a house that is supposed to be deserted or a caving in a dungeon. A barroom brawl would just as easily fit under this heading.

An Emotional Event. Emotional events are those that force or play on your characters emotions. It could be a random act of kindness or something that plays on your characters back story.

An Item. Characters are surrounded by items and simple machines. You have their own equipment, objects around them as well as traps and unique items in the world.

Appears. This does not have to mean "as if my magic X appears". This twist introduces something into the current scene.

Alters the location. Some thing happens that should drive the story to change the location of the action. It could be as simple as learning that the wizard you are looking for is in a different city or a pit that drops you into a cavern below the temple.

Helps the hero. The help could be a simple as a farmer allowing the hero to sleep in their barn to a sage giving up valuable information or a key NPC offering aid.

Hinders the hero. Is the gate guard being cantankerous? The sage refusing to see anyone? Has a roof collapse blocked the way out?

Changes the goal. This twist can really change your story. Changing a goal may be a piece of information that changes what you were planning to do next. It could be that someone else completed the quest before you and now you need to find them?

Ends the scene. You should see Scenes below for more on scenes. In short a scene ends whenever a director would shout cut, when the DM would hand wave away a period of time or the action changes location. When this twist comes up something will happen to bring about an end of scene.

Playing out Twists

A twist does not have to happen instantly, the second you roll it. You should rather see it as a note pinned to your character or storyboard. Once you have decided what the twist would mean for your character you should then try to work it into your character's adventure. Sometimes they will be instant. Frequently, the best solution will create so many unanswered questions that they will drive some amazing role playing and challenge your improvisation skills. If you are five levels down in an undead infested catacomb and the dice say an NPC helps the hero. Where did this NPC come from? How did they get here? You just need to let your imagination provide and answer.

Scenes

These rules have mentioned scenes. A scene ends when you could imagine a director shouting Cut! or you feel like skipping a block of time. More importantly is your ability to think in scenes. You do not need to play every scene. If you were sat around a gaming table with friends you would not role play every minute of a mundane journey into town. As you are the only player and the game is for your benefit only you can pick the scenes you want to play. There is no reason not to skip great swathes of a dungeon crawl and just play the most exciting scenes, the first meeting with the undead guards, confronting the dark priests in their temple and then slaying their horrendous snake god.

You can also jump about in time. If you character died confronting the priests you could jump backward in time and carry on playing the same character but explore how they came to be on this quest.

When we cover record keeping, scenes is one of the things that you may want to keep a record of.

Complex Questions

Not every question can be answered with a yes or a no. If you eavesdrop on one of the villain's lieutenant's conversations then yes or no is not much use to you.

In this case you roll two dice, or one die twice, and check the following table, just like building a twist.

First Die	Second Die
1 Plotting against	1 an ally or colleague.
2 Uncovering	2 a foe or traitor.
3 Supporting	3 a new force or an old enemy.
4 Opposing	4 old lore or magic.
5 Creating	5 a death or murder.
6 Discovering	6 an alliance or surrender.

As before, you build a short sentence and then try and work this into your game. Typical complex questions relate to conversations, the contents of scrolls and books and orders given by officers, but you will come up with hundreds of other uses.

The golden rule is that you consider the story so far, the current situation, the sort of adventure you want to have and finally the dice rolls.

Imagine you are trying to gather some rumours in a town. There are a couple of women sat by the well doing laundry and chatting. You get close by and listen in. You roll a 5 and a 6, Creating an alliance or surrender. Depending on the sort of adventure you are having are they matchmaking and arranging a marriage between their eldest children or are there rumours that a battle went so badly that the king has been forced to accept surrender?

The same rolls made in a dockland dive of a tavern could have two lowlifes negotiating a ceasefire between their gangs. It is the context that is vitally important.

Ultimately if the roll makes no sense then discard it or if you have a better idea, go with that.

NPCs, Friend or Foe?

Not everyone is going to be your friend and likewise not everyone is going to draw swords and try and kill you. NPC reactions can be handled using the regular Oracle but you can use your characters Charisma in in addition to likelihood modifiers. For example, if it is highly unlikely that a castle guard will let you pass but you have a +2 modifier from your Charisma then that gives you a net +1 on the roll. You must remember that depending on the question. If you ask a negative question where a Yes will be bad for your character, then inverting you Charisma bonus/penalty would make more sense.
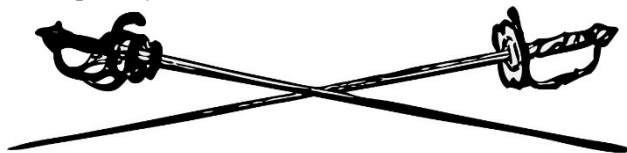
Record Keeping

It is helpful to keep a written log or journal of your solo adventures. This helps you pick up where you were later. This is no different to keeping game notes except there is no planned campaign as a backdrop.

Some people will make a few oracle question rolls and then write up an entire scene as if it is a chapter in a book. Others will record very little. I personally just use bullet points and record questions, answers and key points. It is very terse and would mean nothing to anyone else but it only has to serve as a reminder to me. I also find that the less time I spend writing the more time I can spend in character.

Regardless of the style of journal you keep it is helpful to keep a few lists.

NPC List

An NPC list just needs to keep the barest of details, name race and location and a brief note about your meeting. The location is important as when you revisit a place it helps if the same NPCs are there. It helps to make the world more consistent. If you have a list of NPCs and the oracle tells you to introduce an NPC it often makes sense to use an existing NPC rather than constantly creating new ones. For you an player and DM not having to create hundreds of detailed personalities makes life easier.

Scene List

You can number or name scenes as you play them and at the end of the scene add a descriptive note. Glancing down a scene list is almost like fast forwarding through your adventure, but it is also useful if you want to insert a flashback scene between a pair of scenes you have already played. I record which NPCs were present as well as what I was trying to achieve.

Loose Ends List

It is inevitable that you will end up with a great many unexplored plot threads or loose ends. Why did your nemesis ride into town that day? Who was the lieutenant plotting to kill? Complications can create loose ends, story twists often create loose ends and complex questions do the same.

When this list get to more than half a dozen it is worth seeing if you can tie some of them together into a deeper and more complex plot that your character has just brushed the surface of. Highlighter pens are useful here as you can group by colour. These loose ends could be used to explain some of the more unusual dice rolls. If someone is going to be murdered that could explain why the wizard you are looking for has fled town!

Solo Play Hints and Tips

❖ The golden rule is do not ask too many questions. Ask a question and possibly a follow up if you are still not sure but then just start to improvise.

❖ Do not ask game breaking questions. Don't ask if you wake up and find 1000gp under your pillow or a vorpal sword at the end of the bed. If you need these things just add them to your character sheet. It is your game, no one will ever know!

❖ Playing as a solo hero in a game designed for parties of 6-8 heroes is hard. You may want to start at 2nd to 3rd level. This also adds more scope for skipping back into your characters past to play flashbacks.

❖ Don't start your first solo play sat in a tavern. Take a leaf from Hollywood and start right in the thick of the action, a roof top fight against thieves, in a runaway carriage careering towards a cliff or surrounded by zombies in a boneyard. You know the sort of adventure you want to have. Start there and start in the thick of it.

❖ The first time you solo play it will probably be slow and stilted as you don't know the rules or what to expect. Don't worry, this is normal and the more you play the faster and more fluid it all becomes.

❖ It is useful to have a stock of pre-generated NPCs. When you are learning a new game, it is useful to make a few characters to try and get an idea for how the rules work. Keep those characters and use them when you need an NPC. That saves breaking up your game to create an NPC at a crucial moment.

❖ Narrative Description is your friend. Have you ever had a character in a barroom brawl and asked the GM if there a bottle or chair at the table you can throw? Or maybe you asked is the chandelier secured by a rope, when you wanted to swing across the hall. In solo play the answer to all these questions is yes. It is your story, your adventure, you are star and director. The props will always be in the right place.

❖ Fail Forward. If something goes wrong and the adventure would end or there is no way out ask the oracle. In the movies the hero faces seemingly impossible situations all the time and somehow gets out of them. You are the hero, it is OK to save yourself.

❖ The questions you ask should be the ones best for the game and not what is best for your character.

Random Dice Tables

On the following page is a random dice table with nearly a thousand d6 rolls. You can use them left to right to top to bottom, any which way you like so long as you use them in sequence.

Random dice tables speed up your gaming, both solo and at a regular table. If there is a chance of wandering monsters you can easily scan down the list and see how long it would be before the monster would turn up and you can work that knowledge into your narrative. If you can see that nothing would happen until midday you can work with that.

At a regular table, if your players are anything like mine, they will regularly force you into improvising. If you don't want it to be obvious that you are improvising, random tables make it appear you are consulting game notes when you are actually letting the dice decide.

There is no significance to the numbers being grouped into threes or three by three blocks. That is purely for ease of reading and highlighting.

Tip. Highlighters will never obscure the number on the page so you can use the page once and highlight the used numbers in yellow and then go over them again in green then pink and so on.

Random dice tables like these are useful for wandering monsters, to see if elves spot a secret door without alerting the players that there is something worth searching for.

If a player suddenly thumps a town guard then you can glance three numbers along and you have his strength, if he still be standing and wants to thump the character back.

When used with these solo rules they can completely replace the dice. Print off the table of rolls and have it side by side with whatever table you are referencing. It speeds the game up immensely and doesn't break the suspension of disbelief nearly as much as making multiple dice rolls.

Random D6 Table

3 6 3	1 1 1	2 6 6	5 4 6	2 4 3	6 1 6	4 5 1	6 4 5	1 2 1
2 4 3	3 5 3	2 1 3	4 3 2	6 5 1	2 4 1	2 2 6	1 3 1	3 1 2
3 4 4	3 6 3	4 4 3	1 1 3	6 6 1	4 4 3	5 6 6	5 4 5	2 3 2
2 1 3	3 6 5	2 6 6	3 2 2	2 3 2	6 3 3	6 1 2	2 4 4	4 6 4
6 3 3	1 4 5	6 6 2	6 4 1	3 6 6	2 6 5	1 4 6	4 4 5	6 1 6
6 2 3	4 4 1	4 6 1	4 1 6	3 5 1	4 1 3	3 5 6	3 3 5	6 1 5
3 1 5	2 5 5	2 4 3	6 6 1	3 3 1	1 5 3	3 6 3	4 6 1	6 6 4
6 5 3	1 4 3	1 5 3	1 5 3	4 3 6	4 6 1	5 2 2	3 4 1	5 2 5
4 5 3	6 5 1	2 3 2	4 2 5	5 2 1	4 1 1	5 5 4	6 4 6	1 2 5
1 1 1	1 6 1	2 2 2	1 1 4	5 6 2	5 1 1	5 4 4	5 6 4	5 6 4
3 6 6	3 6 3	5 2 2	5 2 2	6 3 5	3 2 4	1 1 1	1 6 6	4 2 2
1 5 2	5 5 1	5 1 1	1 4 4	1 2 3	5 2 4	6 1 4	5 4 4	3 3 2
4 6 2	4 2 5	1 4 4	6 4 4	5 6 4	4 3 6	1 4 5	6 3 2	5 5 5
2 4 1	5 1 6	4 6 6	1 6 6	5 3 1	3 2 4	5 1 5	4 4 5	5 5 5
5 3 2	5 1 3	3 1 2	3 6 5	4 4 5	5 2 1	4 5 4	5 6 4	5 6 1
6 4 5	1 1 6	3 2 6	3 3 6	3 6 1	3 2 2	3 5 5	6 3 6	3 3 4
3 1 1	6 4 5	5 3 6	2 2 3	4 6 3	5 1 2	6 5 2	4 3 2	2 4 5
4 4 4	6 5 3	1 4 2	2 4 6	1 5 6	1 4 1	5 5 3	2 6 4	1 3 2
6 1 5	1 6 5	3 3 2	2 1 1	3 3 5	5 4 5	4 1 3	5 1 3	2 3 2
3 2 5	6 5 3	1 3 1	5 3 6	4 4 3	6 6 6	1 4 2	1 4 6	4 5 6
2 2 2	2 4 5	6 2 6	2 1 3	5 2 5	1 6 4	3 5 3	5 3 2	5 3 6
1 3 3	4 1 4	1 3 6	3 1 4	6 3 4	1 6 5	4 3 2	2 5 3	4 4 5
4 2 3	5 5 5	2 4 3	6 2 1	4 3 3	1 4 5	6 2 3	2 3 2	4 3 4
5 5 6	6 4 1	1 1 2	1 1 4	3 5 2	4 2 6	2 6 6	5 4 2	6 2 1
5 2 6	1 5 2	5 1 5	1 2 1	4 6 4	2 6 5	3 5 6	4 3 3	4 3 1
3 3 3	5 1 3	5 6 5	5 1 6	6 4 3	3 6 5	4 4 4	3 3 6	1 2 1
2 1 2	6 4 6	2 3 4	1 5 4	6 5 6	3 4 1	1 2 5	2 6 6	3 3 4
5 5 4	3 3 4	3 4 5	4 4 3	6 3 3	2 2 2	6 1 6	6 3 4	6 3 3
1 5 2	4 1 5	4 2 3	6 3 1	5 2 5	6 1 5	2 3 2	2 5 6	1 6 5
6 6 1	4 6 6	1 3 1	2 5 3	5 5 2	1 1 4	3 3 3	6 3 4	2 6 2
1 2 4	5 6 3	5 5 6	4 6 2	5 1 1	4 5 1	3 1 1	2 3 4	2 6 2
6 5 1	2 3 3	1 1 2	5 5 2	1 2 6	4 5 5	5 1 1	4 6 3	6 3 3
5 6 2	2 2 2	1 4 3	2 1 1	5 2 4	5 4 5	2 2 1	6 2 3	1 5 6