SOLO RULES SUPPLEMENT

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Contents

SOLO PLAY

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This rules supplement adds solo play options to the Genesys core rules. Solo play can mean different things to different people. I am talking about one person taking the roles of both player and GM and playing a game entirely independently.

Solo play works by pushing many of the decisions that the GM would make to dice rolls. For example, if you need to know more about your surroundings, you form a question and then roll for an answer. No dice roll can possibly know your character's situation, so you get a generic answer, and you have to interpret it in the context of the game. It is really no different from interpreting regular Genesys skill checks. Success and failure are replaced by yes and no most of the time.

GETTING STARTED

These rules are going to start with a very top-level view and get more specific as they go. First, the top level is the adventure. Next, I will discuss tone, enemies, asking and answering questions, and finally, character creation.

ADVENTURE DESIGN

The GM will outline an adventure in a regular game, plan a variety set play encounters, create NPCs, rivals, and nemesis characters, and apply tone-specific elements such as cliffhangers or clues in a mystery game. This isn't the normal process for solo playing. Half the fun is discovering what is happening in an adventure as you play it, letting the story unfold.

So, how can you plan an adventure but not know what is happening or play an adventure that hasn't been written? The answer is to rely more on improvisation than on preparation. This section will share some ideas on creating an easy structure to use when improvising your adventures.
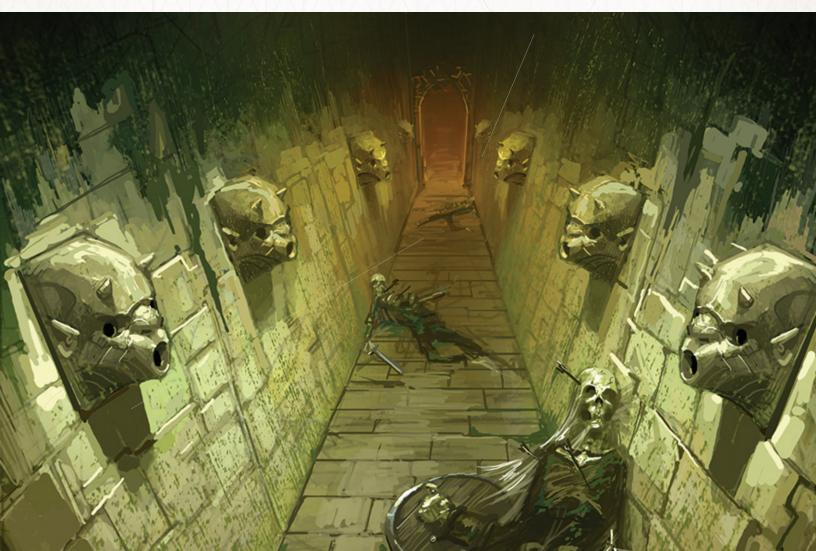
The 5-Room Dungeon

A 5-room dungeon needn't have rooms or be a dungeon. 5-Room Dungeons are an easy structure for adventure design created by Johnn Four [roleplayingtips.com]. It describes five stages that an adventure goes through, from plot hook, through different challenges and showdown and resolution at the end.

This is Johnn Four's description of the five rooms.

- **Room One:** Entrance And Guardian
- **Room Two:** Puzzle Or Roleplaying Challenge
- **Room Three:** Trick or Setback
- **Room Four:** Climax, Big Battle or Conflict
- **Room Five:** Reward, Revelation, Plot Twist

This format can describe an entire campaign, with each room being a major part of the game, or it can describe a single adventure. For example, if you are familiar

with Lord of the Rings, there is a section where the characters need to pass through Moria. This can be shown to be a 5-room dungeon.

- **Room One:** The wolf attack makes Moria the only viable route.
- **Room Two:** The 'passworded' doorway is the puzzle.
- **Room Three:** The tentacled monster and losing Bill the pony.
- **Room Four:** The battle with the Balrog.
- **Room Five:** The reward is emerging alive on the other side of the mountains, but there is also a delayed revelation when Gandalf the White returns.

It can help to break the association of rooms and dungeons by referring to the five stages as the Prologue, Act I, Act II, Act III, and Epilogue. To get started in a solo game, you only need to know the setting for the prologue. Knowing this initial setting tells you the genre you are playing, where your character is, the setting, and helps you visualize the character. I do not recommend visualizing a static setting. In a group game, the GM needs to bring the party of characters together and let them gel as a party. This is not something that you need to do in a solo game. This frees you up to throw your character in at the deep end.

In Media Res

In Media Res means to start a scene in the thick of the action or to give its literal translation in the midst of things. Your character is in a perilous situation, and you must act. It could be a runaway train heading towards a broken bridge or being thrown from a tower window by a cloaked assassin. These high stakes situations create many unanswered questions, and most solo play is driven by interpreting answers to questions.

This is your prologue, and the 'guardian' element is something you need to overcome. It could be stopping the train before it plummets into the canyon or defeating the assassin.

High-drama scenes can often be described in a few very broad terms, which makes imagining them very easy. For example, an old west steam locomotive has a distinctive look and sound. It is easy to imagine the heat from the firebox and the steam. You can also imagine the blur of the landscape rushing by the open sides of the driver's area. If you face that assassin, the tower window is possibly arched and made of stone, looking over the irregular rooves of a medieval city. Is there a storm raging? Wind and rain lashing at you? Or, is there a moon or two hanging in an alien sky? Below you, are you going to crash into a cobbled courtyard, or is there a hayrick below your window?

In Media Res gives you material to work with without the need for a mass of GM prep before you can play.

TONE

The **tone** is an important factor in solo play. When you plan your game decide on the tone, or more than one tone if you are mashing up two or more. Write your chosen tone on an index card or at the top of a new sheet of paper. This is a reminder that every time you answer a question, you want to try and inject an element of that tone into the answer. As you define elements of your game that directly relate to a specific tone, you write these on your index card or tone sheet. These act as reminders of facts you have established and serve as mood boards to help you create more elements that are consistent with what you have already established.

If you are mashing up two contrasting tones, such as Fantasy and Pulp, you may find that you draw inspiration from one tone more than the other. If you are happy with your mashup, great, but you may want to use it as a sign to build in more elements of the other tone, so it doesn't get lost.

Tone Special Rules

Many of the tones in the GENESYS Core Rulebook have special rules. You can add these to the tone index card or sheet as a reminder to use them. It is often easy to forget a special rule if you are not used to it being in play.

There is one special rule from the Pulp Tone, and that is Cliffhanger. I suggest using this in all your solo games. It is often much more difficult to survive in an RPG that assumes a group of characters if you are on your own. No character can be good at everything. Parties of characters are supposed to complement each other and rescue one another if things go wrong. A solo character often does not have that backup. When you find yourself in that situation where you are unsure how your character will get out alive, invoke the Cliffhanger rule.

SETTING DIFFICULTIES

It is often hard in solo games to know how difficult to make challenges and skill checks. Too easy, and it can feel like cheating, too difficult, and it exposes the weakness of being a lone hero in a game designed for a party of characters with a range of skills.

This is where the 5-room dungeon structure can help. As you move through the adventure structure from the prologue, through the acts to the epilogue, use the stage you are at to set the number of ♦ of the typical challenge. In the prologue, most challenges will be 1♦. In Act I, the typical challenge becomes 2♦ and so on. If you need to make challenges to avoid a sting in the tail in the epilogue, that is a full 5♦ check!

Within this, you can vary the difficulty depending on the situation and the challenge you are facing. For example, stopping the runaway train before the bridge may be more than 1♦, but jumping from carriage to carriage to get to the locomotive would probably be 1♦.

You don't want every skill check to be a generic x♦ at every stage of the adventure. This is intended to give a general difficulty level. This can also translate into meeting minions, rivals, and nemesis foes. Minions will be most common in the prologue and Act I, such as our fantasy assassin, rivals in Act II. You bring the nemesis in during Act III.

STORIES AND GOALS

Normally, in a solo game, you do not have a predefined story or goal. Instead, you are playing to find out what is going to happen. What you can have is an intention. If your intention is to play a game about an alternative Annie Oakley taking on train robbers, that sets your expectations. Without it becoming a fixed story, you can use these expectations to set scenes and decide the content. The question-and-answer system can still throw up unexpected answers and plot twists.

SCENES

I have already talked about creating your first scene. Scenes end when you skip a block of time. For example, it could just be a moment if you cut from stopping the runaway locomotive to frightened passengers running up to congratulate you, or it could be hours if you have a long walk back to town and you don't want to play it out. If you skip a block of time, one scene ends, and another starts.

Normally, you would be limited in interpreting Advantage, Triumph, Threat, and Dispair in a game; in solo play, there is no need to operate within limits imposed by the GM. Scenes will typically follow a logical order, following on from the scene that proceeded it. Truths established in one scene remain true until proven otherwise. This allows you to plan and react to what has gone before.

When you are starting a scene, if you have a clear idea of what should happen, as a question [see below] worded something like "Is this scene as I expect?" or "Does something happen to change this scene?"

These questions exist to prevent the solo game from becoming a procession of preconceived scenes that march from the prologue to confronting a nemesis in Act III without any of the unpredictable freedom of a typical RPG game.

I suggest you keep a list of the scenes, number them or name and number them, and keep a few notes about key events and any established facts. Reading this list will help you come up to speed when you pick up your game for a second or subsequent game session. There is no GM to recap what has happened before!

Your list can contain the names of NPCs that you have created, names of locations, and if NPCs have displayed skills or talents, make a note of those. It is not necessary to create a full character sheet for every NPCs you invent. You do not have to write everything down in great detail. What you are striving for is just enough detail for you to imagine the location if you visit it again and enough to put the correct NPCs in their correct settings. If a one-armed former gold prospector is playing piano in the saloon the first time you walk in the doors, they should probably be there the next time you step in off the boardwalk.

You can get creative with your record of scenes and include little sketched maps if that works for you. If you are recording the record on a computer, you can find images that convey the feeling you are trying to capture and save them in the document. This is a personal document and will only be seen by you; you can set it up however you like!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Questions and answers are the core of solo playing. So any time you would normally ask your GM a question about a scene or an NPC's actions, you will ask a question of the dice.

The process is several steps.

First, can the question be phrased as a yes-no question? These are often easier questions to answer. If the question is a yes-no, imagine what the yes and no scenarios will look like to your character.

Now roll the question dice pool. The dice pool is typically made of 2◆ and 2◆. Successes count as yes, Failures count as no. If you feel an answer is more likely to be a yes, upgrade one of the◆dice to a ⬡. If the answer is more likely to be no, upgrade one of the ◆ dice to a ⬢ The pool is never more than four dice.

Interpret the results. If there is no net yes-no answer, the dice come up blank, or the glyphs cancel out, the answer is a no. If at least one success symbol remains, the answer is yes. If there is a net result of a failure, the answer is no.
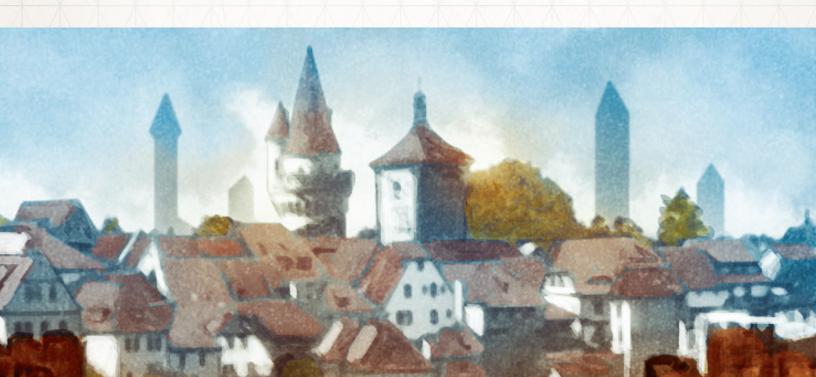
If there is more than one yes or no result in the final totals, the answer becomes more emphatic. For example, if you want to know about the stream pressure on the locomotive, you can ask that as a yes-no question, "Does the locomotive have a full head of steam?". The more failures you roll, the less pressure in the dial; the pressure is high if the answer is yes. The more yes results, the higher the pressure until 4 yes results could push it into the red zone.

Advantages and Threats behave exactly the same as they do with any skill check dice pool roll. So, for example, you could roll four yes results and a threat and decide that the steam pressure is up near the red zone and the steam valve is seized in the open position.

Once you have your answer and the interpretation, you get back in character and carry on playing. Having the answers outside of your control makes solo play a game, not just a writing exercise. You are using the rules as written for GENESYS, and you are reacting to scenes outside your control.

Not every question can be answered with a yes or no. For example, you could pick up a jewelry box, give it a rattle, and ask if it sounds empty. That is a yes-no answer. If it isn't empty, and you open it, what is inside is a completely different type of question. We call these questions complex questions as they.

COMPLEX QUESTIONS

Complex questions are those that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Sometimes you can chain questions together, for example, asking if someone is armed. If you get a yes, you follow up with do they have a pistol? If you get a no, you ask, is it an Uzi 9mm? Sometimes the supplemental question is not necessary at all. For example, if you imagine secret service bodyguards, the picture in your mind could well be black-suited, mirrored shades, and service pistols in shoulder holsters. You do not need to drill down to an exact answer because you have a coherent picture from the beginning. On the other hand, bodyguards for a drug baron could be dressed the same but with those Uzi 9mm machine guns.

Often, you will want an answer to a complex question that comes from an outside source. For these, we use inspiration prompts. First, you will generate a pair of words at random and then use them as a seed to imagine an answer to your question.

I am not going to give you actual word lists to use. As a generic system, Genesys is too wide-ranging for a single list to be useful for all situations, genres, and tones. Instead, I am going to give you two techniques that can be used to get your words. You can choose the method that suits you.

MyVocabulary.com

This website has vocabulary wordlists intended for educational use. There are many hundreds of lists across a spectrum of subjects. At the time of writing, there are 770 lists, and more are being added all the time. Select a few lists that describe your tone, genre, and theme. Then, I copy and paste them into a text editor and save them.

When I want to answer a question that cannot be answered with a yes-no question, I roll 1d10 and count that many words into the word list. I note down that word, then roll a second 1d10 and count on that many words and take that word. I now have two words that can be combined to create a prompt. For example, above, I mentioned a jewelry box. If I wanted to know what is in it, I could roll for a two-word prompt. I had already selected three word lists, one of which is Kings and Royals, as I am playing a Dramatic toned game. The first d10 gives me *Baron*, the second d10 gives me *Castle*. The pair together *Baron* plus *Castle* makes me think of a gold chain with a key as a pendant. In this case, the words created more of a word association style answer than a literal answer. I make my place in the word list, and the next time I need an answer, I will roll the dice and count on from the marked place. This means that the same words are unlikely to come around again in the same game.

Genesys

This is the second method and my preferred method when playing in an official setting such as the Realms of Terrinoth or Android. The process is very similar to the wordlists, but this time you will use the books you own for Genesys, your setting, and any other books that have inspired your game. First, you roll a dice to choose which book you will select words from, then roll a d10 and count that many pages in, and then a d10 to count that many lines down. You then take the first descriptive word on that line. You can then roll a third d10, count on that many words, and take the next descriptive word. Using this method, the first roll landing on the word '*of*' in the phrase '*of forgotten greatness*'. I skip the word *of* and select *Forgotten*. I roll the next d10 and count on and get Kings. My word pair is *Forgotten Kings*, which suggests, to me, a signet ring with the crest of an ancient royal house. I mark my place in the Terrinoth setting book and will count on the next time I need a random word pair.

Which to Choose?

Both methods will give you two words that are themed to your game. The first is highly customizable, and you can add in new words and lists of words as you play. For example, you may start out thinking you are being chased by assassins because of mistaken identity, but then events that you play out may suggest that you are a twin to one of the royal princes, either by birth or uncanny appearance. This nudges your game into a new direction, so you can add in words that include more royalty or heraldry. If your adventure takes a darker turn, you could add words related to the occult or Halloween. You can also intentionally salt the list with words that you would like to see come up, such as NPC names or places in the setting.

Using the setting books can keep your game rooted firmly in the game's setting and style. If your dice rolls land you in a sentence full of game mechanics, you can skip forward until you get to the next sentence of prose or description.

A useful exercise is to imagine your character putting their hand into a black bag and drawing out an item. Next, roll for a pair of words and see what your character holds, then draw out another item with another two words. Keep doing this to see how many things you can pull out of this bag. The goal of the exercise is to stretch your imagination and build the habit of interpreting random words.

STORY POINTS

The rules say that you start a session with one Story Point per player. As you are the only player, this would limit you to one story point. However, Genesys works best when there is an ebb and flow of story points. Therefore, I suggest using one Story Point per important character.

If you remember, back to the 5-room dungeon format. During the prologue, you should only spend one GM Story Point per scene to make your life more difficult. Act I, room two of the 5-room Dungeon, limit yourself to spending two Story Points per scene. Act II gives the GM up to three Story Points and so on. Of course, this is assuming that the GM pool has the Story Points available.

It is up to you to decide when you have moved from the prologue to Act I, and then on to Act II, etc. With each step forward in the adventure, the next challenge to overcome changes, from defeating or avoiding the guardian to solving the puzzle to overcoming the setback, and so on.

How you spend the GM pool is up to you.

NPCS & THE PARTY

I am not a fan of trying to run an entire party as a solo player. Of course, there is no reason not to do this, but I struggle to get into character when I try to control too many people. Having your character as the star of the action and having a sidekick NPCs is a nice compromise. This gives you a regular two-person party, but you could pick up other NPCs as temporary members if the adventure calls for it.

All NPCs, party members, neutrals, and foes can all be controlled by yes-no questions. For example, if you have a good relationship with your sidekick and you shout at them to cover you as you break for an exit, there is a very good chance that they will lay down covering fire to protect you. If, on the other hand, you have cheated them out of their share of the rewards and lead them into danger and defeat time after time, they could be a little tardy in laying down that suppressive fire!

Decide how likely they are to do as you ask, what they may do if the answer comes up no, then roll the question. Sometimes your sidekick may have their own ideas.

With neutral characters, you can use a skill check to convince them to follow your instructions or requests, but for true neutrals, you can decide the most natural or logical thing for them to do and then roll a question. For example, if guns start blazing, could you see them diving for cover, raising their hands and surrendering, running away? Pick the one that seems the most likely, and then ask if that is what they do.

Not every foe will fight to the death or stand there and let you pick them off. Look at each foe, decide what the most logical thing to do, and then roll for them. If a fight is going really badly, you could ask do they start to fall back? If you get a yes, then they may all start to withdraw. Play your foes with common sense, and your victories will be more valuable.

This technique works just as well with minions, rivals, or nemesis NPCs.

DRAMA CLOCKS

Drama clocks are a technique for adding a sense of tension to a game. A clock consists of two parts. The first is an event that may happen. For example, it could be that security guards have noticed signs of you breaking in, the villain has activated the self-destruct on the starship, or the Titanic has taken on enough water to upend and sink beneath the waves. Of course, none of these events are certain to happen, and you don't know when they will happen, but they could.

The second part is the timer. A timer is a value typically from 4 to 10. It starts at its highest value. So each time you make a check and roll a Threat glyph, you can choose to spend Threat to tick the clock, reducing it one for one.

When the clock reaches zero, the event happens.

Drama clocks are a useful sink for Threat; they also add an element of the unknown to your game. For example, a clock with 10 ticks could take forever to count down, but a series of atrocious rolls could count off half the ticks in next to no time. Of course, it is always your choice to tick a clock, but when you have to narratively describe what the Threat means, ticking the clock could make the most sense or be the lesser of two evils.

If it makes narrative sense, you can also use Advantage to untick a clock on a one-for-one basis. For example, it would make little sense to stop the Titanic from sinking, but if you are racing against time to get to an escape pod before the ship self-destructs, your Advantage could point you to a closer evac assembly point.

AND FINALLY...

There are some big-name solo tools. Mythic is about the biggest, Motif is also popular. Once you know how they work, these are generic tools that can be used with any game. As a solo player, I like to have my solo tools work exactly like my game. It means that once I am in the mindset to play a GENESYS game, it all works seamlessly. Using a generic tool means that you can use narrative dice for skill tests and then have to use d6s for your solo questions. I find this breaks the flow.

These rules are not the be-all and end-all of solo playing GENESYS. Almost all solo players pick up or make random tables of countless different things. These help you surprise yourself, throwing in encounters you would not have thought of or making weather completely unpredictable.

The ■ and ▨ dice make perfect little tables if you want to create simple random tables. The ■ dice gives you three options of equal probability. The ▨ dice gives you five options, with Blank being the most likely and then four equally likely other options. So if you had a character wading through a swamp, you could easily create an encounter table that looked something like this.

Blank	no encounter
☼	Alligator
☼⌃	Snake
⌃⌃	Wading Bird
⌃	Toad

The table would take next to no time to create as you play, letting you customize each location as you play. It may not look like it makes your game very exciting, but startling a bird while trying to sneak up on an enemy camp could be a game-changer. In addition, formulating small tables like these can help you rationalize advantages and

threats later in your game because you have already created a precedent.

Solo play is truly unlimited, and you can keep building and exploring your own worlds. You can drill down to whatever level of complexity that suits your style of play. I many be happy with an ▨ table of things to find in a swamp, someone else may build a d100 table and make it ecologically sound! Your game, your rules, play it your way.