

THE 7 TYPES OF SOLO RPGs



And how to find out which one is right for you!

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WHAT IS AN RPG?

An RPG is a lot of things.

An RPG is a story-making tool.

An RPG is a conversation (possibly with only yourself)

Most importantly, an RPG is a game.

In most RPGs, all the players except for one take on the roles of characters. These characters are represented by stats and abilities that show how good they are at certain things and what special powers they have. They'll navigate a fictional world, choosing what their characters will say and do. If there's a chance of failure, they'll roll dice. The result will tell them if they pass or fail (and sometimes, to what extent they pass or fail).

The only player who does not take on the role of a character acts as the Game Master. Every system seems to have its own term for this, but this is the player who fulfills the requirements of everything else in the world. They control the monsters, the weather, the NPCs (non-player characters), and prepare the adventures the other players will go on.

If you are looking to play RPGs as a solo activity, there's a good chance you're going to be both character and game master.

SOLO VS GROUP PLAY

This is perhaps the biggest difference when playing traditional RPGs solo: you are expected to perform all the roles. You'll be guiding a character through an adventure, but you'll also be running the adventure. You're the judge and the one on trial. As such, it's important to be able to look at your character and their struggles objectively at times, allowing tough things to befall them because of dice rolls and bad decisions. That's all part of the fun, though!

The good news is that there are plenty of games and tools out there to help you with this refereeing. We'll talk about a few of them, but first, why does playing with yourself get such a bad rap?

WHY THE STIGMA IS DUMB

I see it online all the time. Someone asks about playing an RPG solo, and the replies roll in.

That's called writing a book.

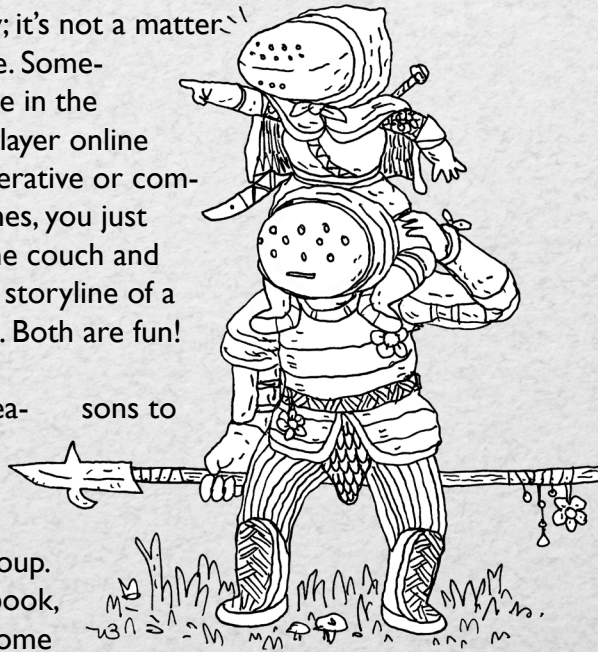
Just find friends to play with.

Sounds boring.

There's no better way for me to say it—that kind of reaction is bullshit. We play games alone all the time! The only difference is, it's usually in front of a screen. Single-player video games are extremely popular, so there is no reason solo RPGs can't be as well.

Solo or group play; it's not a matter of better or worse. Sometimes, you might be in the mood for a multiplayer online game, either cooperative or competitive. Other times, you just want to chill on the couch and get super into the storyline of a single-player game. Both are fun!

There are many reasons to play a solo RPG:
You're a proud introvert
You can't find a group.
It's like reading a book, except you have some



control over the direction of the story.

You like being the sole focus of the game.

You love playing through stories, with or without friends!

Scheduling is hard and maybe you are unable to get folks together for five hours at a time.

You're an adult with tons of responsibilities and need to fit your gaming in when you can.

You don't get enough dungeon-delving and adventuring in your life.

Once you decide you want to try playing a solo RPG, there are a lot of things to figure out. Unfortunately, there's both an excess and a scarcity of information out there. You can find tons of tools, playthroughs, etc, but it is harder to find a simple "how-to."

While all the ins and outs of solo RPGing are beyond the scope of this single PDF, you do have to pick a game before you can start. Let's talk about some examples, and what you may or may not like about them.

CATEGORIES OF SOLO RPGS

TRADITIONAL RPGs

Traditional RPGs are the type most folks are familiar with, and the type I most reference above. They consist of a game master and players, though they span many, many genres. While Dungeons and Dragons is obviously the most popular, there is an incredible amount of options out there. From branded RPGs like [Star Trek](#), [Alien](#), and [The Lord of the Rings](#), to original games like [Mork Borg](#), [Frontier Scum](#), [Vampire: The Masquerade](#), and [Blades in the Dark](#). If you have an idea for a game you want to play, there's probably a system out there for it.

PROS

If you've played an RPG before, there is probably a system you are already familiar with. Sticking to that familiarity while embarking on your first solo journey will better keep your focus on learning to play solo. There's also tons of variety.

CONS

Most games of this format aren't made with the solo player in mind. You'll have to find third-party tools to run them (see below).

COMPLETE SOLO RPGs

There are some RPGs that feel traditional but have a solo style of play built right in. Perhaps the most well-known is [Ironsworn](#). It is excellent. Along with that system, almost any RPG by [Blackoath Entertainment](#) is worth looking into (Sacrifice, Riftbreakers, etc.) Alex does a great job of creating RPGs that are adaptable to solo play.

PROS

Other than accessories like dice and paper, they include everything you need to play. You won't need multiple books.

CONS

They can still be intimidating for new players, especially if they haven't had much practice running games. Having the tools and knowing how to use them are two different things.

TOOLS

Plenty of tools exist to adapt your favorite RPG to solo play. Mostly referred to as 'oracles' by players and their creators, these additions consist of tables or other randomized elements that let you introduce a sense of uncertainty into your games. Will the NPC tell you what you want to know? Are those goblins friendly? What happens next? Incorporating oracles will help with questions like these.

Some popular oracles are the [Mythic Game Master Emulator](#), [Plot Unfolding Machine](#), and [One Page Solo Engine](#). Some game-specific ones can also be found, like [Strider mode](#) for the One Ring RPG, or [Alone in the Dark](#) for Blades in the Dark.

PROS

Tools make traditional RPGs accessible to people interested in playing on their own.



CONS

There's a learning curve to get them working the way you want.

WORLD-BUILDING GAMES

These differ from traditional RPGs. Instead of acting as a character, you're building entire worlds, histories, cities, and more. They're great for getting your creativity moving; some folks even like to run more traditional RPGs in the worlds they create!

Some of my favorites are [The Quiet Year](#), [Microscope](#), and [Beak, Feather, and Bone](#).

PROS

Since they are generally divorced from the Game-Master-and-Player-Character dynamic, they adapt to solo play really well.

CONS

They often miss that adventurous feeling that traditional RPGs offer. You won't be leveling up a character or gaining XP (experience points) in these games.

JOURNALING GAMES

Journaling games are great if you like to do a little writing. They work almost like writing prompts, except they allow your character to progress. They vary widely in themes, styles, and genres, but some popular ones are [Thousand Year Old Vampire](#), [Apothacaria](#), and [Wretched and Alone](#).

PROS

These are hyper-focused on the story aspect of RPGs.

CONS

If you like combat, leveling characters, and rolling dice often, these games won't scratch that itch. Additionally, if you don't feel like much of a creative writer, this format can lead to frustration.

BOARDGAMES (SOLO RPG ADJACENT)

Finally, we have boardgames. While not built like RPGs, some do cross over into that realm with their mechanics. You get to level up characters and go on adventures. This is another category with tons of variation, but some popular roleplaying-driven board games are Heroquest (with the solo play app), the Arkham Horror Card Game, and [Tin Helm](#).

PROS

They're really fun, and they take away the intimidation factor that comes with not having clear instructions.

CONS

They're not really RPGs, so they leave out some essential components of that experience.

GAMEBOOKS AND SCRIPTED GAMES

These can be one of the best entry points into Solo RPGs for new players. Think of them like a more complicated Choose Your Own Adventure book—with dice! You'll be guided through making decisions, rolling dice, and killing things while you follow your character(s) through an engaging story. This scratches that solo RPG itch for many.

Some are strictly dungeon-delving, like [Four Against the Darkness](#), while some are more story-oriented, like the Fighting Fantasy, [Lone Wolf Gamebooks](#), and [Marching Order](#).

PROS

The gameplay is very straightforward, and these books contain all the procedures you'll need to play. You'll never have to ask what is next or what you have to do.

CONS

If you want a more sandbox, open-world approach, these won't really get you there (but they can provide a good intermediary step).



WHICH TYPE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

The answer largely comes down to individual preference and experience. The biggest complaint I've heard from new Solo RPGers is that they're overwhelmed with possibilities and a lack of structure and don't quite know what to do. The Gamebook and Boardgame categories are perfect for this (and can help get you ready for some of the more robust games listed).

But if you do have experience with RPGs, playing a traditional game with the addition of an oracle can be right up your alley.

Of course, nothing says you have to pick a single type. Experiment, and find what's right for you! Solo RPGs are like anything else: the more you practice, the better you'll be at them, and the more defined your preferences will be.

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BONUS #1:

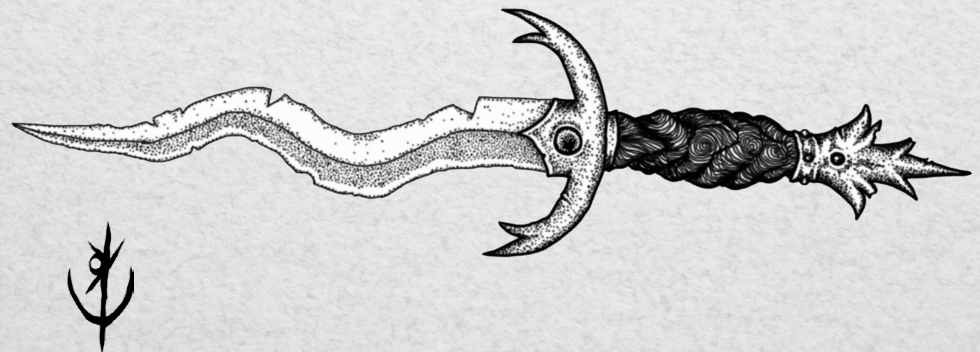
8 TIPS FOR SOLO RPGS

1. Don't get overwhelmed. You don't have to internalize everything at once; in fact, it'd be a mistake to try. Just have fun. Different things speak to us at different points of our journeys. If something here is helpful, take it and put it in your pocket. If not, forget you ever saw it.
2. Just get started. Don't think you need to have everything fleshed out, or that you need to use every system or tool. While prep can be a fun part of the execution, make sure you get beyond it. Perfection is the enemy of the finished. In other words, if you spend all your time worrying it's not good enough, you'll have a lot less time for playing and enjoying yourself. You can always grow the game later.
3. Don't start in a tavern. Like so many writing teachers will tell you, cut the first few pages of whatever you're writing and start where it gets interesting. Begin your game with the town being attacked, or with your character in the middle of a conversation with the queen, wherein she gives you your quest, or in the midst of a magical experiment going wrong. If you start the story when there is already tension, it's easier to know where to go. Active beats passive.
4. Keep notes! Journaling can take the place of the group interaction found in non-solo play. In a group, the participants are telling stories with each other. So when playing solo, it can feel more fulfilling to keep up the storytelling aspect by writing it down. You are the author and the audience. In addition, don't trust yourself to remember what happened from game to game. Chances are, you won't. Make sure you write down the important beats so you can reference them later.

5. There is no right or wrong. You're playing with yourself, so you are the only person you have to please. If you want something to happen in the story, make it happen! If a mechanic doesn't appeal to you, don't use it. You're your own storyteller and game designer. You're doing it all.
6. Put the rules aside sometimes. You don't need to roll on every table, or look for a rule for every situation. If you have a good idea of what's happening next, let it fly! Look to the mechanics and tables only when needed. They should help you, not hinder you.

When in doubt, go with your first thought. You don't need to find the "right" thing to do. As above, there is no such thing. Just follow your heart.

7. Games can be about the narrative, or games can be about the dice and strategy. Most are about both. Journaling games, where you detail intense character arcs, and dungeon crawls, which are focused on killing monsters and grabbing loot, are equally valid. Find your personal balance and own it.
8. This bears repeating: just get started. Solo RPGs are a skillset. The more you play them, the better you get—but you can't get better if you never begin. There's no one there to judge you except that mean voice in your head, so be nice to yourself and just do it.





Bonus #2: 10 Random Tables For Your Solo Games



WHAT IS YOUR QUEST? (3D10)

	The Quest	Where it is	The Complication
1	Slay the rampaging beast	in the Corpsewood	where it is never light.
2	Retrieve the stolen relic, The Joi Sun	deep inside the Necromancer's Tower	where it's guarded by evil serpents.
3	Capture the Iron Renegade	somewhere in the deserts of Khartor	an insane cult worships it.
4	Flee the forces of Marazan the Dark	in the ruins of an advanced civilization	the very air is poisonous.
5	Retrieve the herb known as "King's Balm"	on a distant moon	it can only be accomplished with the Key of Bone.
6	Heal the Spring Prince	in a vast system of caves	where there are many illusions.
7	Overthrow the Lord of Dusk	at the center of the world	hordes of undead bar the way.
8	Destroy the Shadowstone	in the center of the red maelstrom	magic has corrupted it.
9	find the Codex Magicus	in the middle of a deep, fiery pit	it will be destroyed in one month.
10	Live until dawn.	in the dungeon of Crabal the Defiler	you are being hunted by an assassin.

MAJOR PLOT TWIST (1D20)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 They were being mind-controlled | 9 A major ally flees | 17 Time has been cruel |
| 2 A major NPC was dead the whole time | 10 An old enemy has been watching from the shadows | 18 An innocent dies |
| 3 A major NPC betrays out of self-pity | 11 A message arrives telling of distant tragedy | 19 The gods intervene |
| 4 A major NPC betrays out of selfishness | 12 A message arrives telling of distant fortune | 20 They suddenly become much more powerful |
| 5 Magic goes awry | 13 A prominent institution falls | |
| 6 The biggest truth was a lie | 14 A prominent structure crumbles | |
| 7 A major NPC isn't who they seemed to be | 15 One you thought was your enemy is your friend | |
| 8 A major villain flees | 16 Fire | |

WHAT SECRET DO THEY KEEP? (3D10)

	WHAT THEY WANT	but...
1	Safety for their child	They are in league with the PCs' enemies
2	The surrender of their rival	They have much more money than it seems
3	Respect from the villagers	They are a horrible monster, shape-changed
4	To be the power behind the throne	They've accidentally killed someone close to them
5	To hide from the mercenaries pursuing them	They've purposely killed someone close to them
6	To play matchmaker with one of the PCs	They are royalty, hiding amongst the common folk
7	To fulfill a pact made to a dead mentor	A demon speaks to them at night when they dream
8	To ride a dragon	They've stolen money and other goods from various houses around town
9	To become the world's greatest swordsman	They have a family somewhere that they left behind
10	To be known as the most attractive person for leagues around	Anyone they kiss dies within a week

WHAT IS THIS SETTLEMENT? (3D10)

	Settlement	Detail 1	Detail 2
1	Huge metropolis	Smells like fish	Lit by glowing fungus
2	Large city	Completely in a series of caves	Overseen by an evil wizard
3	Moderate town	Has a terrible secret	It is never daylight
4	Small village	An army is staying here	It is never nighttime
5	Isolated home- stead	Has caught the attention of a nearby dragon	Always raining
6	Campsite	Every dwelling is in a tree	No one lives there/ it is abandoned
7	Military fort	Hidden away and not on any map	Incredibly welcoming. Maybe too welcoming.
8	Castle	Recently experienced an outbreak of disease	Suffering from a famine
9	Church/temple	The streets are empty and the doors are locked	There are no children
10	Commune	Absolutely loves bards	You can't wear weapons inside its borders

WHERE DID THIS DUNGEON COME FROM? (3D10)

	What it was	What it became	What it is now
1	A Dwarven gem mine	A flooded ruin	A Goblin burrow
2	A castle's dungeon	Catacombs to house the dead	A bandit's hideout
3	Tunnels of a Purple Worm	A shelter in which to hide from the war	A tourist attraction
4	Natural cave formation	The king's hidden treasury	An unused place full of rats and wererats
5	Gnomish workshops	Headquarters for a rebel army	A forgotten place, erased from history
6	The hollow bones of a dead god / giant	The scene of a great magical tragedy	A holy site for pilgrims
7	An organic mass of pseudo-living flesh	A maze full of Minotaurs	A mad wizard's laboratory
8	A vast prison	A wine cellar	A cultist's ritual site
9	A god-emperor's tomb	A blighted, cursed place	A place where the dead rise again
10	Far-stretching sewers	A serial killer's hideout	A Kobold den

CAVE PASSAGEWAYS (3D10)

	Passageway	Detail 1	Detail 2
1	Wide-open cavern	quiets all sound	is full of rats
2	A skinny chimney	You can hear growling ahead in the darkness	a stream of magma flows through it
3	An underground river	is magically dark—no light or darkvision penetrates it	moves under your feet
4	A smooth burrow	a corpse is in it	unintelligible whispers fill the air
5	A tunnel full of rubble	looks like it might collapse	always sends you back to its start
6	A rope bridge over an impossibly deep chasm	is lined with glowing lichen	is obviously man made
7	A narrow shelf over an impossibly deep chasm	has been used recently	is supported by great basalt columns
8	A cave-in	has carvings on the wall	is a dead end
9	A small crawl hole	is oddly hot	is full of poisonous vapors
10	A long and wide vertical shaft	is freezing	You hear your own voice up ahead

WHAT LIVES IN THE FOREST? (3D12)

	What?	That...	But...
1	A tribe of goblins	likes to party	can't stand daylight
2	A great green dragon	eats man flesh	has never been seen
3	An ancient druid	searches for knowledge	is/are forever trapped in the forest
4	A strange hermit	kills all outsiders	can be distracted by shiny things
5	A confused wizard	protects the forest	is/are forever cursed
6	A very proficient healer	worships demons	knows where a great treasure is
7	Rambunctious fae	is/are an ally to the Light	has been dead for years
8	Secretive Elves	is/are mischievous	is/are always searching for their true love
9	Playful gnomes	will steal your possessions while you sleep	cannot speak
10	A dark and terrible presence	knows all that happens in the wood	is/are the source of great knowledge
11	A sentient glade	can only be harmed by fire	never tells the truth
12	A tree as old as the gods	has asked for you by name	guards the way to the other side

WHAT LIVES IN THE SWAMP? (3DI2)

	What?	That...	But...
1	A coven of hags	steals children	never leaves its cave
2	A great black dragon	desires the death of all that live	can be wooed with song
3	A tribe of lizard people	swim in the dark waters of the swamp	will flee if spotted
4	A talking stone	possesses ancient knowledge	can be bribed
5	A strange hermit	dances for coin	will slit your throat if you are not looking
6	A forgotten demon	can only be seen at night	is cursed to never stop eating
7	A drunken recluse	wants to be left alone	wants your fingernails
8	A giant serpent	can fly	doesn't speak any language that you do
9	A colony of halflings	subsists on swamp grass	is always high
10	A unicorn	that can't remember how it got there	is sure you have something that belongs to it
11	A floating ball of light	wants to steal your memories	can never dream
12	A two-headed raven	has existed since the dawn of time	tries to chase away anyone that enters

WHAT LIVES IN THESE MOUNTAINS? (3DIO)

	What?	That...	But...
1	Wyverns. So many wyverns.	have not left the mountains in 1000 years	wants to kill everyone but you
2	A colony of dwarves	are searching for the prophesied one	they have lost their way
3	A small family of basilisks	tell tales of stone-eaters	there is a hefty bounty on them
4	Happy goats	want nothing to do with you	don't care about anything
5	A forgotten monastery of monks	knows where the entrance to an underground city lies	holds dark and forbidden magic
6	a camp of berserkers	want nothing to do with anyone	their lair has never been found
7	A red dragon	can't remember your name	knows how to reach the stars
8	A legendary blacksmith	is/are rumored to have killed a god	remembers the future instead of the past
9	Nothing (stop rolling)	love apples	are almost extinct
10	A group of minotaurs	can see into your mind	can only ever be seen from afar

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE TAVERN?

**It's never a boring night.
Roll a D20 to see what's happening.**

1 Bar fight	11 The town guard is attempting to shut the place down
2 The local merchant's guild is having their annual celebration	12 A pickpocket is trying to steal everything from everyone
3 Two gangs are trying to make a deal	13 The ale has gone bad and is causing hallucinations
4 A drunken bard performing terribly.	14 Every person in the tavern is singing drinking songs—just not the same songs
5 A wedding	15 It's flooding
6 An angry goose has gotten loose	16 A dice game has gone sour
7 A potato-carving contest	17 A Lizardman has locked itself in the outhouse
8 The bar is empty of customers except for a feared necromancer. He just wants to drink in peace	18 A mercenary company is drinking there tonight and acting poorly
9 It's on fire	19 A drinking contest
10 A dead goblin was found floating in a keg	20 The entire building gets pulled into another plane