

*"Here it's another Saturday night and I ain't got nobody,  
I got some money 'cause I just paid.  
Oh how I wish I had someone to talk to,  
I'm in an awful way..."*  
-Sam Cooke, "Another Saturday Night", 1963

You want to do it. You know you shouldn't. You know you'll never live it down if anybody catches you. You've heard it might even make you go blind. Still, it's normal, right? There's nothing wrong with it. Nervously you draw your shades and slink off somewhere private. Maybe your room, maybe the basement. You hope nobody calls to break your concentration while you're doing it. It's not as good as doing it with someone else, but when you've got an itch, you've got to scratch it.

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS SOLITAIRE



## INTRO

There is probably no way that Solitaire D&D could ever hope to be as rewarding as playing the game with a group of your friends. The unpredictability of their actions, the corny in-jokes, the pause in the game because somebody has to take a call from their significant other, and the wheeling and dealing over the division of the treasure are all things that no die roll can replicate. But the fact is that sometimes some of us find ourselves wanting a game, but nobody is available. Maybe you're new in town and are having trouble finding a group you can get to. Maybe everybody in your old group has settled into the "grown-up" thing and now thinks the game is somehow beneath them. Maybe they've got new priorities that aren't able to leave any room for D&D no matter how hard they try.

But you've still got your books. You've still got time. You still want to play. You enjoy working your imagination, and the last thing you want to do is wind up like Jackie Paper, who abandoned his old friend Puff the Magic Dragon when he grew up. You live by the George Burns line, "You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old."

The problem with D&D Solitaire is that it will be impossible for you to be surprised if you play normally. You can see the whole map, you know what the bad guys are going to do, you know who's behind the plot to assassinate the duke, and you know that next room is a killer. How can you *not* know? You're the DM.

I do a lot of test runs of dungeons as Solitaire games. When faced with a choice, the result of which I have advanced knowledge, I leave it up to the dice. The party is low on HP and needs to take a rest. They are faced with three doors. One leads right to the BBEG, the other two are safe. They can't afford to meet the BBEG right now. They're all bloodied and low on powers. Which door do they choose to go through?

Assuming they see nothing to indicate that one door might be bad, such as a blood smear leading to one, or abyssal chanting coming from behind one, I leave it up to the dice. Three doors, roll a d3. The result tells you which door they go through. If one of the doors had something bad about it, cut it to a d2. Odds they go through one door, evens they go through the other.

I recently had a party pointed the entirely wrong direction. Reading only one room description at a time (and just enough about the surrounding rooms to see what happens if a fight breaks out in the first room, like reinforcements), I found out after clearing this room that the next room they were going to go into was the biggie. They didn't have the resources to handle it at this point, but, based on the evidence, I had no logical reason to send them in another direction. I had to send them into the belly of the beast and hope I'd get the opportunity to make an escape when things went bad.

Such is the approach to D&D Solitaire. It's an exercise in imagination like no other.

## PERSONALITY



You shouldn't play your PCs as all alike. They might live longer if they're all cautious and attentive to detail, but unless it's a prerequisite for joining an organization, you won't get a group together like that in a month of Sundays. Before we deal with that, however, we need to have someone to apply a personality to. Create a character in the same manner as you normally would. Point-buy, rolled stats, assigned numbers, it doesn't matter. Just create the character, and stay within the bounds of the game. Nobody gets all 18's and you know it. Don't accept anything that you wouldn't let a table full of players get away with.

Pretend you're looking through the eyes of your PC. If the rogue is your point man, you can imagine him carefully moving down the hallway, mindful of the odd-looking sections of floor that might be trapped. He moves silently up to the door and places his ear against it.

Now picture the party behind him. What are their personalities like? Is the fighter brash and impatient? He might decide that the rogue is taking too long and stomp on up to the door, boldly announcing "I'm sick of all this sneaking around! Step aside, Slow-poke!" Is he more of a tactical thinker, his eyes locked onto the door, his hand gripping the sword hilt and ready to take down whatever may be on the other side? They're your PCs, so you should know their personalities best. There are no generic PCs in auto-fantasia.

You can find a few personality developers for PCs. My favorite, although now out of print but available used and as a download, is Paul Jaquays' "Central Casting Heroes of Legend". Besides personality development, the Central Casting line of products creates entire back stories. These personalities are important because they tell you how your party members are most likely going to act in various situations.

For example, one party is focused on clearing out the dungeon and freeing the town of its threat. The rogue, however, is interested in getting his hide out of there, the more intact the better. Unfortunately, he owes the party at least an effort since they sprung his worthless soul from prison if he agreed to help. As the party is examining the room, the rogue has found a hidden door. Interested in whatever goodies might be back there (and not sharing any of it), he checks for traps then picks the lock. The door, however, is magical in nature, and opening it triggers zombies to burst forth on the opposite side of the room. The zombies attack the party. Now it's in my

interest to have the party unite to defeat the zombies, but I can't play the rogue against type. Seeing both the danger behind him and the chest in the room before him, he slips into the new room and shuts the door, leaving his party to deal with the zombies. Meanwhile, he gets into the trunk, helps himself to some choice goodies, relocks and re-traps the chest, then slips back into the original room to "help" the party. They failed their checks to see if they noticed his stunt, so I had to play them as though they thought he had been there all along, and then run a Bluff check to see if they bought his act about being surprised at the chest.

The best way to train for this style of playing is to try on different personalities. Create a plain character, give him a personality and a back story, and write his bio in character. You may even try on different personalities for the same character.

If you decide he's morose and moody, the bio may start out:

*"I was born in a dead-end town with no prospects for the future. I took up the adventuring life because anything was better than staying there."*

A more upbeat character may describe the same beginning as:

*"I come from a small town in need of a shot of life. I've always been restless, so I set out in search of adventure."*

One presents the idea of leaving town to escape crushing boredom and disgust, while the other uses a sense of wanderlust as the catalyst for leaving. Different personalities will describe the same situation in different lights. Try on different lights. Be an actor! Nobody's watching you on stage, so go for it with gusto. (As I asked myself when embarking on this style of play, "You already play D&D, how much geekier can people regard you?") Of course, like certain other activities done alone, Solitaire D&D is best done without witnesses.



Some personality types just to fill up empty space  
(From Paul Jaquays' "Central Casting: Heroes of Legend", used without permission)

## MONSTERS

Switching to the monsters is as easy as switching from one PC to another. Sure, as the controller of the party it's in your best interests to keep the party alive. But as the controller of the monsters as well, it's also in your best interests to keep the party from attaining their goals.

Here's your scenario. The party has entered the Temple of Eternal No-Goodness, interrupting the Dark Rite of Vile Intentions. There is a high priest at the altar. Six cultists are chanting while the high priest performs the rite. What happens now?

What happens is the same thing that would happen if you had five of your buddies sitting at the table. You check for a surprise round, roll for initiative, and then proceed with the encounter. No biggie.

How do you play the cultists? Ask yourself what would look good on a movie screen. Would the cultists line up one at a time and let themselves get mowed down like a wheat field, kind of like you see in those really bad karate movies where the good guy is surrounded, so the bad guy's henchmen run at him one at a time instead of swarming him? Not just no but HELL NO! Anyone with a ranged attack is going to hang back and strike from a distance. Melee attackers would be more likely to try to gang up on the biggest threat while other cultists may engage other party members in 1 on 1 or 2 on 1, or as many on 1 as possible. The high priest will take logical steps to defeat the party. He probably isn't going to stage-dive off of the altar and get into the fight. He'll most likely buff himself with protections first, make sure his path of escape is clear, and then use various spells and attacks to strike at the party from as far away as possible. If he can teleport to get out of harm's way, he most certainly will. He most certainly will NOT, however, teleport next to an enemy unless he's going to try to attack immediately.

Play the enemy smart, try to keep them alive, and try to kill the party. It's not like you can't roll up new ones.

Less intelligent monsters are easier to play. They will attack the nearest immediate target. If someone or something has just attacked them from behind, let's say, they will probably do a quick spin to attack whatever just caused them pain. If that attack came from a ranged source, the adjacent target (assuming there is one) might now be behind that monster and can take whatever advantage of that position he may find.



*An Intelligent Monster*



*An Unintelligent Monster*



*Intelligence Unknown. Beware!!!*

## THE PCS AND THE MAPS

They will be the most difficult thing for you to play. Your first role is as the DM, and any DM worth his or her salt knows what sort of meddling pests PCs can be. But your close-second role is as the player. Any player worth his or her salt knows what a vicious, cruel SOB a DM can be.

So how do ya does it? How do you pretend that you don't know what you've got planned? How do you ignore that big sideways "S" on the wall that tells you, that SCREAMS at you, that a hidden door is present? How do you not skirt your way around the most dangerous rooms, racking up XPs before stumbling onto the hidden activities of the Cult of Eternal Ambiguity? How do you muddle through an RP encounter without being hauled off to the loony bin?

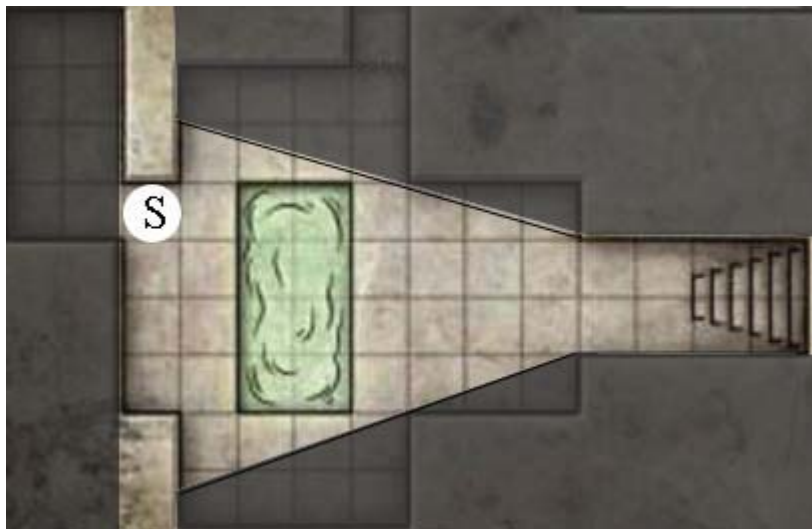
Let's look at a brief encounter, first. At the table are myself, myself, myself, a cup of coffee, and a cat watching the dice with ill intent in his eyes.

**The Map:** The first thing you will encounter is the map. It's Kobold Hall (4e DMG pp. 210-219). The sweet thing about the published dungeons is that they're so organized. You get a neat little list at the start of the encounter that tells you what monsters are involved. If you've got minis, you know who to pull out (or how many pennies to gather up as markers).

Reading the italicized text gives you a description of what your PCs see: *Dominating the room ahead is a long trench filled with a glowing green substance. Beyond the trench, a small, reptilian humanoid stands in a shadowy chamber, gaping at you. It carries a sling and quickly reaches into a pouch at its belt for a stone. It hisses and shouts, "Intruderssss! Intruderssss!"*

As a player, this is all the DM would read to you, so stop right there. A quick glance at the encounter map shows you everything you need to know at this point. Minis and a battlemat are practically indispensable for this, although a piece of grid paper and a pencil will do in a pinch. Based on the description above and nothing else, decide what your PCs will do.

In 2e and 1e, I used to take a piece of paper and cut out a template large enough to cover a 30 foot radius area in scale to the map. Standard torchlight would reveal that much, so I acted only on what was visible in that area. The changing sizes of the printed maps in the modules, however, began to make that impractical. As a result, I use the Line of Sight technique, which is basically the rule that you may not respond to anything not in your Line of Sight (4e PHB, pp.273-274).



Kobold Hall Room 1, Line of Sight From Bottom of Stairs

## THE ENCOUNTER

Based on the description above and a quick glance at the encounter map, you know where one monster is. What else do your characters know? That there is a green, slimy pit in the middle of the room and the monster just called out to someone. Even the quick glance at the encounter map will show you where the other monsters are, and if you're using a battlemat and minis, go ahead and place them if you like. Just remember, you can't respond to any threat that has not presented itself to you in any way, shape, or form. Had the kobold leaned back and shouted to the room behind him (as shown on the map), it would be okay for the party to assume that there is someone else back there. Unfortunately for you, all he did was shout in no particular direction.

From where your PCs are positioned, check for your lines of sight. (This is why a battlemat and some kind of markers are key.) If it's not in a PCs line of sight, or if they are not otherwise aware of it (smell it, hear it, have been told about it, etc.), they may not respond to it. They know about the pit, so they may avoid it or jump over it. They know about one kobold for sure, and they have a good clue that there may be more. How many more? Only the kobolds know for sure. If your PCs in this room are standing on the entrance stairs, they have no line of sight to the chamber behind the kobold or the hallway at the top of the map. They may therefore only respond to the kobold, the pit, and the possibility that there are others nearby.

Roll for initiative.

If the PCs win the initiative, decide what they will do based only on the perceived elements. Suppose you decide that the PCs will enter the wider area at the base of the stairs and fan out, their senses alert to whatever direction the kobold's reinforcements might come from.

If the monsters win the initiative, read the section of the encounter labeled "Tactics". Activate the monsters accordingly, reading the section labeled "Features of the Area" so you, as DM, know what to have the features do once they are engaged.

Let's say the PC's won the initiative. Who is in the party? Let's say one of the players is a fighter with an itchy trigger finger. He's all about smash-n-bash, loot-n-scoot. He's a fiery personality who doesn't feel like waiting for the invitations to this melee to get engraved and mailed out. Keeping up this character's personality, you might decide that he whips out his battle axe and charges for the shrieking kobold. You decide, based on your vision of the PC, whether he skirts the slime pit or whether he leaps across it with a mighty battle-cry.

Well, you didn't name him "Rambo" for nothing...

The "Features..." section tells you that the pit is 10 feet deep filled with 4 feet of kobold snot or something. Jumping over the pit is a DC 10, so roll against his Athletics skill and hold your breath. If he makes it, think cinematically. He lands on the other side of the pit, swinging his axe in a devastating arc. If he fails, you can imagine the \*SPLUT!\* as he lands unceremoniously in the slime, taking the damage listed in the pit description and suffering any effects described therein.

However you do your initiative, whether for each individual, for each group (party, slingers, skirmishers, in this example), or for each side (party, monsters), activate them in order. When it's the monster's turn, it's time to put on the DM hat.

"Who are these punks that dare invade our home? We must stop them, and the bloodier we do it, the better!" Ask yourself, "What would Vhuc do?" (FYI, Vhuc was a kobold chieftess in the first release of "The Ruins of Undermountain".)

You run the monsters the same way you run the PCs. They may not respond to anything they are not aware of. They might not know how many members are in the party, or what their capabilities are. When in doubt, do what you would do if your buddies were playing.

What they will know in this example is that there is a hall to the top of the map protected by a portcullis that they may bypass without penalty. It's possible that one or two kobolds may circle the pit to the bottom of the map, keeping that portcullis at the PCs backs and giving a bit of an advantage to their buddies behind the bars. It's possible that the slinger may keep running around the edge of the pit, keeping the party dodging his shots while also trying to evade or fight the skirmishers. It can be a chaotic situation that requires you to change hats faster than Bartholomew Cubbins (a cookie for naming the reference) as you work through your initiative order.

**AVOID TEMPTATION!!!** You put a lot more work into creating your party than you did buying the module, so it can be tempting to move the monsters in less-than-tactical ways. This is as bad as buying a module that your normal group is going to play and reading ahead so you know where all the pitfalls are (assuming you're not the DM, that is!). Keep that Monster Manual handy and live by it!





## SECRET DOORS, HIDDEN TRAPS, and OTHER DM GOODIES

Yeah, there's that big "S" telling you all about the secret door. There's the "T" telling you about the trap door, the "C" telling you about the hatch in the ceiling, and the text telling you that a failed Thievery check at DC20 will hit the rogue with a poison dart trap affixed to the treasure chest. How do you ignore that kind of information? That's solid gold to a player!

And yet, during a solo run through a 3e dungeon to make sure I knew where all of the knives were hidden, I almost didn't finish the dungeon because of my party's failure to notice a secret door. I had to honestly ask myself if I had any reason whatsoever for them to suspect a secret door, and I had none. As a little bit of Deus Ex Machina, I decided that the wizard began adjusting his equipment for the long trek out of the dungeon and back to town to investigate more rumors about this dungeon. The party had encountered no threat like the one described by the townsfolk, so what were they talking about? Maybe they had the wrong place? As he was adjusting his belt, he dropped a scroll he had been examining. Reaching down to pick it up, I allowed myself a perception roll to see if he noticed the scroll moving, as if by a breeze. Had he failed, it was time to go back to town. However, he made his roll with a solid 20, and not only did he notice the scroll moving a little bit, but he felt the breeze along the floor and followed it to a section of wall. From there it was a normal search for the door. The key to making this work was to give myself a chance to fail.

Assuming you haven't settled on a routine for the PC in question and noted it on the character sheet, such as "Always checks chests for traps" or "Always searches for secret doors", a Passive Perception check should be enough to allow you to let yourself know that there's something not right about the lock, something odd about the bookshelf, or whatever. Just make it enough of a description to yourself to stand out a little. Now you have to see if you find anything. The adventure text should tell you what it will take to actually notice things. There are DC charts in the DMG to help you if no numbers are presented. (Players of older editions would make a Spot check.)

Taking 10 is not allowed in Solitaire D&D, but you may allow yourself a number of tries equal to your WIS modifier. This is to offset the metagame knowledge you possess as both player and DM. If you notice something odd, you must investigate. If you notice nothing unusual, you must act as though nothing is there. Walk past the secret door, jimmy open the lock, whatever. The DMG tells you what sort of difficulty to set for yourself. Average secret doors are set to "hard". The 4e DMG also lists numerous traps and the DCs to notice them as well as the DCs for the various countermeasures you might consider.

Skill Challenges (4e) are easier than you'd think. The DMG and the errata for Skill Challenges are pretty definitive of what DC to use, and the examples in the DMG should give you a good idea of what you want to accomplish and how tough it will be. Your only challenge as DM and PC is how to role-play it without looking like you're talking to yourself. If you are using a published module, you will already know how many successes versus how many failures you will need, so you could just roll the dice until you get a final result one way or the other. You could even imagine the conversation going on with each roll. What I do when soloing is to keep a word processor handy and write each line before I roll. For example, suppose my cleric is trying to garner the cooperation of a rival church to defend against an impending attack. I would start the encounter by writing the first line of the conversation:

*PC: Your Worshipfulness, we may not share the same ideologies, but we share the same threat. The followers of Bane are a grave danger to both our flocks.*

At this point, roll for a Diplomacy skill check. Whatever the result, I now write the response as I

imagine it would come from the rival priest:

SUCCESS:

**Priest:** *Agreed, we share the same danger, but without knowing the size and nature of what we're facing, I need to keep as many of my own shields and swords as possible.*

FAILURE:

**Priest:** *Your "flock" prefers to eschew the very things that could protect them. You may bring them to our temple for protection, but I cannot afford to send my own defenses to those who have chosen not to be able to defend themselves. It could cost me my own people.*

Record the number of successes and failures, writing a new dialogue line for each response. In the Success example, you can see that the priest's hesitation is based on not knowing what he's going to be fighting. Based on this, I would then write something like this for the next line:

**PC:** *It is believed that a force of three thousand descend on our small valley. Local militia forces should be able to deal with the foot soldiers, but it is known that they have secured flying mounts, drakes, and have a powerful war wizard with them.*

Again, make the appropriate skill roll, repeating until you hit either the success or failure target number. For example, if the line above was meant to frighten the priest into action, it would be a Bluff check. Other lines could be written that are meant to intimidate or otherwise influence the NPC in question. In a published adventure, certain side-effects for certain techniques should be listed, such as "Using Intimidate will always result in a failure." If you want to use this knowledge, make an Insight check (Sense Motive in older editions) to see how imposing the other person's personality is. Determine the Charisma bonus for the person you're using the skill challenge against, subtract it from 13, and use that as your DC to see if it looks like you can Bluff, Intimidate, or otherwise force the guy's opinion. A higher Charisma bonus is going to represent a strong force of personality (and thus easier to detect), and you'll know whether or not the guy can be bluffed, bullied, or bargained with.

If you fail to detect how set this guy is, you have to look at your PC's personality. A peacemaker will not be prone to play it heavy-handed. The fighter in the Kobold Hall example, however, is an impatient individual. He might do something detrimental, like opening his big mouth. If you have a feisty, impatient PC, bad things can happen that might make you feel you're playing with a feisty, impatient player. After a failure, roll against his Willpower, adding 1 for every two-way verbal interchange that has occurred. If you get equal to or lower than his Willpower, your potentially detrimental PC behaves himself. If you get over his Willpower, he gets stupid, maybe because he's tired of diplomatic games while lives hang in the balance... or maybe he's just a loud-mouthed jerk.

Assume the priest in the example has responded to the description of the forces he may be facing. He decides that the threat sounds too big for him to send any of his defenders away and insists that the party bring the undefended villagers to his fortified temple. The fighter rolls and fails his check. Enough of this pretty little banter, this guy just doesn't get it!

**FIGHTER:** *Reality check, buddy! We've got people scattered across the farmlands! We'll never get them together in time to march them across the valley to your little hidey-hole here, so we need meat shields between them and Bane's boys until we can get their butts outta there! Now are you with us, or do we have to sack and burn this fancy chicken shack?*

Yeah, you gotta write this line down, too. Make an intimidate check in this case. If it's already determined that Intimidate attempts are automatic failures, mark it down as such. If not, go ahead and roll for reaction normally. Maybe an immediate Diplomacy check will smooth things out. ("He was kicked in the head this morning by our pack mule. He's not quite right.") Maybe the priest was unaware of how spread out the pacifistic villagers were. ("I didn't realize they were so dispersed. And you only need us to buy time to get them here? Hmm, that changes things...")

However it plays out, write down an appropriate response.

It can derail a whole adventure if something detrimental happens that lands your party in the local jail, but understand that you are giving up a lot of fate to the dice in exchange for playing both sides of the game. You will know if you have an impatient, hyperactive, or uncontrollable character in your party. After all, you made them! If you decide before starting the encounter that this PC is somehow not present (maybe one PC took him to the tavern instead, to keep him busy), then he won't be a problem. If you failed to think of it beforehand, well it looks like you're stuck with a potentially ticking bomb in the encounter. Not knowing how the dice are going to roll is like not knowing what the DM placed in the next room.

Puzzles aren't difficult to resolve. If you made the puzzle, you know how to solve it. Page 84 of the DMG tells you how to set up a puzzle as a Skill Challenge. It's a good way to simulate your PCs not knowing the answer.



## COMBAT

This is the meat and potatoes of the game. You didn't go into Kobold Hall to sell them cosmetics or time-shares in the Moonshaes. You went in there to kick butt and chew bubble-gum, and you're all outta gum.

You ever play chess against yourself? No? Good. You're not THAT lonely. I have as a security guard. I had a magnetic chess set with flat pieces so you could fold up and store a game in progress. It was slow going, maybe one move per hour. The interim time was used actually doing my job, so I had other things to think about. At the end of each hourly patrol I'd make one move, and then move an indicator, like a paperclip, to the other side of the board to indicate whose turn it was, black or white. Then I'd read, check gauges, alarm settings, make coffee, do crossword puzzles, and wait for the next patrol, after which I'd repeat the process. I'd get in eight moves a night playing against myself. At each turn, I would make the move that was most advantageous to which ever side I was moving for. I had two identical tokens, one with a black side the other with a white side, on the table. If the game ended, I'd flip one of the tokens. Whatever color was on the token was the side that I was rooting for. In that manner I could actually lose against myself.

In Solitaire D&D, combat isn't that much different, except that you're probably going to want it to move faster. The rules stay the same. As you switch sides in the encounter, you must make whichever move would be most beneficial or advantageous to the side you are playing at that moment. As in the encounter section above, you may not respond to what you are unaware of. If there's a big chandelier overhead and the party ranger has decided that he's going to take a shot at the rope holding it, thus dropping it down on the ogre menacing his friends, the ogre most likely doesn't know this is going to happen. Unless he has another reason to move, such as charging another opponent who has proven to be a bigger threat than the one(s) he was already engaging, he stays put. He can't read the ranger's mind and probably hasn't noticed what the ranger is aiming his arrow at.

Similarly, if the orcs are aware of a net overhead and have the lever for it in their control, the party may move to a position right under it. It will probably be that fighter. He seems too eager to fight. Your rogue, however, might stay back, preferring his ranged attacks. Hey, nobody's paying him to get killed, right? So move your PCs in a manner consistent with their personalities. The warlord or cleric might go in with the fighter to buff him and back him up while the rogue and warlock stay back blasting away at the enemy. Unless someone in the party actually notices the net (Passive Perception), the orcs, on their turn, may drop it onto the PCs beneath it.

So a summary of Combat is

- 1) Roll for initiative.
- 2) Activate characters accordingly, making the most beneficial move possible for that character based on what that character is aware of.
- 3) Be mindful of the tactics used by opponents as described in the adventure text.

Things like Surprise Rounds, Cover, Concealment, etc. still apply normally. There is a section in the DMG that describes the monster roles. It is highly recommended that you read these pages. They will help you in deciding what the monsters do when your PCs do something that interrupts the "Tactics" section of the module. It will also help you decide what monsters to spring on yourself when you write your own dungeons.

## **ROLE-PLAYING, SCHIZOPHRENIA, and YOU**

Unless you want an express ticket to the therapist's couch, RP encounters, like pressing the innkeeper for information, bribing the street urchin to show you where the thieves' guild is, or haggling over the price of a horse is something best not acted out. Okay, maybe Robin Williams and Jonathan Winters could get away with it, but not you. Come on! D&D has a shady enough reputation as it is without "It drives you crazy!" being hung on it as well.

How do you handle such things? As I'm setting up for a Solitaire session, I set the scene in my mind. I keep it generic. If the party is in town, maybe they're just waking up. To get myself into character, I imagine what each PC is doing based on their personalities. The feisty fighter is also an early riser, so I put him in an open area working on his moves. The cleric is kneeling in morning prayer, his paladin friend joining him. The wizard, a bit fond of fine food, is enjoying a sumptuous breakfast while the rogue is sleeping off a hangover or else trying to figure out who he's woken up next to ("Oh, gods! Please don't let that be Hairy-nipple Kelli... Eeeeeew! This is why I don't give to the temple!"). If the party is in a dungeon, the PCs are stirring and/or checking their equipment. Someone may be making a breakfast-type meal (trying not to make it smell good enough to attract predators) while whomever was on watch briefs the party on anything noticed the previous night. If I had to knock off in the middle of a session, I check my notes as to who was where and doing what and set up accordingly. This puts me in the frame of mind for how they're going to interact with the NPCs.

While in non-combat, non-skill challenge encounters, it's best to keep them to an absolute minimum. "My fighter needs a new axe after losing his old one in the dungeon. There's a weapons shop in town. He has enough gold to buy one, so he does." If you like, make a Diplomacy or Streetwise check to see if he can haggle the price down, but don't drop it more than 2-3 gold. Make it a skill challenge if he really wants a price break, like a drop of 5 gold lower, or even at cost. Set the challenge level according to the DMG and how hard-nosed you've decided the retailer is. No merchant should be willing to drop his prices more than 15% without good reason.

Here is where personality charts can come in handy. The aforementioned "Central Casting" book has more than enough charts to determine an NPC's personality and help keep you from making it too easy on yourself, and all of the DMGs since 1e have ways to get a general personality type established. Sometimes all you need is a couple of words to get a germ growing. In a solo game I played just to see if the D&D economy was workable, I had to create a personality for a potential employer for my character, a wood-carver from a tiny little village who was determined to make a name for himself in Waterdeep. He had almost run out of money when he finally made a basic Charisma roll to be offered a job. The pay wasn't enough to keep him housed, but his new boss came out to be a generous and honest man with a nose for opportunity. I decided that he let the PC sleep in the storage loft, with the stipulation that he would also provide security for the place, which had been broken into a few times. His co-worker came out to be a hard-working but unimaginative carpenter. So the co-worker would make the pieces in plain cuts and the PC would carve the fancy details into the pieces. He would also keep small scraps and carve them into art pieces to sell on consignment. It wasn't an exciting adventure. It was just a "Get A Job" game to see how well the economy worked. It's harder to make a living in D&D than it is in the real world, but that's beside the point. The point is that from two or three key words per NPC, I had built an idea of what they were like and how they would respond to the PC.

So let's go back to the weapons shop. Two words for the shopkeeper, are, let's say, cheerful and compassionate. (1e DMG pp100-101 has a few lists to roll on.) The fighter sees an axe he really likes. The weight is good, the edges are sharp, and it rests comfortably both at his hip and in his hand. It's like it was made especially for him. He must possess this axe. The shopkeeper is cheerful. Why? He's doing good business. You don't become prosperous by giving your inventory away, so you may assume that he's not just going to give the fighter a price break. But he's compassionate as well, and he can see how badly the fighter wants this axe. "Cheerful" and

“Compassionate” are not words commonly associated with evil people, so the shopkeeper is not going to drive the price up, but desiring to see a happy customer and not desiring to take less than he feels is fair, you might decide that the shopkeeper offers a deal to the fighter. If the fighter can split a log in two in one fell stroke, he can have, say, a 15% discount on the weapon. The DMG has the rules for determining what sort of damage objects of various materials can take and what will be needed to hit them.

In such a manner, you have worked through an RP encounter without actually doing any role playing. You know the personality, made a few skill rolls, and are probably not talking to yourself. The great thing about Solitaire D&D is that you can cut to the chase. However, if you enjoy the role-playing aspect a lot, feel free to break out the word processor and novelize the encounter:

*Tev walked into the weapons shop. Hanging on the door was the most glorious axe he had ever seen. It seemed to be calling to him from its lofty perch above the doorway to the back. He barely even paid attention to the jingle of the bell over the front door, or to the smiling dwarf who had emerged from the doorway.*

*“So, you like her, do you?” the dwarf asked, following Tev’s gaze to the axe. “She’s a beauty, that one is, just waiting for the right hands to wield her. Do you think to be the one?”*

*“Let me see her,” Tev’s voice was quiet, as though he was in awe at the flaming scrollwork carved into the mirror-like axe head.*

*His hand felt electrified as he grasped the handle. It felt warm and comfortable. He gave it a couple of test swings, learning quickly that this axe would become an extension of his arm as well as of his soul. There seemed to be nothing magical about this axe. All of this beauty, this perfection, it was all due to sheer craftsmanship, and that made her all the more desirable to the young warrior who favored the skill of a craftsman’s own two hands over the mystic manipulation of arcane forces.*

*“How much?” he asked, his eyes still fixated on the fine details of the axe.*

*“She’s about 15 gold, but I’ll tell you what. I kind of like you, and I can see she does, too. I want to see how well you two work together. Let’s go out back.”*

Any RP encounter can be handled thusly. You don’t even have to be a great writer. Nobody’s going to grade you. All you’re doing is fabricating an encounter between two or more characters. The rogue perched on a building ledge might overhear the duchess and her lover discussing how to dispatch her husband, the duke. Write it up! The cleric might be poring over dusty religious texts by himself, seeking the true name of a demon. Write it up! The wizard might be arguing his reason for extended absences from the academy as research (read: lucrative dungeon delving). Write it up! Any of these can incorporate a skill check or a skill challenge, so keep your eyes open. Do the guards below notice the rogue? Does a self-appointed guardian of banned texts walk in as the cleric is nose-deep in dusty scrolls? Do the Superiors at the academy buy the wizard’s story? It’s nothing a little creative license and a few rolls of the dice can’t handle.

The side-effect to this is that you start to build a journal of your adventures. You can take these entries to build a new campaign from. Build it as though it’s going to be a regular session with buddies, pizza, everything. If you do wind up with a bunch of the guys over, you’ve got a detailed game ready to go. If not, it’s all metal for the forge of your imagination.

Another side effect of this sort of thing is that you can go through romance scenes if you are so inclined without having to hear your buddies make barfing noises. In a series of stories involving a young noble and his spirited, red-headed mistress, the romantic element was rife throughout, and the tension in the relationship as he began to settle down became a catalyst for tragedy. She charged off on an adventure in spite of his attempts to keep her home, and it ended with her messy demise at the hands of an orc king. I would never have put the guys through such a thing.

Most teenage boys aren't notoriously patient when wine and roses pervade the storyline. But by myself I was allowed to acknowledge my double-X chromosome and get all flowery. Meh, it's a good release that keeps me away from chick-flicks.

One more thing, go ahead and fudge die rolls if you are so inclined. If you'd do it for your regular group, you can do it for yourself. My rule of thumb is to permit fudging only if the roll is one point away. I will generally only fudge if A) the dice have rolling really crappy, or B) it would make for a better adventure. It wouldn't be much fun for the rogue to sit unnoticed on the ledge while a murder plot is un-hatched. I want drama, so the guard below gets s fudge changing his "just missed seeing the rogue" to a "Hey, who's that up there?"

Rooftop chase scene anyone?



## TREASURE and XPs

The published modules have the treasure already listed and dispersed. If you're crafting your own dungeon, you may want to follow this example and simply record what will be found once you get there. Stay within your PCs' levels and don't Monty Haul them. If you were DMing for your buddies, would you dump tons of magical goodies on them right off the bat? (You'd better say "no" or I'm going to sic that hamster from the MONSTERS section on you.) Don't do anything for your PCs that you wouldn't do for your buddies' PCs.

Another way to handle the doling out of treasure to yourself is to take the treasure for the dungeon and break it into smaller chunks, making sure there is treasure in at least a third of the rooms that you will be exploring. Write these chunks on index cards, with one blank card each for the rest of the rooms. If you want a specific treasure to show up in a specific room, assign that room number to that card. Shuffle the rest and stack them by your map. As you explore a room, open a chest, etc., pull a card off the top of the deck and that is what you've found.

Experience Points are straightforward, although you shouldn't allow yourself XPs based on great role-playing. That sort of thing is best done by another person, which you don't have handy if you're playing Solitaire D&D. Stick with what's handed out by the books. The published adventure will tell you how much you get, and the DMG can tell you what to award yourself for homemade dungeons.



## BIG, LENGTHY EPILOGUE

These tips should get you your D&D fix whether or not you have any friends to play the game with. I have run entire campaigns by myself, and I have to admit that it's not as rewarding as having the whole gang over for pizza, beer, and D&D, but it makes the game no less valid, provided you have played by the rules.