THE DUNGEON ORACLE

A Method For Converting Published Modules For Solo Play

By Paul Bimler

The Dungeon Oracle

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CREDITS:
All text by Paul Bimler
Cover Art by DM's Guild Creator Resources
All other art by William McAusland

THE DUNGEON ORACLE: CONVERTING A MODULE FOR SOLO PLAY ON THE FLY!

With the plethora of amazing, multi-player modules online, wouldn't it be amazing if there were some way solo players could take advantage of these. Well they can.

Your first stage is of course to purchase the module. Read through the adventure background before starting your quest.

You, as DM, will be running this for your adventurers, as a solo player. You can run any number of adventurers you want. Adventures are often balanced for 4 x PCs of a certain level. Four PCs is a lot to run, however. As a solo player, you may find a party of two or even just a single adventurer is preferable. If you run a single PC, give it Max HP, as it is not allowed death saves.

Have a look at this chart to give you an idea of how to convert 4-player adventures for 1-2 PCs. When a recommendation is given with the words "harder" or "easier" that means that there is a slight variance in encounter difficulty levels. So, 1 Level 6 PC will find an adventure balanced for 4 level 2s *slightly* harder than intended. 2 Level 4s will find the same quest a little *harder* than intended. But that just gives you choice - do you want to experience the story and have a little fun with combat along the way? Then go with easier. If you like a challenge, go with hard.

This is not a simple matter of calculating via the table on p.82 on the Dungeon Master's Guide. With smaller parties, the action economy is reduced, so the difficulty rating is increased even if the monsters stay the same. We need to take this into account when calculating a balanced level to run a module solo, and p.83 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* ("Party Size") gives us guidelines on how to do this. You can also use sidekicks and magic items to buffer difficulty levels.

An adventure balanced for...	Could be played with...	Or...
4 x Level 1 PCs	2 x Level 3 PCs (balanced)	1 x Level 4 PC (harder)
4 x Level 2 PCs	2 x Level 4 PCs (easier)	1 x Level 6 or 7 PC (harder/easier)
4 x Level 3 PCs	2 x Level 5 PCs (balanced)	1 x Level 8 or 9 PC (harder/easier)
4 x Level 4 PCs	2 x Level 7 PCs (balanced)	1 x Level 11 PC (balanced)
4 x Level 5 PCs	2 x Level 10 PCs (harder)	1 x Level 14 or 15 PC (harder/easier)
4 x Level 6 PCs	2 x Level 11 PCs (balanced)	1 x Level 16 PC (balanced)
4 x Level 7 PCs	2 x Level 13 PCs (balanced)	1 x Level 18 PC (balanced)
4 x Level 8 PCs	2 x Level 15 PCs (harder)	1 x Level 20 PC (balanced)
4 x Level 9 PCs	2 x Level 17 PCs (easier)	No level applicable
4 x Level 10 PCs	2 x Level 18 PCs (harder)	No level applicable
4 x Level 11 PCs	2 x Level 20 PCs (easier)	No level applicable

CREATING SURPRISE: CHANGING THE ADVENTURE

But even you are going to get some surprises. We are going to take the basic framework of this module and use it as a starting point for our adventure. So reading through this adventure will reveal some basic detail, but the nature of this material is going to change in interesting ways.

More enemies may appear. More traps may appear. The story will *definitely* change, as we need it to surprise us. But this method will allow you to enjoy innumerable adventures crafted by the many creative minds that contribute to the world of D&D (or any RPG for that matter)

TO PRINT OR NOT TO PRINT?

You may wish to print out the module or obtain a physical copy. Get away from those screens and onto the tabletop, increasing the quality of your gaming experience tenfold.

THE MAPS

You have two approaches to the maps. You can choose to use the maps and their locations as is, which detracts from the surprise a little. Or you can count the number of locations on the map, then devise a dice roll which triggers their appearance, making a new map as you go.

More on that below: "Randomising the Map"

CONTEXT

Here is your starting text to provide some context as to why you might be embarking on this quest alone:

> *You have heard rumours about this quest, you have even talked to some who have attempted it and failed, and they have told you many of the perils that await. With this foreknowledge, you feel you have a good chance of succeeding in this quest.*

Read through the module intro, including the DM backstory. Take note of:

1. Basic storyline. (Strip it down as much as possible.)
2. Each room, its inhabitants, and a basic outline. Don't worry, you are still going to be surprised!
3. Read through most of the module, even the DM background. This is the *basic* story, but we are going to change it in interesting ways that even the original authors didn't intend!
4. Look for any interesting random tables or monster encounter tables in the adventure. Take note of these. Perhaps you could even replace them with your own!

MAIN STORYLINE (Example):

> *Beastmen are abducting villagers. The PCs uncover an ancient chaos cult and its source: a temple in the centre of an underground sea.*
> *A rite is about to take place - the sacrifice of their fellow villagers. The PCs must stop it. If they don't the Chaos Lord will be reborn.*

ASK SOME QUESTIONS, especially ones that might add extra detail.
DETAIL: Something can cause the villagers to become undead… what is that?
DETAIL: Is there some sort of re-animation machine involved here? Have they gotten hold of planar technology somehow?

QUESTIONS

Now that you have the main storyline, it is time to ask some questions, to brainstorm the adventure. This is where *your* creativity comes in.

- **WHAT** is this cult doing here?
- **WHO** is the Chaos Lord, really?
- **WHERE** is the village that the PCs start in?
- **WHEN** does this take place within our world
- **HOW** do the PCs get to the island?

Some more questions to ask:
- *What is the PCs personal stake in this adventure?*
- *Do any of the PCs have a connection to the BBEG, or to the location? If so, what?*

ANSWERING THOSE QUESTIONS

In order to furnish answers to these questions, and to any questions that pop up within the adventure (EG: "Does this halfling appear hostile towards me?"), you will need access to a question/answer mechanic. The *Mythic GM Emulator* (available on Drivethru RPG) is an excellent one, and I have also included one in my product *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox* (available on Dungeon Master's Guild). Simply put, question/answer mechanics are a way of using dice rolls to get yes/no/maybe answers to any questions you might have regarding what happens as you move through your quest.

Both of these books also contain tools for generating detailed answers through random word association. With *Mythic GM Emulator*, you have the Event Meaning Table, with *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox* you have a list of 499 rollable Verbs. Random word generators are excellent for providing surprises within a solo adventure.

I have also included yet another list of random words not provided in either of those products, at the end of this document!

MONSTER LOCATIONS

Next, make a list of all the monsters that populate each area of the each map.

MAP 1: KEEP EXTERIOR

1. Vine Horrors
2. Beastmen
3. Beastman Champion
4. Tar Ooze

Now, for each of these, make a roll for how likely it would be that these creatures would move from their specified location. Come up with the likelihood ratio yourself. For the Tar Ooze and the Vine Horrors, let's put the probability at 15%, as they are fairly stationary creatures. For the Beastmen and the Beastman Champion, we will make it 30% as they are more mobile, but do have reasons for being in the locations where they are.

Roll for each of these, and determine whether they have moved. If they have, then set a 30% probability that you will encounter them at one of the other locations.

In the above example, I determined that the Beastman Champion had moved. So, every time I entered a new location, I rolled a d100 (30%) to see if he was there. Perhaps he won't appear until the boss encounter.

EXPANDING THE ADVENTURE

Beyond what is contained in the module, we can also consider some preliminary exploration or shopping in a nearby settlement. What is the closest settlement to where the quest takes place? Research it in the Forgotten Realms Wiki, or whatever resource you feel is appropriate. What are some notable buildings and NPCs in that location? Does your PC discover these people and places, and if so how do they interact with them?

What might a DM have a party do first before embarking on this mission? Visiting the local library or temples, in order to try and gain information on the perils about to be encountered? Lurking in and picking up rumours, perhaps? Searching to see if there are any magic items available in the town? Using, for example, *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox*, or *Mythic GM Emulator*, you can do some freeform solo adventuring and see what is able to be discovered, learnt, bought or traded, prior to embarking on the quest proper.
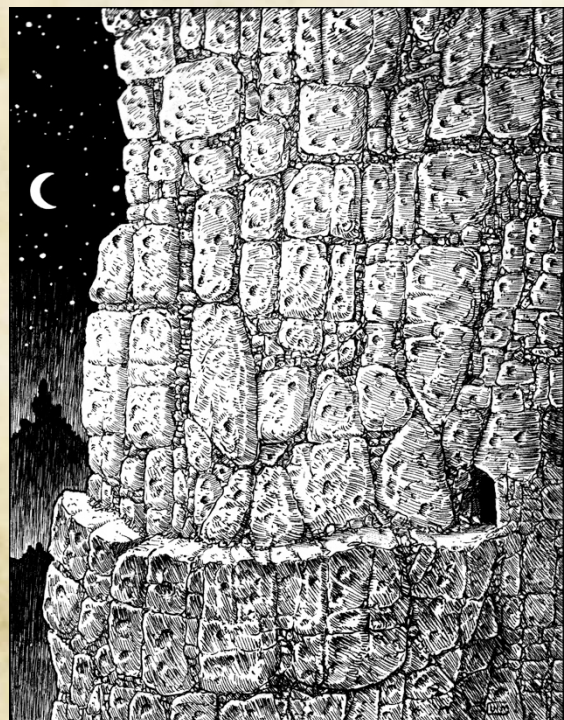
Remember, you are crafting your own personalised version of the adventure, so don't worry if these discoveries don't tally with the original adventure as read. Your version of the module will be different to the bare bones that the author has put down.

RANDOMISING THE MAP

Next, examine each map, nothing how many locations it has on it, and what type of environ it is. We are going to encounter these locations in a random order, and make a new map that reflects that, as we go. Make a list of the location numbers within each map, and come up with a way of rolling randomly to determine location. Leave the boss room out of this equation. We'll encounter that last. For example, in a quest I am playing through at the moment, the first map has Locations 1-12 on it (not including the BBEG location). This is very handy as I can use a d12. For location amounts that don't have a corresponding die, you can use a d100. For example, for 11 locations, make a table that allots roughly 9 points for each location. I.E: 1-9 Location A, 10-18 Location B, 19-27 Location C etc. This enables you to roll randomly. A bit of maths may be required. If you roll a location you have already encountered, simply roll again.

LOCATION RANDOMISATION TABLES: HOW TO ROLL

# of Locations	DICE ROLL
4	d4
5	d10 / 2
6	d6
7	d8, ignoring 8
8	d8
9	d10, ignoring 10
10	d10
11	d12, ignoring 12
12	d12
13	Encounter location 1 first, then use a d12 for the remaining 12 locations
14	Encounter location 1 and 2 first, then use a d12 for the remaining 12 locations
15	2d8 table (2=loc1, 3=loc 2, etc)
16	Encounter location 1 first, then 2d8 for remaining locations
17	d20, ignoring rolls above 17
18	d20, ignoring rolls above 18
19	d20, ignoring rolls of 20
20	d20

You get the idea.
Once you get through a good amount of these locations, you can make a new table containing only the locations you haven't visited yet. For example, if I finish 6 of my 12 locations, I can make a new table with 6

locations corresponding to a d6, so I don't have to reroll for repeats.

You could also use random dungeon generation tools to determine what connects these areas. In my product *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox* I include not only random dungeon generation tools, but also random wilderness generation tools, so wilderness adventures are soloable as well!

You will make your own map, according to the area, using your self-made tables and dungeon generation tools, as well question/answer rolls. And with each location, you will roll a die to see what location it is you have discovered.

Take the nearest number of locations to a die, and don't include the boss room. So, if there were 14 locations including the boss room, Use a d12 and encounter location 1 first, then keep and the boss room aside till the end.

We're going to use reaction tables, and random encounters, and other stuff, to really spice up this dungeon. Every time we enter a room, we will also roll to see how closely the room adheres to what is written within the module.

When it changes, we will take note of this, and how it may change the main storyline. Also, new storylines may emerge as we play, which will add to the fun.

Now cue your favourite adventuring music, read the intro text, and get rolling!
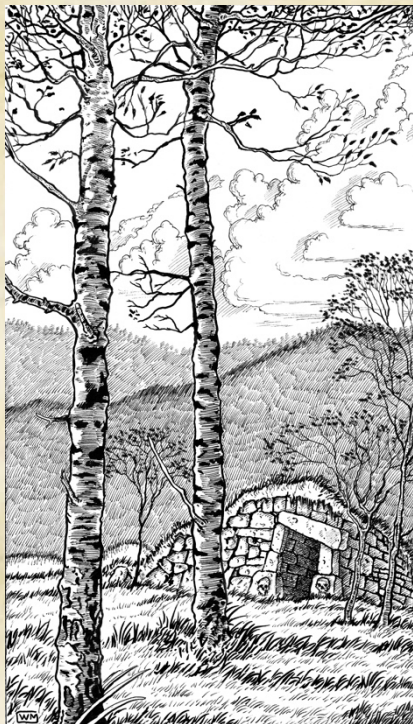
ENTERING A LOCATION - NOTHING IS AS READ!

1: Make a list.
When you enter the room, make a list of the features and creatures within it, as described in the module. Here is a sample list from a module recently played by the author.

LOCATION 2: Entry Courtyard
FEATURES:
- *Barren Ridge of Black Stone*
- *Well*

CREATURES:
None.

2: Determine nature of features.
Now, for each object, roll a d20. If the roll is 1-10, that feature remains unchanged. If you get 11-20, then roll for a keyword to apply to that item which will change its nature. Alternately, you could choose to roll for a keyword on every item so that the nature of the encounter is completely changed.

- **Barren Ridge of Black Stone** (Keyword rolled: *Twisted*)
- **Well** (Keyword rolled: *Controller*)

Reread the descriptive flavour text with these keywords in mind. How have these things changed now? Question why things have become this way. Use *Mythic GM Emulator* or any other Question/Answer system to discern more information about what you have seen. You are now adding detail that was not there previously, providing surprise and discovery for yourself. This is one way you get around the lack of surprise in a published adventure.

- Barren Ridge of Black Stone: Destroyed by some form of magic (how I interpreted *Twisted*).
- Well: There is a guard or keeper of the well here (how I interpreted *Controller*).

3: Encounter Location
Now have your PC or PCs encounter this location, as you have modified it. Run any combat encounters, explore, do all those things you normally do.

4: Spawning monsters
Since there is no DM present, you will need to work out where the monsters appear. Do

they have surprise/are they surprised by your PCs? Choose a die (I like the d12) and roll it to determine how many squares each monster is from your party.

5: Add to Storyline
Once you are done with the location, add to the storyline everything that your PCs have discovered, all the modified stuff included. You are in the process of personalising this adventure, writing a unique version of this module for your own enjoyment! You may create new storyline threads, new subplots. Take note of it all. This will give your characters more stuff to interact with, and that is the heart of a great adventure.

WHAT NOW?
What is described above is the essence of this method of soloing published adventures. From here, simply repeat the steps already described.
Use dungeon / wilderness generators to describe your progress to the next location.
Roll for your next randomised location, using your personalised location table.
List the features and creatures.
Roll to see if their nature / context is changed, and if so apply keywords to them.
Encounter location.
Add any new discoveries to your storyline.
Continue until you reach the boss encounter!

REFLECTION
In the past I have noticed that some of the greatest enjoyment I have gotten out of running solo adventures comes *after* the adventure session, when I am reflecting on the session and how my PC performed. But we can bring this enjoyment *into* the session itself by building reflection into our game. How this is done is by pausing between locations or chapters to review /read what you have already experienced, including any interesting story developments. This helps to reinforce all the different story elements in play, both those in the published module and the ones you have introduced through keywords, and has the added benefit of bringing an extra layer of enjoyment into the game.

THE BBEG
Is the boss as described in the adventure? Given that you have spent a lot of time changing this adventure, there is a high chance the nature of the BBEG has changed as well.
Perhaps you are facing a different boss now, and what you have heard regarding the main villain turns out to be just rumours!
The key here is not to take the material in the module at face value. The only way we can encounter this material in a fresh way is if we can change it somehow, and this goes for the boss encounter.
Use your newly-introduced story threads to change the encounter, or roll for some keywords to determine how this BBEG situation might have changed.
And that is all I really have to say about running published adventures as solos! Experienced solo players will also, at some stage, want to try creating their own adventures as they move through them, using dungeon / wilderness generation tools and question / answer mechanics. In my opinion, solo play is one of the highest forms of RPG play as it allows us to act as player and dungeon master at the same time.
I will leave you with a brand new list of keywords to enhance your adventuring experiences, as well as a list of recommended resources for solo play.
Come and join us on Facebook! Do a search for the "Dungeons & Dragons Solo Adventures" group, and come and join our online community of solo players. May all your adventures be immersive and glorious!

NEW KEYWORD LIST
Method for rolling keywords:
STEP 1: Roll a d4 to get hundreds.
STEP 2: Roll a d100 to get your 10s and 1s.

d4 Roll	Hundreds range
1	0-99
2	100-199
3	200-299
4	300-399

1. Curse
2. Ruined
3. Boon
4. Escape
5. Fugitive
6. Unsafe
7. Treacherous
8. Clue
9. Familiar
10. Rotten
11. Slave
12. Captive
13. Saviour
14. Food
15. Uncharacteristic
16. Rancid
17. Fetid
18. Malodorous
19. Noxious
20. Noise
21. Secret
22. Silence
23. Sneak
24. Trapped
25. Knowledge
26. Accomplice
27. Henchman
28. Illusion
29. Item
30. Controller
31. Toss
32. Disciple
33. Deteriorating
34. NPC
35. Rescue
36. Diversion
37. Explosion
38. Turgid
39. Blustering

40. Hidden
41. Adventurers
42. Luminescent
43. Rusty
44. Vibration
45. Clank
46. Gears
47. Animal droppings
48. Itch
49. Smell
50. Diary
51. Dripping
52. Escape
53. Hairpin
54. Slippery
55. Severed hand
56. Misty
57. Floating
58. Laugh
59. Blood
60. Cloying
61. Hide
62. Smoke
63. Gaping
64. Calm
65. Subliminal
66. Hollow
67. Whoosh
68. Arid
69. Premonition
70. Demon
71. Force
72. Statue
73. Refuse pit
74. Invite
75. Obsidian
76. Tunnel
77. Sundered
78. Fluttering

79. Slide
80. Diseased
81. Infectious
82. Boisterous
83. Overexcited
84. Erratic
85. Decrepit
86. Delusional
87. Title
88. Decayed
89. Representative
90. Suggestion
91. Unthinking
92. Spoiled
93. Obstinate
94. Rambling
95. Portal
96. Rainbow
97. Effigy
98. Scuttling
99. Woven
100. Unseen
101. Fragmented
102. Damaged
103. Incongruous
104. Hefty
105. Mammoth
106. Curiosity
107. Precious
108. Enthusiastic
109. Rundown
110. Unsophisticated
111. Natural
112. Persistent
113. Revealing
114. Prehistoric
115. Awake
116. River
117. Slime

118.	Bones	175.	Child	232.	Indication
119.	Stale air	176.	Runes	233.	Tale
120.	Rocky	177.	Medicine	234.	Water
121.	Dryrot	178.	Teacher	235.	Heat
122.	Twilight	179.	Disease	236.	Book
123.	Vacant	180.	Energy	237.	Goods
124.	Glowing	181.	Road	238.	Guide
125.	Twisted	182.	Location	239.	Prize
126.	Chill	183.	Success	240.	Admission
127.	Angular	184.	Student	241.	Explosion
128.	Scary	185.	Possession	242.	Monopoly
129.	Weather	186.	Performance	243.	Reflect
130.	Portal	187.	Lake	244.	Disastrous
131.	Motive	188.	Sea	245.	Costume
132.	Bridge	189.	Message	246.	Few
133.	Garbage	190.	Man	247.	Medium
134.	Foliage	191.	Woman	248.	Tidy
135.	Aftershock	192.	Payment	249.	Enchanted
136.	Sentimental	193.	Skill	250.	Percussive
137.	Sleep	194.	Wealth	251.	Duty
138.	Toilet	195.	Heart	252.	Original
139.	Livestock	196.	Storage	253.	identity
140.	Well	197.	Alcohol	254.	Nimble
141.	Crypt	198.	Argument	255.	Express
142.	Guard	199.	Agreement	256.	Communion
143.	Sarcophagus	200.	Republic	257.	Duty
144.	Burial	201.	Tradition	258.	Original
145.	Rites	202.	Employment	259.	identity
146.	Family	203.	Device	260.	Pleasant
147.	Ruler	204.	Guidance	261.	Manage
148.	Flee	205.	Foreknowledge	262.	Thick
149.	Protection	206.	Candidate	263.	Route
150.	Vision	207.	Confusion	264.	Swear
151.	Wilderness	208.	Guest	265.	Downward
152.	Dungeon	209.	Operation	266.	Awful
153.	Nobility	210.	Temple	267.	Important
154.	Orb	211.	Song	268.	Faith
155.	Sceptre	212.	Accident	269.	Change
156.	Armies	213.	Girl	270.	Stray
157.	Apocalypse	214.	Boy	271.	Contradict
158.	Music	215.	Proposal	272.	Pilgrim
159.	Singing	216.	Son	273.	Chase
160.	Prodigy	217.	Daughter	274.	Direct
161.	History	218.	Village	275.	Advance
162.	Map	219.	Warning	276.	Mould
163.	Information	220.	Courage	277.	Punish
164.	Government	221.	King	278.	March
165.	Ability	222.	Instrument	279.	Banter
166.	Love	223.	Sister	280.	Building
167.	Temperature	224.	Brother	281.	Glitter
168.	Area	225.	Weakness	282.	Uninterested
169.	City	226.	Ambition	283.	Hole
170.	Country	227.	Celebration	284.	Common
171.	Fire	228.	Fortune	285.	Mouth
172.	Language	229.	Negotiation	286.	Maximum
173.	Equipment	230.	Midnight	287.	Memory
174.	Technology	231.	Obligation	288.	Tedious

RECOMMENDED READING

By the Author:

- *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox*
- *The Death Knight's Squire (Level 2 Solo Adventure)*
- *Tyrant of Zhentil Keep (Level 3 Solo Adventure)*
- *Citadel of the Raven (Level 3 Solo Adventure)*
- *The Tortured Land (Level 4 Solo Adventure)*
- *Drums at Daggerford (Level 5 Solo Adventure, soon to be released)*

(These first four adventures above also available as a bundle)

- *Labyrinth of Lies (Level 5 Solo Adventure)*
- *Dread Vault of Tgozur (Level 10 Solo Adventure)*
- *The Saviour of Sharn (Level 4 Eberron Solo Adventure)*
- *Tables of Doom (Level 2 Solo Adventure)*
- *The Dead Don't Sleep (Toolbox Solo Adventure)*

CONVERSIONS

- *Ghost of Lion Castle 5e Conversion*
- *Rage of the Rakasta Solo Conversion*
- *Menace of the Icy Spire Solo Conversion*

OTHER SOLO ADVENTURES and RESOURCES

On Dungeon Master's Guild:

- *Single Player Systems, Solitaires*
- *Elminster's Guide to Solo Adventuring*
- *Dungeon Room Descriptions*
- *Klauth's Curio*
- *Revenor's Ring*
- *Dark Sorceries*
- *Into Kryptgarden Forest*
- *The Executioner's Daughter*
- *To Hell and Back Again*

On Drivethru RPG:

- *Mythic GM Emulator*
- *Raging Swan Dungeon / Urban / Wilderness Dressing Books*
- *Tome of Adventure Design*
- *Toolbox*
- *Emotional Reaction Generator*
- *The Book of Random Tables*
- *Deck of Many Dungeons*
- *Game Master's Apprentice Fantasy Deck*