

Solo Sandbox

The Solo Sandbox is meant to be the basic skeleton of a world to explore in solo RPG play with every new adventure giving just enough info to build your own connections between scenarios into a larger campaign if you so desire. Each adventure Thread has a difficulty rating (on a scale of 1 to 5) that may make tackling a nearby mission very difficult until you have explored other places to gain knowledge, power, and experience. You also gain Reputation points equal to the difficulty rating of the Thread. Upon completing any Thread, there are lasting effects upon the realm that can color future interactions and adventures.

With no pre-scripted over-arching plot tying all the threads together, you can take the sandbox play in any direction you want. You can treat it as an explorative hex crawl where you seek out adventure just to see what's there, or you can dig deeper to find a connecting Tangle between the Threads. Is there an undead lich making a power play for the kingdom, or could it be a slowly infiltrating kingdom from beyond the borders of your realm?

The World

This is a high fantasy, medieval world with an extremely low incidence of exceptionalism (magical, combat, or otherwise) since the Age of Wonders passed several hundred years ago. For the most part, life is mainly about making sure that there is food on the table for the next meal. Life expectancy is relatively low, diseases can ravage whole population centers, and stark class divides make the feudal system function while keeping the general populace down. Other races beyond human may or may not be a part of this world as you see fit.

After the collapse of all civilization at the end of the Age of Wonders, society has only slowly spread back out from the capital due to the monsters and beasts that roam the wild, and because of this, travel is a dangerous thing. Trade caravans must hire many guards to ensure their goods arrive to their intended destination. Few people try to live isolated from others and instead rely on each other to survive in this untamed world. Occasionally, the ruins of some great fort or tower left over from the Age of Wonders are found abandoned and reclaimed by the wild, but almost no one is willing to explore these lost relics of the past. "Better a lowly meal than a lofty ideal," as the saying goes.

Magic Exceptionalism

Magic is a known and accepted thing that permeates all of society. Many people exhibit small, magical knacks for mundane things like helping plants just a little faster and stronger or cutting wood just a little straighter, but these abilities are just known as talents. True magic, or what is known as true magic, the magic that twists the energies of the world into new and unusual things, is extremely rare. Most people would go their whole lives without seeing any true magic performed. King Jahron rules the land mostly benevolently from the capital city, and even at the pinnacle of power in this realm of Harkan, he only has a few true magicians who serve him led by the powerful Archmagus Sephya Tirel. Some say she is one of the most powerful magicians to ever live.

If your character wields magic, it is a rare thing. If people knew of your magical skills, they may press you to deeds of service that you may or may not be able to perform. However, one thing is sure. You will not be able to meet everyone's expectations of with your magic, and when you fail just once, the general population will turn against you for not caring about the everyman.

Military Exceptionalism

The royal guard is supplied with sharp swords and well-crafted armor. Much like with magic, there are those who just seem to have a natural talent with the bow or blade, but no one would consider this magical in the realm of Harkan. They just happen to hit with a little more accuracy and a little more power than most. There are few true champions who can perform combat maneuvers that appear to defy the laws of physics. The captain of the royal guard, Deegan Wollensburrow, is one such individual.

If your character performs exceptional feats of combat, they may be held in awe and feared, but they will also be sought after to help secure homes, businesses, or roads. Even with exceptional use of a blade, you can't be everywhere at once. At some point, the general population will resent that you weren't there to stop one attack or another.

Mental Exceptionalism

Innovative inventors are rare in Harkan. Few people have the diplomatic capacity to bring a swift peace between two rival nobles. Fewer still are the wise counselors who seem to know exactly the right thing to say or do at exactly the right moment. King Jahron does employ two such minds: Gimple Grensdum, the Royal Tinkerer, and Rubin Tallow, the King's Sage.

Gathering a reputation for being a smooth-talker or quick-thinker is not necessarily difficult, but again, since exceptionalism is so rare, this gift will also be highly sought after. Farmer Ragor will want you to cut the best deal for his stock while the merchant Aramia will want you to broker a more favorable trade deal for her. Eventually, some naysayer will start shouting that you're just charming your way up the ladder while stepping on all those beneath you.

The Island Unknown

To the southwest is an island that is completely unknown to the people of the mainland. Not only that, but people are not sure why it remains unexplored. Every time the topic comes up, most people will become uncomfortable and change the subject, but no one knows why they themselves behave this way about the topic.

The Mechanics

This sandbox can be explored using any of your favorite RPG systems and solo oracles. There are only a few additional rules to help you along the way.

Reputation Score

Your reputation score is a measure of how well known you are and how well liked you are. At the end of each Thread, you gain either positive or negative Reputation points (or maybe some of each). Track these two sets of points separately and add them together to find out how well-known you are in the region of your influence. If you have more positive Reputation points than negative, you are generally viewed favorably and vice versa. You can purposefully convert 5 positive Reputation points into 5 negative Reputation points to buy a favor from someone. You can also purposefully lose 5 positive and 5 negative Reputation points by staying out of the limelight for a significant amount of time.

The Reputation points are meant to be a role-playing device, so feel free to fail at threads and earn some negative points. Remember what a short, wise and green puppet once said, "Failure, the greatest teacher it is." Having a net negative Reputation score may even help drive more conflict which is the heart of any good story or game.

See the chart below for more details on the effects of Reputation points.

Total Reputation Points	General Effect
0 – 5	You are a virtual unknown outside of your immediate circle of influence.
6 – 10	Some people in the local region recognize you or have heard of you.
11 – 20	Most people in the local region recognize you and have heard of you.
21 – 35	You have earned the local respect and/or fear of most of the population in the region.
35 – 50	Some people outside of the local region have heard of you.
50+	You have reached a celebrity status across the realm.

Difficulty Levels

Each Thread has a difficulty rating from one (low difficulty) to five (high difficulty). You should feel free to interpret the difficult in any way that makes the most sense at the time, but the intention is that these would be absolute difficulties based on the range of character power within your given system. For example, if you're playing in a system that has 20 levels of character power progression, you might interpret difficulty one Threads as appropriate for level 1-4 characters and difficulty five Threads as appropriate for level 17-20 characters.

Connecting the Threads into a Larger Story Arc (Tangle)

At the outset of your adventure, your character is most likely not aware of an epic plot by the Big Bad Evil Guy that spans over all the Threads. At the end of each Thread, think about the potential connections that could be made to a larger narrative and use your oracle of choice and more Threads that you then create on your own to investigate whether those connections are accurate. In this way,

two players could complete the same initial 3-5 Threads but end up with a very different overarching narrative that ties them all together.

You can use the Connections questions found at the end of each Thread description, or if you are stumped for connections that make sense, you can roll on the clue chart to find random clues to begin piecing together after several Threads are complete. These clues or connections can be found at any time during the exploration of a Thread.

2D6	1: Symbol	2: Colors	3: Influence	4: Name	5: Attitude	6: Material
1	An Eye	Red and Gold	Magic	Local Lord	Greed	Red Clay Dirt
2	A Hand	Blue and Green	Nature	King or Queen	Destruction	Glittering Dust
3	A Sword	Purple and Black	Politics	Outlaw	Hatred	Chips of Unusual Stone
4	A Shield	Orange and White	Religion	Dead Person	Precision	Leaf of a Far Off Plant
5	A Dragon	Brown and Green	Military	Deity	Revenge	Unfamiliar Coins
6	A Bear	Yellow and Blue	Another Plane	Creature	Planned	Foul-Smelling Liquid

Remember that not all Threads will connect to the big narrative, so if something doesn't fit or make sense, consider it simply a side quest. However, if you find Threads that do relate, this can make a Tangle which are basically the threads of a larger narrative or epic quest. After you have at least three connections or three different clues from three different categories, write down a plausible way in which those Threads could be woven into a larger storyline. This is a potential Tangle. If you find additional connections or clues later on that don't fit within that Tangle, create a new Tangle. At most, you should have three Tangles open a time. Determine whether or not a specific Tangle is accurate by creating your own Threads exploring the truth of your perceived storyline Tangle.

Questions for After Thread Completion

Every time you complete a Thread, you should think about how the events and outcomes of that Thread affected both you as a character and the world at large. Remember that succeeding at a Thread is not necessarily a binary thing. There may be both positive and negative outcomes on either yourself or the world just as there may be both positive and negative Reputation points earned.

- *How did the world change based on your outcome?*
- *What happened to your personal circumstances as a result of you taking time off to adventure?*

Using the Map

Once you choose (or randomly generate) a Thread, you need to mark where it is happening on the map of the world. Each Thread should no further than one additional hex from the last explored hex. For example, the first Thread you explore will either be within your starting hex or in an adjacent hex. If it's

in an adjacent hex, the next Thread could occur in your starting hex, the same hex as the last Thread, or any adjacent hex to either of those two hexes. In this way, you can continually work outward from your starting hex as your story progresses. Each hex on the map should take about a day's journey to get to.

There are only a few fixed locations on the map. Most larger towns, local baronies, trading centers, etc. will be placed on the map as you explore and they come up in Threads.

If a Tangle pushes you to a geographical region (mountains, swamp, desert, etc.) that is further away than any hex adjacent to explored hexes, feel free to travel there. For each hex passed through this way, get a Thread. You may explore that Thread on the way to your original destination or leave it for later. If you leave it for later, think how the Thread may have changed in the meantime.



Starting the Game in a Small Village:

You never set out to be an adventurer. In a village this small, you can't help but be a well-known part of the community, and you're known as a regular person with a mundane part in the village. Sure this area is ruled by the king, but he lives far away in a fancy palace. No royal guards or even messengers ever make it out this far from the capital. It's a simple life out here. There's a smithy shop, the tanner's place, a textile mill, woodworker/lumber yard, a gathering place affectionately referred to as "The Public House" that rents out a room or two to the occasional traveler, and several homestead farmers spreading out in a rough circle away from the trading post which is in the dead center.

What is the name of the village?

What are you trained at (farming, blacksmith, tanner, etc.)? Put another way, what is your day job?

Why will you start adventuring on the side (financial security, upward social mobility, the thrill of it, etc.)? What need motivates you to adventure?

Thread 1:

Oralie Couci was warned about setting up a homestead so far away from the village proper. Each night for the past three nights, a cow has been killed and devoured. Losing anymore will mean he and his family have no more meat to trade before this winter. For solving his problem, Oralie is willing to give a large case of eggs and some of the feed he won't be needing anymore which can then be sold or bartered.

Dramatic Question: Can you protect the remaining Couci family livestock from whatever has been hunting the cows?

Difficulty: 1 (low)

Connections: Is a beast specifically targeting the Couci family? Is something specifically targeting only a cow rather than other livestock they have on the farm? Is there intelligence behind these attacks?

Lasting Effects of Success: Now that the area is safer, Oralie may convince a family member who needs to move from a neighboring village to set up his own homestead near here. If that family member goes deeper into the wild, there could be future complications.

Lasting Effects of Failure: The Couci family may lose a member either during the upcoming winter or on the road as they travel further to drum up new trade to replace their losses. Oralie will blame you for this loss.

Thread 2:

Father Barnabas Postel, bruised and bloodied, makes his way into the village proper pleading for help. His small shrine isolated in the woods has been overrun with what he claims are creatures out of a nightmare.

Difficulty: 2 (low)

Dramatic Question: Can you save the shrine from destruction/desecration?

Connections: Where did these creatures come from? Have they always been part of these woods or are completely new to the area?

Lasting Effects of Success: Father Barnabas will be willing to provide long-term care for you if you are wounded.

Lasting Effects of Failure: The shrine is abandoned and may become part of a growing threat. Father Barnabas forgives the loss of his shrine, but would deeply appreciate help finding a more suitable location for a new one.

Thread 3:

A pair of young boys, no more than 13 years old, were brought into town after they tried to steal food from a local. After hearing their story, you find out that their small village was flooded with waters that rose much quicker than should be possible. They escaped the flash flood but were separated from their family in the process.

Difficulty: 1 (low)

Dramatic Question: Can you reconnect the boys with their family? Can you remove the flood waters from the village?

Connections: Where did this flood come from? Is it natural?

Lasting Effects of Success: If you find them, the family offers a place to stay on your future travels. If you remove the flood waters, this land becomes a growing village as they turn it into a large rice farm.

Lasting Effects of Failure: If you don't find the family, the boys will break free and join a group of local bandits to survive. If you don't remove the flood waters, the village becomes a new home to monstrous water creatures.

Thread 4:

Stories always talk about lost artifacts from the Age of Wonders. One such artifact is the Blood Staff of some long banished demon which is said to grow in power with each sacrifice of innocent blood. Callum Hatchet the sickly bard arrives to tell a tale in which two members of a traveling caravan he was part of found a perfectly balanced walking stick when digging a spot for a latrine in an area of several closely packed low hills. A fight ensued and Ladia Foreman the goldsmith clonked Ferris Godart the clothier on the head. She claimed the blow was never intended to be a death blow and became violent as the caravan tried to discuss it with her. At one point the bard claims the staff shot flames at one of the caravan guards, and Ladia used that time to make her escape. The bard says this most likely the lost Blood Staff, but is his story to be trusted, or is he just weaving a tale to earn a meal and night's rest?

Difficulty: 2 (low)

Dramatic Question: Can you track Ladia and save her from the influence of the staff or at least bring her to justice for her crime?

Connections: If this really is a staff left over from the Age of Wonders, what was it doing so close to the surface that it could be dug up?

Lasting Effects of Success: If it really is the Blood Staff, it may try to influence you instead of Ladia. If it is not the Blood Staff, Ladia will be jailed for her crime. Regardless of the outcome, many others will seek out this area of many closely packed hills trying to find more magical artifacts.

Lasting Effects of Failure: If it really is the Blood Staff and Ladia gets away, her influence and power will only grow. Regardless of the outcome, many others will seek out this area of many closely packed hills trying to find more magical artifacts.

Thread 5:

A lucky farmer, Musart Washborn, had many more bovine births this past season than he anticipated. He can now sell a breeding pair of cows to another farmer, Bert Lombalon, but getting the animals there safely is dangerous. Something has been attacking travelers on the road there during the night, but no one has gotten a good glimpse at it due to its hit and run tactics.

Difficulty: 1 (low)

Dramatic Question: Can you safely get the farmer's animals?

Connections: What creature(s) or people would be attacking a road with such regularity and still be able to avoid identification?

Lasting Effects of Success: If the animals make it safely to the Lombalon's farm, they offer a job to any of your family members or children who need work. After all, they hope to now have a growing business.

Lasting Effects of Failure: If the animals are lost, both farmers blame you. A member of the Lombalon family may resort to less than legal deeds in order to make ends meet and may become a thorn in your side at some point in the future.

Thread 6:

Loxias Talvace runs his barony with ruthless efficiency and as such is not well-liked. It comes as no surprise that there are whispers of an assassination plot, but while his death may be welcomed by most, it could also throw the region into upheaval. Should the assassins be stopped or should their plan be altered to depose Baron Talvace in a more humane way?

Difficulty: 2 (low)

Dramatic Question: Can you bring resolution to this situation in a way that maintains the peace and safety of the citizens of the barony?

Connections: Is there another power behind this assassination attempt? Is there some strategic importance to the Talvace barony?

Lasting Effects: If Talvace lives but is deposed, he will surely seek revenge by any means necessary. If Talvace lives but keeps his position of power, he will seek to root out those who plotted against him and make an example of them. If Talvace does not live, his daughter will seek revenge by any means necessary.