SOLO DUNGEON MAPPING

by Roger Moores

It seems to me that D&D is an ideal game for solo adventures, and indeed so is EPT; I recall enlisting as a deck hand (level 1) on an exciting expedition to Ss'amris Isle which worked well as a solo adventure apart from the fact that we kept getting lost at sea. My share of the spoils enabled me to finance myself and I continued to do quite well until I got impaled at around level 4 — but that is another story.

For solo adventures in D&D you need somewhat more than the game provides in the way of treasures, contacts, etc., as naturally you have no referee. Therefore it is important to improve on the contact tables to give you more variety. But the subject of this article is dungeon mapping, and I have devised a system which is useful, not only for lonely masochists, but also for DMs planning an underworld complex, for the dice can give you some very interesting dungeons which you might not originally have thought of. In other words, dungeons mapped under this system often seem to have an air of "authenticity".

Basically the system works like this. I have drawn up on graph paper some 100 'maps', each representing an underground area 200' x 200'. The 'maps' are not intended to be geomorphic in any way, so there is in fact no particular reason to have them all the same size. The key to the system is 'only map what you see'. For example, Figure A shows my Map No 22, which has four entry points (use a D4 to decide which). So, having decided on method of entry into the underworld — usually down a flight of steps, or a cliff-side cave, whatever your scenario decrees, our intrepid solo adventurer throws a '3' and therefore enters the 'Map' at point 3.

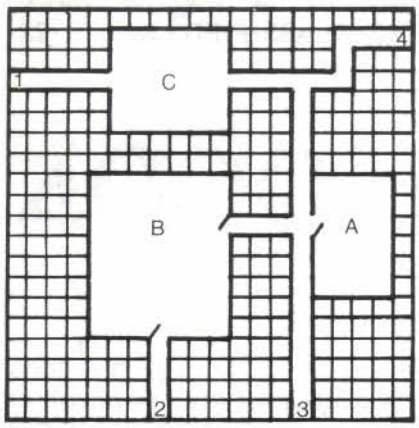

Figure A
Map 22

Charting his progress on his own blank sheet of graph paper, dicing every turn (as per D&D) for possible encounters, he — and any non-player hirelings or allies he has managed to secure — proceeds forwards for 100' without untoward incident until he is beside the closed door to Room A. In my underworlds, vision with torches is usually 40', so at this door our hero can see 30' to the left where there is a closed door, 40' ahead where he sees the blackness of the tunnel ahead, and, of course, the closed door to Room A. What he has 'mapped' so far on his own map appears in Figure B.

For the sake of this explanation he decides to ignore the passage to Room B and having explored Room A, tackling whatever the contact tables provide for in that room, he continues down the long tunnel for 70' from where he can see left 30' and the opening of a cavern (or something) and to the right 20' where the passage then turns left. He decides to go right in which case he will reach the end of the 'map' at Point 4, and his own map will look like Figure C.

Figure B

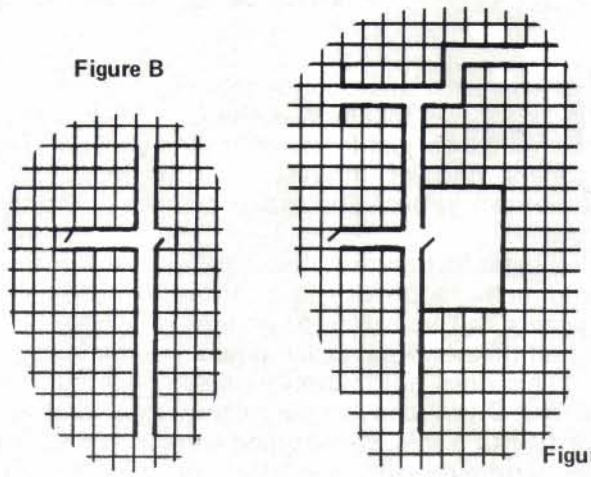

Figure C

He could of course now decide to go back and explore Chamber C or Room B, but the whole point of this system is that once he has decided to leave "Map 22" he must, should he subsequently return and decide to see what is behind the door to Room B, throw decimal dice to see which new 'Map' he starts on. In other words, once he has decided to go off 'Map 22' he does not know what is behind the door which at present leads to Room B. Let's assume he decides to leave Map 22 at point 4. He must first dice to see whether he stays on the same level or not. And here is my table for determining this. Throw a D20, and consult the column appropriate to the type of dungeon you are working in.

	Simple dungeon	Average dungeon	Deep dungeon
Straight on	1-12	1-14	1-8
Steps down 1-level	13	15-16	9-13
Steps up 1-level	14-16	17-18	14-18
Slope down 1-level	17	19	19
Slope up	18-20	20	20

(Unless specially indicated steps and slopes go along 20' for each level up/down)

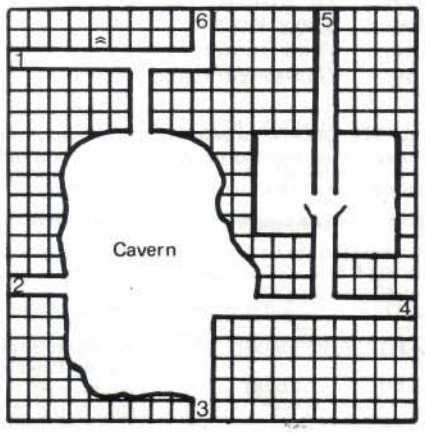

Figure D
Map 34

It is a "simple" dungeon, our hero throws 8 and therefore stays on the same level. Now he throws decimal dice to see

which 'Map' he moves on to. Let's say he throws 34. 'Map' 34 has six entry points (Figure D). He throws a 6 (this time using a D6) and thus enters at Point 6. He sees a right turn 30' ahead and goes on. He continues past the passage leading to the cavern and arrives at Point 1.

Incidentally, the grille is a method of transfer between levels. It leads to a parallel passage on the level below or above (50% chance of each). I like to put one odd thing on each map if possible.

Assuming our hero comes off Map 34 at Point 1 his own map will look like Figure E. And so the adventure goes on until our hero thankfully comes out of the complex, or perishes deep down within it.

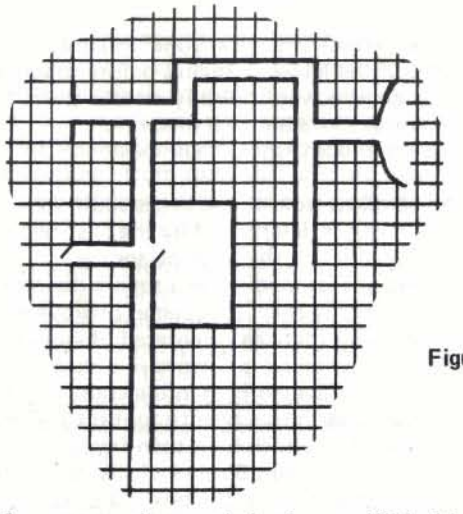

Figure E

Some anomalies need clearing up. With this method of "mapping only what you see" you are always liable to come round and meet yourself, so to speak. An example is Figure F where in continuing his adventures the hero arrives at Point A, which he had passed earlier on. We need to decide whether it's a blank wall (40% chance) or a secret door(60%). If it's a secret door there is a further 30% chance of its being one-way only. Fiddles are necessary sometimes, as for example on returning to what was previously identified as a cavern opening and not being able to return to the original map (indeed probably forgetting what map we were on at that time anyway). I use a D10 to give me the dimensions of the cavern in feet, and then dice (1 in 4 chance for doors or openings in each wall).

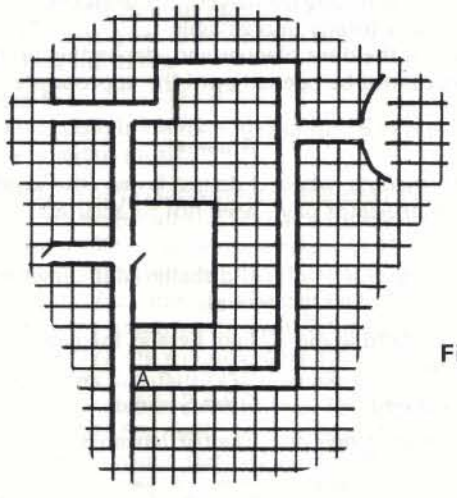

Figure F

Another anomaly is in coming up a level into a room or passage previously explored. Well, in this case there is a previously undetected trap-door. In this way all sorts of potential problems can be overcome.

Figures G, H and J shows some of the other 'Maps'. Figure G shows a 'Map' which enables one to reach different levels by means other than dicing to see if there is a change between 'Maps'. The key to Figure G is as follows (Remember as with other 'maps' to dice for entry point): Point 1 leads to a spiral staircase emerging at A. Dice 1, 2 or 3 it goes up a level, 4, 5 or 6 it goes down.

Point 2 leads to a straight staircase which goes up 1, 2 or 3 or down 4, 5 or 6 *two* levels.

Point 3 leads to a chute down 1 level (1 or 2) 2 levels (3 or 4) or 3 levels (5 or 6).

Point 4 leads to a dead end, with a 50% chance of a 20' trap springing at B.

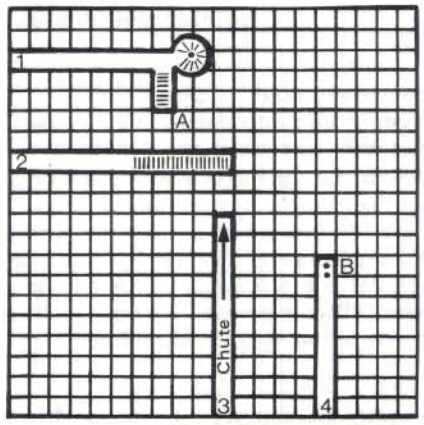

Figure G
Map 19

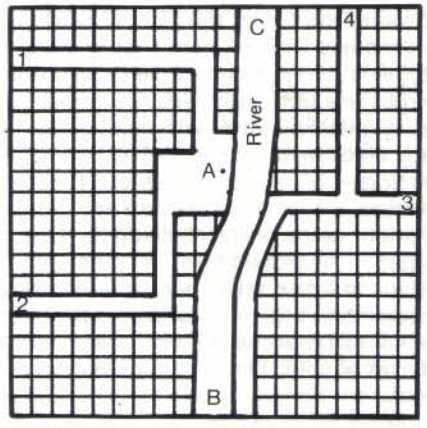

Figure H
Map 70

Figure H shows a map with leads to different sorts of maps. At Point A is a quayside with 50% chance of a boat complete with oars. Point B leads to a whole set of maps showing underground rivers with paths alongside, and Point C leads off to maps of rivers without paths; though on those maps there are plenty of chances of arriving at dry land and thence back to the main series of the maps, assuming you survive all the ghastly acquatic creatures lurking there. As a final example my Map S2 (Figure J) shows an underground river section with pathway alongside. If you joined this from point B on Figure H you would have to join it at Point A (as Point B on Map S2 doesn't match). On Figure J, C is a waterfall with steps alongside, 1, 2 or 3 up, 4, 5 or 6, down. There is a 70% chance of avoiding the waterfall if you are in the section above it and travelling by boat, and even if you fail to avoid it you must try swimming, abandoning all equipment and taking care to avoid those nasty little nanga panga fish which can turn a whole ox into a skelton in five minutes. . . .

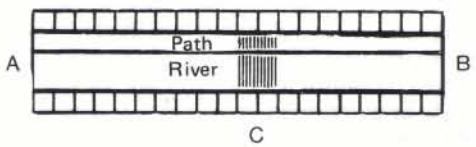

Figure J
Map S2

The possibilities are endless. Others of my 'Maps' contain nothing but rooms of different shapes and sizes, some with potential trapdoors in floors or ceilings. Some have up to 10 entry points, one has a village in a cavern, others have bits of temple complexes, and so on.

Try drawing your dungeon maps, and working your underworlds out in this fashion. It can produce fascinating dungeons – often resembling plans of the insides of Egyptian tombs or Roman catacombs, and in playing a solo adventure, you really feel that you don't know where you are going.