

Story Builder

The game is in three successive parts: story generation then community development then character-based play. This game is meant to be open-ended for what sort of story you can create, however it is mostly focused on fiction, magic, and a large cast of 'main characters.' **Best with 3-5 Players.**

Materials:

A deck of cards

Two 6-sided dice

Three bowls (or small open containers)

Optional: larger paper or whiteboard

Paper per person

Writing implements per person

First - Story generation:

1. Each person should have slips of paper in front of them and a writing implement.
2. Create three bowls representing "Events", "Characters", "Mechanisms." Definitions highlighted below.
3. Everyone spends 5 minutes generating ideas they'd like to see in a story for each of the categories and place them in the corresponding bowl.

Bowl category definitions:

- **Events:** Something that happens in a world, a turning point, a conflict. Examples: The moon crashes into earth, girl runs away from home, a flower switches bodies with a dog
- **Characters:** The people that will define your story, including minor characters. Examples: An assassin that loves birds, a people-pleasing witch, a grandma talented with a sword
- **Mechanisms:** The rules, magic, and way your world or a character is defined. This can also help give a 'twist' to your world. Examples: Empathy that copies someone's abilities, dreams that give insight into someone's past, the grass *will be* greener on the other side

Once you have your slips of paper for each category, you will draw a slip of paper from each category and match them. Example: a kid who likes to skip stones [lives in a world where] all GPS devices suddenly stop working [and] space travel is faster than typical ground travel. In that example, the kid is a character, the gps is an event, and space travel is a mechanism. The interesting thing about the combined idea there is that without modern technology such as gps, it's hard to imagine space travel. So this invites the possibility of magic portals, different forms of space travel, a way that skipping stones could be linked with space travel, or some other twist on our current version of the world.

Not all of the slips of paper will have obvious connections to each other, but that's part of the fun! Spend a few minutes with a combination to try to think how these ideas can connect. If you're stumped, pull another slip of paper to add on or swap out with one of the papers you have. I recommend creating 4-5 of these 'story starters' and then selecting one of these to use for the start of your game.

Second - Community Development:

Now that you have the start of your game generated, it's time to take turns answering prompts to flesh out the community of your story. At this stage, it can be fun to designate a notetaker, take turns writing, or do a voice recording to be able to reflect back later.

A community can be a very nebulous thing. It could be a town, a specific area, or the general cast of characters where they all have been disconnected from each other.

Designate a sheet of paper or a white board as your “map.” Have each person go around in a circle and add a feature or two for the area for your world. This should be a quick symbolic drawing with no to little words. It can be buildings, landscape features, portals, a gathering of livestock, etc. As you play, update your map!

Play two to three (but no more!) complete rounds, where each person goes around in a circle doing the following three actions. Afterwards, you should feel like you have a ‘teaser’ or basic story start, but it should feel incomplete.

1. Pull a card from the “Situation deck” which is a single suit from a standard deck of playing cards. Reference the corresponding prompt for that card. Any time there are characters mentioned and you don’t know who they would be, create a new character that fits within your world. They should have a name and at least one defining characteristic.
2. Roll the “Development Die” which is a single 6-sided dice, and use its corresponding answer to flavor how you answer the prompt from the “Situation deck.”
3. Update the map if you create any new parts of the environment!

“Development Die”:

1. A Conflict or Challenge
2. Supporting characters introduced or enhanced
3. Backstory or world-building
4. Character development
5. Opportunity or new possibility
6. Storyteller's choice or reroll

“Situation Deck”:

- **Ace:** Two characters become better friends, what happened to cause this to occur?
- **Two:** An unattended situation becomes problematic and scary. What is it? How does it go awry?
- **Three:** A character has something they wish for, but it may be hard to obtain. Describe what they wish for.
 - *Or* A character is given an unexpected opportunity, but there is some major roadblock to taking advantage of it. Describe how they approach this opportunity.
- **Four:** A character is asked to make a choice, even though it goes against their own wishes or values. What effects does this have?
 - *Or* they decide not to make this choice, even though that goes against the wishes of a person that is important to them. What effects does this have?
- **Five:** A character hears about an accident or bad event and has a personal reaction. What happened? What is their reaction?
 - *Or* they hear about something special/wonderful that has happened to someone else. What happened? How does it affect them?
- **Six:** Someone new arrives. Who? Why have they come? Are they in distress?
 - *Or* Someone who leaves the community? Who? What are they looking for?
- **Seven:** A charismatic youngster convinces many to help them with an elaborate scheme. What is it? Who joins their endeavors?
- **Eight:** Two people or a group of people are thrown in together to achieve a goal. What is it? Are they able to work well together?
- **Nine:** A headstrong character tries to convince the community to change their current path. What consequences does this have? Or how are they prevented from doing this?
- **Ten:** A contingent within the community demands to be heard. Who are they? What are they asking for?
 - *or* A contingent within the community have acted on their frustrations. What did they damage, and why did they damage it? Is it permanent?
- **Jack:** Something happens that should be taken as a warning. What is it?
 - *or* something feels good and different. What is it?
- **Queen:** Describe a group at the edge of a community? Are they currently interacting with the main community now? If so, explain how.

- **King:** What group has the highest status in your community? What must people do to gain inclusion in this group?
 - *or* Describe the family of one of the characters. How do they get along with each other? How do their dynamics affect the character?

Third - Character-based Play:

Look at all the characters you have created so far. Take a moment to think if there's a few more characters that would round out your community. Name them and give them at least defining characteristics, like a connection to one of the existing characters and a role in the community. Create character sheets for any major characters you are interested in, based on the following character sheet set-up.

Character Sheet:

- Name
- Basic description of character
- **Values for the stats below**, with a distribution as follows: +2 for one of the stats, -1 for one of them, a 0 for one of them, and the other two should be +1. Decide these based on the type of character you believe them to be.
 - **Charm:** Influence someone
 - **Cool:** Act under pressure, assist someone, facilitate a group
 - **Sharp:** Perception, ability to solve mysteries, can read a difficult situation
 - **Tough:** Strength, physical conflict, protecting someone
 - **Weird:** Using magic, thinking outside normal boxes, often relating to the 'mechanic' of your story

Now, decide the next major action a group of characters would be motivated to investigate, solve, fight, etc. Each player should choose a character to play for that action. Now, play in turns, where you will announce the type of action your character is attempting and roll both of the 6-sided dice. Add your modifier depending on the type of action. A 10+ is a complete success, a 6+ is a success with some sort of drawback or difficult choice, under a 6 is a failure and your character will gain some sort of experience from that. If you are playing for a long while, you may want to mark these experience points to then be put into adding to one of your stats.

The players who are not in active turn can act as other supporting characters or as game guides, where they can narrate the surrounding world, roll dice for conflicting forces, add obstacles or opportunities, etc. Feel free to talk as a group when you are uncertain what to do next or to gain general consensus on what feels fair for a given situation. You are trying to create a story together that is narratively interesting, not create the best character or unnecessarily cause someone else's character harm.

This stage of play can last as long as you want it to be. When you have reached the end of the major action your group of characters was exploring, feel free to select another action for that group, select a new group of characters, or end the game!

End of Session Wrap-up:

Great job! You created something together! It may have been challenging or confusing at times, but you also likely discovered new ideas or learned things about the people you were playing with. Share-out recordings, pictures of notes, pictures of character sheets, etc. so that you can look back at your time together or try to write a story based on your experience. Thanks for playing.

Inspiration and Collaboration credits:

The Quiet Year

Monster of the Week (and generally powered by the apocalypse)

Milo & Reid for co-creating and editing the roleplaying and community development portions

Bill & Jenny (my parents) for co-creating and editing the story generation and community development portions

- From them: “We like turn-based games in which each person in turn will take up creating the story where the last person left off. This happens in “a quiet year” and a game we made up and played when the kids were younger, where a bowl is filled up with folded papers with plot twists, quotes, character ideas and you draw something to include during your turn as you continue the story. We also liked that each of these games has both a random aspect and some feature that the storyteller is constrained to integrate.”