StoryCraft

This is a game of improvisational role-playing, where a group of people create a dynamic, unpredictable story together. Gather a group of players, preferably between three and six. One will become the narrator and tell an interactive story, while the rest will play as the characters. You’ll also need a handful of six-sided dice, several sheets of paper, and a few pencils or pens.

Set the Stage

Getting the game started requires a few steps to get everyone on the same page. These are all collaborative tasks, where open discussion is encouraged. Talk things over with the other players, ask the narrator questions, and work together to make something that sounds exciting.

Step 1
Choose a genre – As a group, decide on a theme for the setting, something like high fantasy, science fiction, post-apocalypse, pirate era, cold war, ice age, or a dreamscape. Try to pick one with lots of opportunities for adventure, drama, action, romance, or politics, preferably all the above. If you like, you can even mix and match genres.

Step 2
Outline the plot – One player describes an idea for the current situation, what’s going on where the players begin the game. The players continue taking turns, describing the antagonist, their objective or what they’re after, their method for achieving it, and the result if unimpeded. Once the players are done, the narrator secretly writes a plot twist for one of the plot ideas, perhaps changing it, which can be revealed later in the story.

Step 3
Establish a connection – All the characters should share or belong to something: a ship, organization, family, castle, company, or the like. Next, pick one or roll two strengths for it from this list: helpful, hidden, large, organized, respected, or versatile. Finally, pick two or roll one weakness: archaic, crowded, fragile, outlawed, poor, or unreliable.

Create the Characters

Each character should be designed to fit the genre. The players should discuss how to create an interesting cast, one that will be engaged and challenged by the plot. Remember to figure out what the connection means to each character. Beyond those points, each character’s appearance, history, motivation, and personality are up to whoever is playing them in the game.

- Pick a concept – a profession, class, vocation, or nature that’s related to your plot idea.
- Pick a quirk – an attribute, skill, or talent that’s unrelated to your concept.
- Pick a flaw – a fear, drawback, dark secret, or debt that’s related any of the plot ideas.
- Pick three resources – equipment, companions, titles, assets, property, or reputation.
Roll the Dice

Whenever a character attempts a risky action, roll at least one six-sided die. Add a die if the action relates to their concept, their quirk, if they risk a relevant resource, and/or if they have an advantage. Subtract a die if the action relates to their flaw and/or they are at a disadvantage. If one character is able to help another, the acting character may reroll their lowest die.

The narrator sets a difficulty from 1 to 6, negating any dice that match it. The highest remaining die determines if the character’s action succeeded or failed, along with any other effects. If the character’s only die is negated by the difficulty, the outcome is always “no, and…” failure.

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For outcomes that include “and...” or “but...” the narrator should describe what else happens. This could add complications to the story, reveal new information, impose consequences during the scene, give a character advantage on a subsequent action, or simply be a critical hit.

Using a resource on a roll requires risking it. If the roll fails, the resource becomes endangered. Endangered resources are restored if risked again on a roll that succeeds. If an endangered resource is risked on a failed action, it is lost. In addition to resources, a player might also have to risk their life on some rolls, possibly causing their death after endangering it!

Tell a Story

The narrator can tell the story however they wish, but the easiest way to do it is to set the players’ connection and the antagonist in opposition. Ideally, this will involve the connection’s weakness as well as some of the characters’ flaws. Try not to make the antagonist pure evil, though. Truly engaging stories tend to have interesting villains, so this is a great place to start.

The first scene of the story should flow from the situation and introduce all the characters – or allow the players to introduce their characters themselves. From there, the narrator can get the story moving by combining the objective and method in different ways, challenging the characters to react or take the initiative to prevent the result. The best time to reveal the twist is when the players think they have a strategy or solution for each plot element.

The dice are there to keep things moving by resolving each character’s risky actions, but also to fill the story with surprises. Players shouldn’t roll for mundane or impossible tasks, only those that an average person would find challenging. Also, players should ask the narrator if their concept, quirk, or resources are relevant to the action. Most importantly, the narrator should be ready to improvise when rolls result in “and...” or “but...” as these offer flexible outcomes.

The narrator should run the game as a conversation with the players. They not only portray the characters, but help develop the story by their actions, feedback, and ideas as well. The narrator’s job is to both entertain and challenge them, but not as their adversary – it’s not “narrator versus the players.” Everyone helps create the story together. And above all, have fun!