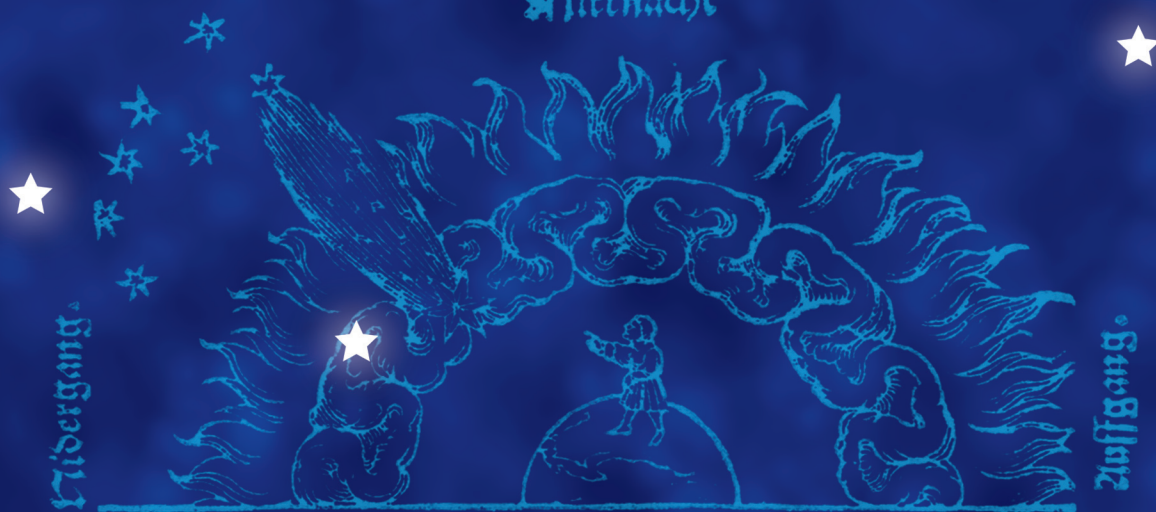




STORY CARDS

ROLEPLAYING GAME

Mitternacht



StoryCards

Roleplaying Game

by

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Introduction

You and your friends have an evening free together. Sometimes you get together to roleplay, but tonight your game master isn't prepared. You could play some other game, or just hang out, but you really want to roleplay. What do you do?

Roleplay anyway.

StoryCards was created so that you can quickly and easily roleplay whatever sort of adventure you want. Compared to most roleplaying games, the rules are simple and the points don't much matter. What does matter is that you and your friends enjoy portraying the heroes of an interesting adventure. With StoryCards, you can create and run a complete adventure from initial concept to epilogue in as little as four hours.

This manual contains the following sections:

- **The Golden Rule** – the only rule that actually matters
- **The Cards** – an introduction to the StoryCards deck
- **What You Need** – a checklist of resources you need to create and play adventures
- **Environments** – how to create the setting for your adventure
- **Heroes** – how to create the characters you will play
- **Feats** – how to determine the success or failure of actions
- **Combat** – how to manage lots of actions going on at the same time
- **Injuries** – what happens when characters get hurt
- **Fortune Cards** – a way for the players to temporarily take control
- **Adventures** – how the guide creates a scenario for the heroes to interact with
- **About the Project** – how and why StoryCards was invented
- **Glossary / Index** – brief definitions of terms, and where to find more information
- **Appendices** – a quick reference to information used during play



The Golden Rule

The most important rule of StoryCards is this: when faced with any decision, ask yourself—whether as guide or player—What will make the best story?

A roleplaying game isn't really a story,¹ it's a simulated adventure: the guide presents an interesting situation and the players imagine interacting with it, and with each other. However, if you imagine yourself as the hero of any story you've ever enjoyed, you can see that the story is an account of an adventure that was experienced by the hero. Therefore your own experiences in enjoying and telling stories are good guidelines for what will make an interesting adventure.

Ideally we might physically simulate the adventure on a life-sized stage with realistic props, with the level of immersion imagined in the Dream Park novels or a Star Trek holodeck. A roleplaying game accomplishes the same thing by running the simulation in the heads of the players. An ideal physical simulator would put restrictions on what the players could do, balancing the characters' abilities against each other, so that each of them has the opportunity to participate. A roleplaying game uses rules (sometimes very elaborate ones) to accomplish the same thing.

StoryCards, though, is a very stripped-down, bare-bones sort of roleplaying game, for people who want to quickly immerse themselves in an interesting adventure rather than in the mechanisms of its simulation. This manual is just a toolkit for assembling and interacting with such an adventure. Because the environment of the game could be anywhere—or anywhen—it's impossible to provide details on which weapons do how much damage, or what powers or spells provide how much bonuses. The players must instead rely on what seems realistic within the environment, and more importantly, on what will make the most enjoyable adventure for every player. Thus the reliance on the golden rule: What will make the best story?

***What will make
the best story?***

Of course, not everyone will agree on what makes the best story. Different people like different things. It's best to build consensus between the players, but ultimately the guide has the responsibility and the right to adjudicate disputes: pick your guide carefully.

¹Nor is it actually a game, since the rules don't specify how some players can win and others can lose. But we seem stuck with the term roleplaying game, at least for now.



The Cards

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. —Psalm 19:1-4a, *New International Version*

Consider the stars. If the universe is a product of unguided natural laws, then their arrangement is effectively random, and has little significance to us here on Earth. Conversely, if there is a divine creator, then everything was created according to some design, and it seems natural to assume that the arrangement of the stars is intended to serve a purpose. People have told stories about the shapes in the sky for millenia, and perhaps that is what they are for.

The StoryCards deck was inspired by the constellations, in the hope that the cards in turn will inspire you in the creation of your own stories. The constellations on the cards are not always the classical ones that you may be familiar with. Some of the interpretations were drawn from other cultural sources, and all were adapted to make them suitable for as many different types of stories as possible.

The StoryCards deck consists of 60 cards, numbered 1 through 12 in five suits (strength, intellect, dexterity, will, and essence).

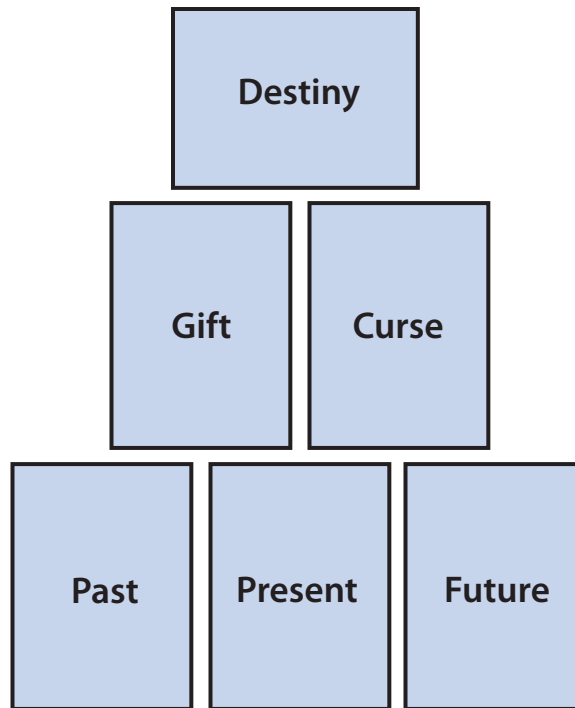
Each card has the following features:



The cards are used in the game to perform readings, single-card readings, and feats.

Readings

StoryCards readings generate ideas for characters and adventures. A reading, whatever the subject, is performed by drawing and placing six cards in a pyramid-like arrangement, as illustrated below:



Past: The card in this position represents the past: something that has already transpired but with effects that are still being felt.

Present: The card in this position represents the present: something that is taking place right now.

Future: The card in this position represents the future: something that is anticipated in the future. Note that this is not prophetic; it represents something which is *expected*, not something which is *fated*, and the adventure could unfold much differently.

Gift: The card in this position represents a positive force: something that is exerting favorable influence. Note that “favorable” is from the perspective of the reading’s subject. If the subject of the reading is a psychopath, then this “gift” likely represents something evil.

Curse: The card in this position represents a negative force: something that is exerting influence which is not favorable. Note again that “favorable” is a matter of the subject’s perspective.

Destiny: The card in this position represents something hanging in the balance. Note that it is oriented horizontally rather than vertically. The meaning of this card is ambiguous, and

based upon the differences between the card's upright and inverted meanings. The resolution of this ambiguity is the heart of the subject's destiny. The interpretation of the destiny card is generally expressed as a question that may be resolved by the outcome of the adventure.

Once all of the cards have been placed, the reader interprets them. The interpretation of each card is a product of a number of factors:

- The subject of the reading
- The card itself
- Its orientation
- Its position in the reading layout
- Interpretation of the other cards

The card's meaning can be derived from anything about the card. Often it will be the card's association, but sometimes its title is more applicable, causing a more literal interpretation. The card's illustration might inspire the interpretation, or even the suit or value. It really doesn't matter.

With the exception of the destiny position, each card will have either an upright or inverted orientation. An inverted card in some way represents the opposite of what it would mean if it were upright. This opposite meaning is not fixed for each card, and is also subject to the reader's interpretation.

The reader may interpret the cards in whatever order desired, as inspiration strikes. A quick holistic look at the reading will often reveal some cards in positions that seem to perfectly fit the situation, and the interpretation will proceed naturally from there.

Sometimes a card just won't make sense in the context of the others. This is fine: the reader should feel free to skew its interpretation as much as necessary, or ignore it altogether. This is not a moral issue, as there are no right or wrong answers. The important thing is the stimulation of creative ideas. The cards are a catalyst: the reader is really the one doing the work, and may take whatever liberties are necessary to come up with a useful interpretation. That having been said, sometimes it is the exercise of explaining that one errant card which provides the most inspiration, and results in a reading that is creative and interesting: don't give up too easily.

***The important
thing is the
stimulation
of creative ideas.***

Single-Card Readings

Single-card readings provide quick inspiration during the course of play, such as "Is there a doctor in the house?" or "Did I bring my laser-sword?" or "What do the players see when they burst into the apartment that I didn't expect them to enter?" They help provide answers to questions that depend upon luck or fate rather than upon any character's ability. A single-card reading is performed by drawing the top card off the deck. For a simple yes-or-no question, an

upright card means yes and an inverted card means no. For a “how many” question, use the number on the card, multiplied or divided by some factor to give the desired scale. For a “what happens” question, interpret the card as if it were one card in a full reading, as above.

Players can play fortune cards to impose single-card readings upon the game, allowing them to act as the guide for a moment (see [Fortune Cards, page 51](#)).

Feats

Feats determine the degree of success or failure of character actions. A character attribute determines the number of StoryCards drawn, and the number of drawn cards that match that attribute is compared to the difficulty of the feat (see [Feats, page 35](#)).

Players can play fortune cards to affect the results of feats (see [Fortune Cards, page 51](#)).



What You Need

Players

One player is responsible for designing the adventure and helping the other players interact with it. This player is called the guide. Other roleplaying games typically use the terms game master or moderator for a player in a similar role.

Each other player controls one character, referred to as a hero.

This Manual

After your first session you'll probably find you don't need this, except perhaps for the reference charts in the appendices.

StoryCards Decks

The group needs at least one deck of StoryCards. If more than one deck is used, consider putting each deck's cards in distinctive sleeves so they don't mix between decks.

If only one deck is available, share it while developing the environment, then let the players use it to perform their initial character readings, and finally pass it to the guide to develop the adventure while the players flesh out their heroes. Once play begins, place it in the center of the play area so it can be reached by everyone.

If two decks are available, the guide should have one and the players share the other.

If more than two decks are available, the guide should have one and allocate the rest to specific subsets of players: each player should draw only from their allocated deck.

A StoryCards deck is shuffled together with its discard pile between each of the adventure's scenes, or after its last card is drawn.

Playsheets

Several playsheets are provided at StoryCardsRPG.com to help you design and play your adventure.

Each player needs one character playsheet for their own hero.

The group as a whole needs one environment playsheet, and enough character reference sheets to copy information about each hero.

The guide needs one adventure playsheet. The guide also needs at least one character playsheet (for major characters, such as antagonists) and one or more character reference sheets (for minor characters and thugs).

Pencils

Actually, any writing implement will do, but mechanical pencils with good erasers are recommended. Use these to write on your playsheets.

Visual Aids

It helps to have some sort of aids to help players visualize each scene. A marker board works well, as do miniatures. A very portable and inexpensive solution is to use a sheet of paper for the setting, sketch the scenery in with your pencil, and use some sort of token (e.g. a colored stone, a die, a pawn) to represent each character.

Time

StoryCards adventures are typically segmented into three interactive scenes. This not only helps create the narrative structure of a story, it also regulates certain game mechanisms, like the distribution of fortune cards and the use of character powers.

By following the timetable below, a full StoryCards adventure with three scenes can be created and played to completion, with no prior preparation, in as little as four hours.

0:00–0:15: The guide and players together design the adventure environment.

0:15–1:00: The players design their heroes while the guide designs the adventure.

1:00–1:15: The players each introduce their heroes to all the players. The guide may tailor the adventure to the heroes.

1:15–1:30: The guide introduces the adventure with a non-interactive hook scene.

1:30–2:15: Playing through the first interactive scene (the setup).

2:15–3:00: Playing through the second interactive scene (the complication).

3:00–3:45: Playing through the third interactive scene (the climax).

3:45–4:00: The loose ends of the adventure are tied up in the epilogue.

Environments

You can play a StoryCards adventure in any time or place, at any level of seriousness or comedy. This section describes how the players and the guide can decide together what those environment settings will be.

The steps in the environment creation process are as follows:

1. Assess the players' moods ([page 11](#)).
2. Select one or two genres ([page 11](#)).
3. Determine the heroes' mission ([page 12](#)).
4. Sum up the environment in a one-sentence-or-less summary ([page 12](#)).
5. Determine the power level of the heroes compared to other denizens of the environment ([page 12](#)).

Mood

The first step is to set the mood for the session. If one player prefers hopeless brooding angst and another prefers frantic cartoon-style mania, some sort of compromise is necessary.

Everyone should privately select a value on the scale below and record it on their character playsheet. The guide then records the average of those values on the environment playsheet. Your group may want to discuss adjusting the average value before finalizing it: whatever their primary preference, many players enjoy playing in a range of moods, and may be willing to accommodate other players.

Descriptor	Dire	Dramatic	Balanced	Comedic	Whimsical
Value	-2	-1	0	+1	+2

Once the mood is established, it is the responsibility of every player (not just the guide) to maintain it throughout the adventure. Just try to be considerate, and don't shove magical cream pies in the angry Goth's face.

Genre

Next we need to determine where and when the adventure takes place, and how physical and metaphysical laws there differ from the real world. The quickest way to do this is for the players as a group to select from genres of existing fiction which are already known to all. Combining two genres often results in a novel and interesting setting.

Choose genre descriptors in whatever manner you see fit: for inspiration, see [Appendix A: Random Genre Determination Table \(page 75\)](#).

Mission

Now that your group knows *where* and *when* the heroes exist, you also need *why* they are together and *what* they hope to accomplish as a group. Each hero should have individual motivations, possibly even conflicting with those of other heroes, but in order for the group to play together they must also have one or more shared objectives. If the group's rationale and mission aren't already obvious from the choice of setting, it may be useful for the group as a whole, led by the guide, to do a mission reading.

Environment Summary

This one-sentence-or-less summary is a nutshell description of the environment, as if it were a concept being pitched to a publisher or producer. For example:

- Students in the *Harry Potter* universe when Lord Voldemort first came to power.
- Martial artists in a kung fu movie, in the style of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.
- *James Bond*-style spies.
- Caribbean pirates, with ghosts.
- Near-future urban martial-arts demon hunters.
- Elizabethan sorcerers in the New World.
- Anthropomorphic creatures piloting giant automatons in the Renaissance.

The group should work together to come up with an environment summary that everyone agrees upon.

Power Level

Finally, the group needs to determine how powerful their heroes are relative to the typical denizens of the selected environment. StoryCards supports the following power levels:

- **Juvenile:** The heroes are weaker than typical denizens, usually because they are adolescents.
- **Realistic:** The heroes are comparable in power to typical denizens.
- **Epic:** The heroes are extraordinarily gifted or talented, and legends will be told of their exploits.
- **Super:** The heroes have godlike powers, far beyond those of ordinary mortals.

Note that even if the heroes are insects or giants, the power level would still be realistic if their environment is mostly peopled with other insects or giants. In a city of the gods, having divine powers of your own just makes you another typical denizen.

Example Environments

Example #1: Galley Slaves vs. Circe

The players have agreed upon a dramatic (-1) mood for the adventure. A random genre card draw indicates Greco-Roman and Magic. From this the players decide that the adventure will take place on the island of Circe, the sorceress from *The Odyssey*. The obvious mission will be to escape the island before Circe turns them into beasts, but the underlying question is how the heroes arrived on the island in the first place. A mission reading is performed:

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Lion	Ferocity	U	Ferocity = A fierce storm that blew their ship ashore.
Present	Breaker	Courage	I	Inverted Breaker = Attempts to repair the ship.
Future	Vermin	Torment	I	Inverted Torment = Anticipation of pleasure = Isle of the Lotus Eaters.
Gift	Chain	Sin	I	Inverted Chain = Freedom from the ship's masters.
Curse	Ruin	Disorder	U	Ruin = The broken ship.
Destiny	Hydra	Corruption	—	Corruption = Will Circe turn them into beasts?

The players determine that the heroes are galley slaves, the only survivors of a ship that wrecked while searching for the Isle of the Lotus Eaters. The environment summary is thus: "Galley slaves versus Circe." Finally, the players select a realistic power level for the adventure because it seems likely to provide the most drama.

Example #2: Spacefaring Circus Troupe

The players have agreed upon a comedic (+1) mood for the adventure. A random genre card draw indicates Show Biz and Space Station. From this the players decide that the adventure will take place in the future, in a spacefaring circus troupe. The heroes will be human and alien performers in the circus. No mission reading seems necessary, and the environment summary is simply "Spacefaring circus troupe." In order to make their performing abilities more exciting, the players decide upon an epic power level for the adventure.

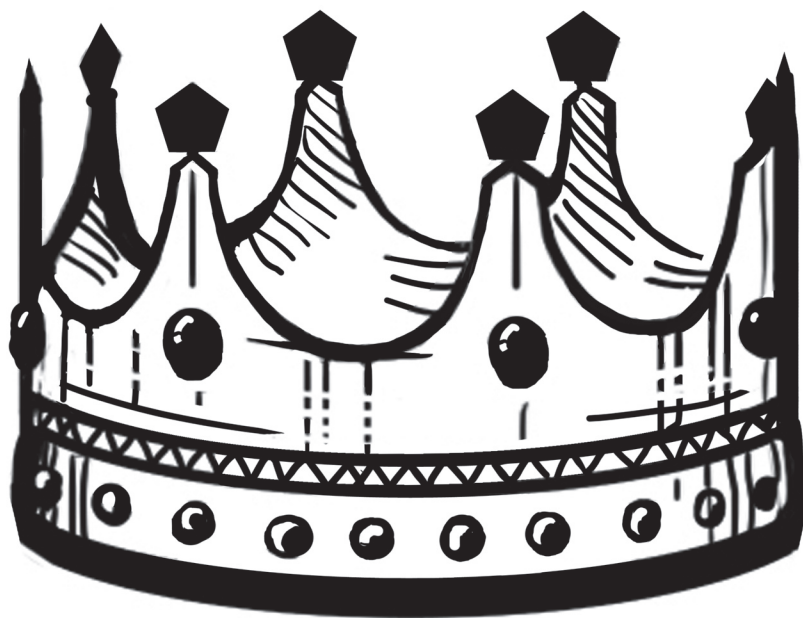
Example #3: Kung Fu Marketing

The players, in a lapse of sanity, have agreed upon a whimsical (+2) mood for the adventure. A random card draw indicates Martial Arts and Rebellion, but no one is enthusiastic about the result. Glancing around on the random genre table, Big Business catches someone's eye, and the players agree to discard Rebellion in its favor: as result the adventure will be set in a

modern corporation in which all the employees are high-powered martial artists. A mission reading is performed to find out more about the corporation:

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Chimes	Harmony	I	Inverted Harmony = The company has undergone a severe reorganization.
Present	Raven	Punishment	U	Punishment = All employees are considered to be on probation.
Future	Scales	Payment	U	Payment = They have the potential to land a big account.
Gift	Hound	Leadership	I	Inverted Leadership = No competitor has a clear lead in the industry.
Curse	Petitioner	Favor	I	Inverted Favor = This company has a bad reputation.
Destiny	Feast	Abundance	—	Abundance = Will the company prosper or not?

The guide decides that the corporation is an advertising agency that's in a state of upheaval. The mission of the heroes is to each distinguish themselves and claw their way up through the organization by whatever means necessary, as long as they make the company profitable in the process. The environment summary is thus also the name of the company, "Kung Fu Marketing." In order to give themselves exciting martial arts powers, the players choose the super power level.



Heroes

After the environment has been agreed upon, and while the guide creates the adventure (see [Adventures, page 53](#)), the players create heroes.

The steps in the hero creation process are as follows:

1. Record your real-life name and mood value on your character playsheet ([page 15](#)).
2. Perform a StoryCards reading to determine your background and personality ([page 15](#)).
3. Based on the environment's power level, determine how many points you have ([page 18](#)).
4. Set your attributes ([page 19](#)).
5. Describe your skills (including your two free one-point skills) ([page 21](#)).
6. Define your powers. You may also define one weakness, to gain additional points ([page 22](#)).
7. Describe your appearance([page 29](#)).
8. Summarize yourself in seven words or less ([page 29](#)).
9. Copy information to the guide's character reference sheet ([page 29](#)).
10. Create a nameplate so everyone can remember who you are ([page 29](#)).
11. When everyone is ready, introduce yourself ([page 29](#)).
12. Make whatever adjustments seem wise based on what other heroes are in the group ([page 30](#)).

In many roleplaying games, the players generate numeric characteristics and then try to make a background that fits them. StoryCards does it the other way around: you will already have a good idea of your history and personality before you start assigning numbers to characteristics.

Player Info

Start by taking a character playsheet. Write your real-life name, and your personal mood preference for this session (see [Environments – Mood, page 11](#)).

Reading

Perform a reading with your new hero as the subject. After you have drawn all of your cards, pass the rest to the next player. Use a single deck, and return all the cards to it only after all character readings have been drawn, in order to promote diversity in the group. Note on the character playsheet the position and orientation of each card.

Past: This represents a defining force in your history, probably some event that led you to the current situation.

Present: This represents your current situation, for good or for ill.

Future: This represents your expectations, something anticipated or dreaded.

Gift: This represents a force working to help you. It could be an ally, an aspect of the environment, or some special ability or personality trait.

Curse: This represents a force working to hinder you. It could be an enemy, an aspect of the environment, or some particular vulnerability or vice.

Destiny: This represents an unresolved issue in your life, something that must be decided before you can be at peace.

The reading is a scaffolding on which to build ideas, not a straitjacket to confine them.

As with any other reading, this is just to get creative ideas flowing. The reading is a scaffolding on which to build ideas, not a straitjacket to confine them. Above all, don't let the reading drive you to make a hero you know you won't enjoy playing. You don't need to show anyone what cards appeared in your reading, so you can freely interpret them however you like, ignoring or altering them as you see fit. However, it can be an interesting creative challenge to make all of the cards work together as laid, and this can lead you in directions you might not otherwise go.

Based on your interpretation of the reading, write some notes about your history, your ambitions for the future, and how you intend to achieve those ambitions. Make sure to include how you became involved in the group's mission.

Example #1: Antiope

Here's a reading for a hero in the "Galley Slaves vs. Circe" environment.

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Spirit	Perfection	U	Had an accomplished career.
Present	Queen	Love	I	Her queen is dead.
Future	Pup	Faithfulness	U	Expects the others to follow her orders.
Gift	Leviathan	Dominance	U	Strong, natural leader.
Curse	Shepherd	Guidance	U	Tends to be bossy.
Destiny	Ship	Restoration	—	Will she be able to return to her home?

The reading is mostly straightforward. The hero appears to be some sort of natural leader, someone who had a distinguished career in the past. So how did this person become a galley slave? And what is the meaning of the inverted Queen in the present slot? Continuing to draw from Greek mythology, the player decides that the Queen represents Hippolyta, the defeated queen of the Amazons. Extrapolating from here the player decides that this hero is an Amazon captain who was captured. Too wild and strong to be subject to any other use, she was chained in a galley to row. After a quick Wikipedia search, she is given the name Antiope.

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine

Here's a reading for a hero in the "Spacefaring Circus Troupe" environment.

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Dolphin	Renewal	U	Comes from a water world.
Present	Waterbearer	Generosity	I	Impoverished.
Future	Ox	Service	U	Bound to the circus by indenture.
Gift	Hybrid	Tragedy	I	Natural comedian.
Curse	Lamb	Kindness	U	Softhearted: cannot deny any plea.
Destiny	Stronghold	Faith	—	Will his heart grow cold?

Between the past and the gift (inverted tragedy = comedy) cards, the player decides this hero is a clown, of a race of beings uplifted to sentience from dolphin stock. He's naturally softhearted, and continually gives to those in need, but as a result he has impoverished himself. His own poverty has thus forced him to accept a very unfavorable contract with the circus, an agreement so binding as to amount to indentured servitude. He has become rather curmudgeonly, and while this is a source he can draw on for his comedy, he risks lapsing into real bitterness. The player names him Splashes-in-Sunshine.



Example #3: Chang

Here's a reading for a hero in the "Kung Fu Marketing" environment.

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Martyr	Sacrifice	U	Years of dedicated work.
Present	Flock	Prosperity	U	Work has paid off.
Future	Pegasus	Rescue	U	Wants transferred to the corporate HQ.
Gift	Spirit	Perfection	I	Makes shoddy work look good.
Curse	Branch	Completion	U	Stuck in a branch office.
Destiny	Chain	Sin	—	Will his shoddy work be revealed as such?

The player decides that this hero has been serving as the manager of a branch office (he has earned his marketing black belt), and his career has plateaued. His only hope for advancement in the corporate structure is to be transferred to headquarters. But he runs some risk in the attempt: all his reports show that his branch is one of the top performers, but he has been padding the figures, and things aren't nearly as rosy as he makes them out to be. His only hope is to get out of the branch and have someone else running it, so that they can be blamed when its unsustainable growth inevitably collapses. The player names him Chang.

Power Level

Depending upon the power level that was previously selected for the environment, you have a number of points to spend on attributes, skills, and powers. Copy the values from the appropriate row below to the reference chart on top of your character playsheet.

Power Level	Points	Maximum Points per Attribute	Maximum Points per Skill	Maximum Points in all Powers
Juvenile	8	4	1	1
Realistic	10	5	2	1
Epic	12	6	3	3
Super	20	8	5	6





You also start with two free one-point skills, and you may take one weakness to gain additional points.

Points are a mechanism to help you create a hero with a particular measure of power with respect to other denizens of the environment. More importantly, points help each player create a hero with power roughly equal to that of the other heroes, so no single player dominates the adventure. If a player exploits a loophole or otherwise abuses the points to create a hero that is more powerful than the others, the other players are right to complain, and it's the guide's responsibility to veto it. Note that heroes created at the super power level are particularly ripe for exploitation by munchkin-type players. Sometimes these discrepancies aren't obvious at hero creation but only become apparent over the course of play. It's awkward, but under those circumstances the guide may need to retroactively restrict the hero's unbalanced ability.

Essence is a wild suit that matches any attribute.

Attributes

Attributes in the StoryCards roleplaying game rate four fundamental abilities:

Attribute	Symbol	Measures	Solves Problems By...
Strength		Physical Power	overcoming adversity via force or endurance.
Intellect		Mental Finesse	neutralizing adversity via perception or knowledge.
Dexterity		Physical Finesse	avoiding adversity via stealth or agility.
Will		Mental Power	influencing self or others into solving the problem.

Note that characters do not have an essence attribute, even though the cards have an essence suit. Essence is a wild suit that matches any attribute (see [Feats – Step 3: Draw, page 38](#)).

An attribute value of 2 is typical for an average denizen of the adventure's environment, whether you are roleplaying humans, demigods, or mice. An attribute value of 5 is the stuff of legends, and 6 or more is impossible without supernatural augmentation. Each attribute value is approximately twice as capable as the value below it.

A description is provided for each attribute value to help provide a meaningful context for the numbers. Examples (given a human-based environment) are provided below.

Points	Description	Strength Example	Intellect Example	Dexterity Example	Will Example
0	Feeble	Invalid	Village Idiot	Paraplegic	Junkie
1	Poor	Nerd	Primary School Graduate	Oaf	Lackey
2	Typical	Healthy Adult	High School Graduate	Automobile Driver	Couch Potato
3	Remarkable	Marine	College Graduate	Gymnast	Salesman
4	Amazing	Heavyweight Boxer	Rocket Scientist	Ninja	Senator
5	Legendary	Muhammad Ali	Albert Einstein	Bruce Lee	Alexander the Great
6	Supernatural	Hercules	King Solomon	Spider-Man	Jesus of Nazareth

An attribute costs as many points as its value. No attribute may start below 1, or above the maximum set by the environment's power level.

Example #1: Antiope

Antiope is in a realistic environment, so she has 10 points. Her player decides that her strength and will are what has made her formidable.

Attribute	Strength	Intellect	Dexterity	Will
Points	3	2	2	3
Description	Remarkable	Typical	Typical	Remarkable

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine

Splashes-in-Sunshine is in an epic environment, so he has 12 points. His player decides that his softheartedness is a sign of a weak will, but enhances his dexterity so he can better perform. The player leaves 4 points to assign to skills and powers for now: he may change his mind later and add some of them to attributes as well.

Attribute	Strength	Intellect	Dexterity	Will
Points	2	2	3	1
Description	Typical	Typical	Remarkable	Poor

Example #3: Chang

Chang is in a super environment, so he has 20 points. The player decides to create a generally well-rounded hero, with amazing attributes straight across. This still leaves him 4 points for skills and powers.

Attribute	Strength	Intellect	Dexterity	Will
Points	4	4	4	4
Description	Amazing	Amazing	Amazing	Amazing

Skills

Skills are used when performing feats (see [Feats, page 35](#)). If you have a skill that is applicable to the feat, then you get one automatic success for each point in that skill.

You start with two one-point skills for free (these must be two separate skills, not a single two-point skill). You may add one or more skills for one point each. You can add more points to skills to increase them, but no single skill can exceed the maximum for the environment's power level.

Anything you might study in a class or take up as an occupation is a good candidate for a skill. Nearly every skill can be described in one or two words. No skill should be a synonym for an attribute: if there are few circumstances in which a particular attribute applies but the skill does not, the skill is too broad. Basically, any skill the players all agree upon is fine.

Skills should be appropriate to the environment. It's possible (though unlikely) that your cyberpunk hero might have skill in archery, but it's not possible for your medieval yeoman to comprehend hacking (unless it involves an axe).

On the next page are some sample skills to choose from, or you can invent your own.

Brawling	Smithing	Dancing	Fast talk
Running	Ancient lore	Lockpicking	Diplomacy
Melee combat	Ghost lore	Dodging	Concentration
Swimming	Deduction	Tumbling	Leadership
Endurance	Tinkering	Sleight of hand	Oratory
Resisting pain	Navigation	Marksmanship	Seduction
Blocking	Awareness	Driving	Bluff
Bashing	Climbing	Jumping	Steering
Riding	Throwing	Lifting	Stealth
Combat	Memory	Communication	Charm
Perseverance	Intimidation	Cooking	First aid

Example #1: Antiope

Antiope's player gives her two free skills appropriate to her background as an Amazon captain: archery and leadership.

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine

Splashes-in-Sunshine's player gives him two free skills to help him perform in the circus: comedy and juggling.

Example #3: Chang

Chang's player gives him two free skills to survive in a corporate environment: salesmanship and obfuscation. He decides to drop his dexterity by one point to add another point to Chang's obfuscation skill; Chang will automatically get at least two successes when he attempts to confuse or bewilder others.

Powers and Weaknesses

Powers and weaknesses are unusual traits that are distinctive to your hero. The types of powers and weaknesses available are determined by the adventure environment, but they may manifest in various ways, including magic, mutations, specialized equipment, and relationships with others.

A power grants the ability to do things that typical denizens cannot, such as the powers of heroes and villains in comic books. Superhuman abilities are not always powers: it depends upon the environment. If the typical denizens are dragons, flight and armor and firebreathing are innate abilities each hero gets for free. If you are the only dragon, you must spend points for those abilities. The total number of points spent on all your powers cannot exceed the maximum for the environment's power level.

A weakness is the opposite of a power: it impedes you, but in return it grants you points rather than consuming them. The curse card in your character reading may have given you a good idea for a weakness already. You may define no more than *one* weakness for your hero.

Because StoryCards is not set in a specific setting, you don't choose from lists of predesigned powers and weaknesses. Instead, you use a set of metarules to design them yourself, based upon how much influence they have over the adventure. When game designers create specific powers and weaknesses for most other roleplaying games, they use metarules like these to balance the costs against each other.

Each power and weakness costs 0, 1 or 2 points in each of the following ratings:

- **Impact:** Rates how much it affects the environment.
- **Frequency:** Rates how often it has an impact per adventure.
- **Variability:** Rates how much control the character has over it.

Impact	Rating	Points
Causes or prevents superficial injuries, or provides crawling-speed transport, or reveals or obscures cryptic clues, or inconveniences average denizens.	Low	0
Causes or prevents wounds, or provides running-speed transport, or reveals or obscures hints, or restrains average citizens.	Medium	1
Causes or prevents traumatic injuries, or provides vehicle-speed transport, or reveals or obscures important details, or restrains powerful denizens.	High	2

Frequency	Rating	Points
Has impact approximately once per adventure.	Rarely	0
Has impact in approximately two out of three scenes.	Sometimes	1
Has impact in nearly all circumstances.	Often	2

Variability	Rating	Points
Always manifests in exactly the same way.	Static	0
Effects can vary along one dimension: range, shape, intensity, size, direction.	Linear	1
Effects can vary along multiple dimensions.	Flexible	2

Any power, no matter how limited, must cost at least one point, otherwise it will have no influence on the adventure. Conversely, a player could define a six-point power that made his hero omnipotent (say, universal transmutation), but that wouldn't make for a very interesting story, and thus violates the golden rule.

If over the course of play a power seems too strong, it's the guide's responsibility to provide circumstances that limit it. Conversely, if a power seems too weak, it's the guide's responsibility to provide circumstances in which it is useful. Likewise, if you claim a weakness, you and the guide are honor-bound to ensure that it impedes you over the course of play.

Example Powers	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Claws	1: Medium	2: Often	0: Static	3
Danger sense	1: Medium	1: Sometimes	0: Static	2
Fireblast (variable size)	2: High	2: Often	1: Linear	5
Flight	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	5
Invisibility (permanent)	2: High	2: Often	0: Static	4
Impervious to cold	2: High	0: Rarely	0: Static	2
Ritual magic	2: High	0: Rarely	2: Flexible	4
Stretchable body	1: Medium	2: Often	1: Linear	4
Wall crawling	0: Low	2: Often	0: Static	2
Water breathing	1: Medium	0: Rarely	0: Static	1
Weather control	2: High	2: Often	2: Flexible	6

Example Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Confined to wheelchair	1: Medium	2: Often	0: Static	-3
Blind	2: High	2: Often	0: Static	-4
Extremely allergic to silver	2: High	0: Rarely	0: Static	-2
Enemy (of comparable power)	1: Medium	0: Rarely	2: Flexible	-3
Dependent child	2: High	0: Rarely	1: Linear	-3

Equipment

Most equipment is just normal stuff: if it makes sense for you to have it, especially if you have a skill associated with it, you have it. Specialized equipment that wouldn't be normally available to you is really a power, but in a physical form that can be damaged or lost or—at worst—stolen and used against you. You pay for such equipment as if it were a power, with a one-point discount because of its inherent limitations.

Example Equipment	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Utility belt	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	4
Holy sword (does extra damage to evil spirits)	2: High	0: Rarely	0: Static	1
Jet pack	1: Medium	2: Often	1: Linear	3

Companions

Companions are living equipment, with the same one-point discount. You design a companion with twice the number of points it costs you. Some rules about creating companions are different from those for creating heroes:

- Companions that are not typical denizens (e.g., animals) can have attributes of 0.
- Companions may have two weaknesses.
- Companions cannot have companions of their own.

If you spend an extra point, you can have several similar companions instead of just one. The extra point does not increase the number of points you can use to design the companions.

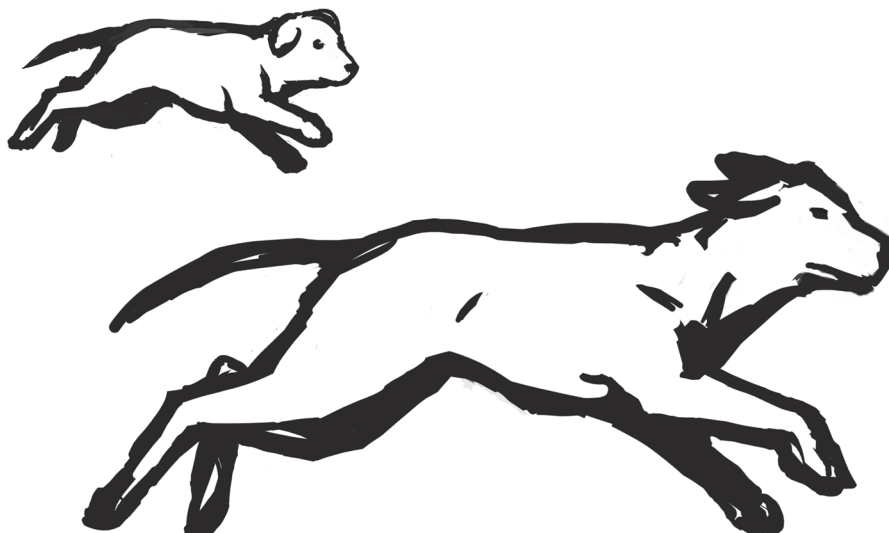
The guide controls your companion during play.

Example Companions	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Edgar, a trained raven (see below)	0: Low	1: Sometimes	2: Flexible	2
Razor, a trained attack dog (see below)	1: Medium	1: Sometimes	2: Flexible	3
Kid Nitro, a sidekick (see below)	2: High	2: Often	2: Flexible	5





Edgar, a trained raven:

	Attributes	Points	Skills	Points
⊕	Strength	0	Flying (First point is free)	1
♯	Intellect	1	Seeing (First point is free)	1
♀	Dexterity	2		
♂	Will	1		

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Flight	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	5
Steals shiny things	1: Medium	1: Sometimes	0: Static	-2
Cannot speak	1: Medium	2: Often	0: Static	-3







Razor, a trained attack dog:

	Attributes	Points
	Strength	3
	Intellect	2
	Dexterity	3
	Will	2

Skills	Points
Smelling <small>(First point is free)</small>	1
Biting <small>(First point is free)</small>	1

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Dog (no hands, cannot speak)	1: Medium	2: Often	1: Linear	-4

Kid Nitro, a sidekick:

	Attributes	Points
	Strength	2
	Intellect	2
	Dexterity	2
	Will	2

Skills	Points
Punching <small>(First point is free)</small>	1
Throwing <small>(First point is free)</small>	1

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Flashbombs (in a belt pouch)	1: Medium	2: Often	0: Static	2

Status

Unless you specify otherwise, your social status is the norm for the environment: i.e. middle class. Status can manifest as your position in a hereditary class hierarchy, your influence as a great performer, or as a measure of your finances or personal appearance: in any case it will affect how you are treated by other denizens, especially with respect to what goods and services you can demand. An impoverished noble can still usually purchase on credit, while a wealthy peasant might still be denied entry to the poshest shops.

Status	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Wealthy / Royalty / Famous	2: High	1: Sometimes	0: Static	3
Upper class / Nobility	1: Medium	0: Rarely	0: Static	1
Middle class	0: Low	0: Rarely	0: Static	0
Lower class / Peasant	1: Medium	0: Rarely	0: Static	-1
Impoverished / Untouchable / Infamous	2: High	1: Sometimes	0: Static	-3

Size

Your size with respect to typical denizens is neither a power nor a weakness. Whether you are larger or smaller than normal, sometimes it will be to your advantage, and other times to your disadvantage. Most of the effects of an unusual size will be more appropriately modeled by changing your attributes: a smaller character will tend to have a higher dexterity and lower strength, whereas a larger character will tend to have a lower dexterity and higher strength.

Example #1: Antiope

As a realistic hero, Antiope doesn't have many points to spend on powers. Her player skips over this section.

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine

Because he is uplifted from dolphins, Splashes-in-Sunshine can hold his breath for a very long time, and can also use echolocation to sense around him. He could buy these powers separately, but decides they are both manifestations of a 3-point general "uplifted from dolphins" power, which might have other unanticipated effects on the game. Coupled with this is a 1-point weakness that he must immerse himself in seawater for several hours a day, usually while he sleeps, or he will sicken from dehydration. He uses his two remaining points to boost both his strength and intellect up to 3.

Power and Weakness	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Uplifted from dolphins	1: Medium	0: Rarely	2: Flexible	3
Must avoid dehydration	1: Medium	0: Rarely	0: Static	-1

Example #3: Chang

Chang doesn't just have the ability to bamboozle people with his intellect and will, he can actually conjure illusions using a 5-point power. He uses these subtly to manipulate his co-workers, but also finds them useful for displaying presentations during meetings. Chang only has 4 points left to spend, so he reduces his strength to get the extra point this power requires.

Power	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Illusions	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	5

Appearance

In general terms, describe your appearance: size, coloration, manner of dress, apparent deformities, mannerisms. Include one distinctive and memorable detail, something that would consistently allow others to identify you in a crowded room.

Character Summary

Create a brief summary that captures your essence, seven words or less, focusing on what you want other players to remember about you.

Character Reference Sheet

After you finish your character playsheet, copy your information to the guide's character reference sheet.

Nameplate

To help everyone remember you, create a paper nameplate with your hero's name and summary and place it in front of you. The simplest way to do this is by folding the top margin of your character playsheet toward you and writing the information on the exposed surface.

Introductions

When the heroes and adventure (see [Adventures, page 53](#)) have all been created, it's nearly time to start playing. But first it's time to introduce yourself to the other players, and make sure that the heroes and the adventure mesh together.

Each player in turn takes one minute to tell the other players (especially but not exclusively the guide) any public information, describing personality, background, appearance, and abilities. Don't describe the StoryCard reading: your hero is more interesting than the reading.

When you are done describing your hero, pass your character playsheet (and any secret notes you don't want to share with the rest of the group) to the guide, who will review it and return it to you.

Example #1: Antiope

"I'm Antiope, an Amazon captain who was captured by the Greeks and forced into slave labor. I'm an excellent fighter and leader, and if you follow my orders I'll make sure you get back home. I'm tall and muscular, with short-cropped black hair."

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine

"I'm Splashes-in-Sunshine, or just Splashes for short. My people are uplifted from Earth dolphins, so I can swim and echolocate and hold my breath for a long time, but I also have to sleep in seawater to keep from drying out. I'm a bit sleeker than most humans, with no hair, grayish skin, no external ears, and a blowhole on top of my head instead of a nose. In the circus I'm a clown, I'm very good at telling jokes and juggling and physical comedy. I'm poor because I'm a soft touch and give a lot of my money away, even though I'm kind of a curmudgeon."

Example #3: Chang

"I'm Chang, and I manage the top-performing branch office of Kung Fu Marketing, but I'm trying to get transferred to the corporate headquarters so I can advance my career. I'm a powerful sorcerer who can conjure things out of thin air, which is good for impressing clients when the rest of you are stuck using PowerPoint. I'm in my early fifties, but I'm still in fine physical condition, and all my hair is still jet black. I wear a navy pin-striped gi with a black belt and a red power-necktie."

You'll note from previous examples that Chang can only conjure illusions. He's lying, which is perfectly acceptable.

Adjustments

In a very freeform system like StoryCards, players will sometimes disagree about whether particular hero abilities are appropriate or well-balanced. This is the time to discuss and adjust such things, before play begins in earnest.

Introducing and comparing heroes also gives the players an opportunity to balance them against each other: if two heroes are very similar, adjusting them can help each have a more distinct role in the adventure.

Finally, this is your last chance for a compatibility gut check: will you enjoy playing this hero? If you're pretty sure you won't, make some adjustments until you're more comfortable, because it's a lot easier on everyone to change now than during the course of play.

Be sure to record any hero adjustments both on the character playsheet and the guide's character reference sheet.

The guide will also take a few minutes at this point to adjust the adventure to better suit the heroes. Then the adventure begins!



Example Heroes

Power Level (page 18): *Realistic*

Points: <i>10</i>	Max Points per Attribute: <i>5</i>	Max Points per Skill: <i>2</i>	Max Points in All Powers: <i>1</i>
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Fold this top margin toward you. Write your character name and summary on the back to create a nameplate.

StoryCards Character Playsheet

Character Name: *Antiope*

Player: *Allison*

Mood: *Dramatic*





Environment Summary: *Galley Slaves vs. Circe*

Reading (page 15):

	Title	Association	U/I	Interpretation
Past	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>Perfection</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Had an accomplished career.</i>
Present	<i>Queen</i>	<i>Love</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Her queen is dead.</i>
Future	<i>Pup</i>	<i>Faithfulness</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Expects others to follow her orders.</i>
Gift	<i>Leviathan</i>	<i>Dominance</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Strong, natural leader.</i>
Curse	<i>Shepherd</i>	<i>Guidance</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Tends to boss others.</i>
Destiny	<i>Ship</i>	<i>Restoration</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>Will she be able to return home?</i>

History: *Antiope is an Amazon captain who was captured by the Greeks. Being too wild and strong to be subject to any other use, she is chained in a galley to row.*

Ambitions: *To return home.*

Attributes (page 19)	Points
 Strength	<i>3</i>
 Intellect	<i>2</i>
 Dexterity	<i>2</i>
 Will	<i>3</i>

Skills (page 21)	Points
<i>archery</i> (First point is free)	<i>1</i>
<i>leadership</i> (First point is free)	<i>1</i>

Powers and Weaknesses (page 22)	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	

Appearance (page 29): *Female, tall and muscular, short-cropped black hair.*

Character Summary (page 29): *Amazon captain*

Power Level (page 18): *Epic*

Points: <i>12</i>	Max Points per Attribute: <i>6</i>	Max Points per Skill: <i>3</i>	Max Points in All Powers: <i>3</i>
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Fold this top margin toward you. Write your character name and summary on the back to create a nameplate.

StoryCards Character Playsheet

Character Name: *Splashes-in-Sunshine* Player: *Toby*Mood: *Comedic*Environment Summary: *Spacefaring Circus Troupe*

Reading (page 15):

	Title	Association	U/I	Interpretation
Past	<i>Dolphin</i>	<i>Renewal</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Comes from a water world.</i>
Present	<i>Waterbearer</i>	<i>Generosity</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Impoverished.</i>
Future	<i>Ox</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Bound to the circus by indenture.</i>
Gift	<i>Hybrid</i>	<i>Tragedy</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Natural comedian.</i>
Curse	<i>Lamb</i>	<i>Kindness</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Softhearted: cannot deny a plea.</i>
Destiny	<i>Stronghold</i>	<i>Faith</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Will his heart grow cold?</i>

History: *Splashes-in-Sunshine* is a down, his race uplifted to sentience from dolphin stock. Naturally softhearted, he impoverishes himself by continually giving to those in need. Currently indentured to the circus.

Ambitions: *Get out of his contract with the circus.*

Attributes (page 19)	Points	Skills (page 21)	Points
⊕ Strength	<i>3</i>	<i>comedy</i> (First point is free)	<i>1</i>
🔧 Intellect	<i>3</i>	<i>juggling</i> (First point is free)	<i>1</i>
♀ Dexterity	<i>3</i>		
♂ Will	<i>1</i>		

Powers and Weaknesses (page 22)	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
<i>Uplifted from dolphins</i>	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	<i>3</i>
<i>Must avoid dehydration</i>	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	<i>-1</i>
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	

Appearance (page 29): *Cross between a dolphin and a human.*Character Summary (page 29): *Impoverished grumpy dolphin clown.*

Power Level (page 18): *Super*

Points: <i>20</i>	Max Points per Attribute: <i>8</i>	Max Points per Skill: <i>5</i>	Max Points in All Powers: <i>6</i>
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Fold this top margin toward you. Write your character name and summary on the back to create a nameplate.





StoryCards Character Playsheet

Character Name: *Chang* Player: *Alex* Mood: *Whimsical*
 Environment Summary: *Kung Fu Marketing*
 Reading (page 15):

	Title	Association	U/I	Interpretation
Past	<i>Martyr</i>	<i>Sacrifice</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Years of dedicated work.</i>
Present	<i>Flock</i>	<i>Prosperity</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Work has paid off.</i>
Future	<i>Pegasus</i>	<i>Rescue</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Wants transferred to corporate HQ.</i>
Gift	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>Perfection</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Makes shoddy work look good.</i>
Curse	<i>Branch</i>	<i>Completion</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Stuck in a branch office.</i>
Destiny	<i>Chain</i>	<i>Sin</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Will his shoddy work be revealed</i>

History: *Manager in a branch office and his career has plateaued. Powerful sorcerer with a black belt in marketing.* *as such?*

Ambitions: *Wants to get transferred to corporate HQ.*

Attributes (page 19)	Points
 Strength	<i>43</i>
 Intellect	<i>4</i>
 Dexterity	<i>43</i>
 Will	<i>4</i>

Skills (page 21)	Points
<i>Salesmanship</i> (First point is free)	<i>1</i>
<i>obfuscation</i> (First point is free)	<i>2</i>

Powers and Weaknesses (page 22)	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
<i>Illusions</i>	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	<i>5</i>
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	
	0: Low 1: Medium 2: High	0: Rarely 1: Sometimes 2: Often	0: Static 1: Linear 2: Flexible	

Appearance (page 29): *Early fifties, good physical condition, no gray hair, wears navy pin-striped gi with black belt and red power-tie.*

Character Summary (page 29):

Sorcerer manager

Feats

Playing StoryCards largely consists of players saying their heroes are attempting certain actions, and the guide describing what happens as a result. In most cases the result is pretty unambiguous, the guide decides it arbitrarily, and the adventure continues smoothly and quickly.

Some actions, however, deserve to be resolved in a more detailed way. This is especially true in the following cases:

- **Difficulty:** the hero is attempting an action above his normal level of expertise.
- **Opposition:** the hero's abilities are pitted against the abilities of an important character.
- **Drama:** the outcome of a scene is determined by the result of the action.

Such an action is called a feat. A feat is typically resolved through the following process:

1. You declare what action your hero will attempt and how he will attempt it ([page 35](#)).
2. The guide evaluates the difficulty of the feat and tells you what attribute and skills to apply ([page 36](#)).
3. Draw cards and add in your skill points to determine how well you performed the feat. The resulting value is your number of successes. Report this to the guide ([page 38](#)).
4. The guide compares your successes to the difficulty of the feat and describes the results accordingly ([page 38](#)).

Roleplaying game manuals usually consist of lots of information about the game's environment and detailed rules about how the players interact with that environment. In StoryCards such rules are abstracted into simple, basic mechanics for universal application to all environments. These mechanics won't necessarily provide a precise simulation of the game environment, but they should be good enough for everyone to create an enjoyable adventure together.

Step 1: Declaration

This is usually pretty straightforward: tell the guide what feat you want to perform, and how you intend to go about it. Your description of the feat affects the guide's evaluation:

- The manner in which you attempt the feat determines what skills you can apply.
- If you describe a clever approach which should make it easier for your hero to succeed, the guide may reduce the difficulty. Conversely, if your approach is less than ideal, the guide may increase the difficulty.

- If you have described your action in a particularly entertaining manner and in keeping with the mood of the adventure—even if it isn't especially helpful in performing the feat—the guide may allow you to draw an extra card.

Sometimes, instead of you initiating a feat, the guide does. For example, if your hero has the opportunity to make some sort of discovery—such as noticing something in the environment, or connecting clues together—the guide tells you to attempt an intellect feat. In such cases the guide doesn't necessarily explain the nature of the feat.

Sometimes multiple characters will cooperate on a single feat, like moving a heavy object or intimidating an opponent. For such a feat, each character attempts the feat simultaneously, and the sum of their successes is compared to the difficulty to determine the result.

Step 2: Evaluation

Difficulty

The difficulty of a feat is the number of successes required to complete it. A typical feat has a difficulty of 1, meaning that one success is enough to complete it. However, a number of factors, including but not limited to those below, can modify the difficulty. The guide determines the difficulty of the feat. Since some of the factors may not be readily apparent, the guide may choose not to tell you what the difficulty is.

Though various modifiers can decrease the difficulty, the modified difficulty is always at least 1.

Opposition: If you are attempting a feat against another character, the guide will compare the attribute you are using against the other character's attribute. If your attribute is higher, the guide will subtract the difference from your difficulty. If the other character's attribute is higher, the guide will add the difference to your difficulty.

Environment: Anything less than an ideal environment can increase the difficulty of the feat. Some typical complicating environmental factors include lighting, temperature, noise, jostling, and weather.

Tools: Having the right tools (or weapons) for the job puts the feat at its normal difficulty. Working with inferior or makeshift tools increases the difficulty. Working with superior tools may reduce the difficulty.

Targeting: A typical targeting feat is to hit a target the size of a typical denizen at a distance within a weapon's optimal range. If the target is farther than the optimal range, the difficulty is increased. If you want to hit a specific area of a target (a hand or an eye, for example) you will

*The difficulty
of a feat is the
number of
successes
required to
complete it.*

need to get more than the minimum number of successes, otherwise you just hit the target somewhere else.

Experience: If the feat involves some area of expertise that is compatible with the character's background, the difficulty decreases. If the feat requires specialized knowledge that the character doesn't have (e.g., medicine), the difficulty increases.

Time: You may be able to reduce the difficulty of a feat by 1 if you act slowly and carefully, taking at least twice as much time as the feat would normally take. Conversely, you may attempt to perform the feat in half the normal time but this will increase the difficulty by at least 1.

Multitasking: If you attempt multiple feats at the same time (assuming this is even possible) the difficulty for each feat is increased by the number of other attempted feats. For example, you can drive a speeding car around a corner while shooting at another moving car, but the difficulty of both feats is increased by 1. The success of each feat is determined separately: in the example above, you might hit the other car but wreck your own.

Attribute

The guide tells you what attribute you will use to perform the feat:

Strength: Strength is used when the difficulty is a matter of whether or not your body can provide the power to perform the feat. Typical strength feats are running, jumping, lifting, breaking, bashing.

Dexterity: Dexterity is used when the difficulty is a matter of whether or not your body can provide the finesse to perform the feat. Typical dexterity feats are striking, shooting, dodging, driving, sneaking.

Intellect: Intellect is used when the difficulty is a matter of whether or not your mind can provide the finesse to perform the feat. Typical intellect feats are noticing, remembering, reasoning, memorizing.

Will: Will is used when the difficulty is a matter of whether or not your mind can provide the power to perform the feat. Typical will feats are resisting, dominating, enticing, convincing. If the feat is based off how strongly you can manifest a power (within the confines of its impact rating), will is the applicable attribute.

Sometimes more than one attribute applies. For example, you may need to hit something hard enough to break it, but you have to hit it in exactly the right spot: you need to use strength and dexterity both. In most such cases the guide will arbitrarily decide which attribute is the most critical to success, and it will be used for the feat. In an unusually dramatic situation, the guide may decide to have you resolve the action as two separate feats—one for each attribute—but in general this should be avoided in order to keep play moving along.

Skills

The guide will tell you which, if any, of your hero's skills may be added to the feat. It's okay to make suggestions, but the guide gets to decide. If the guide initiated the feat, your hero's skills may be applied without your knowledge.

Step 3: Draw

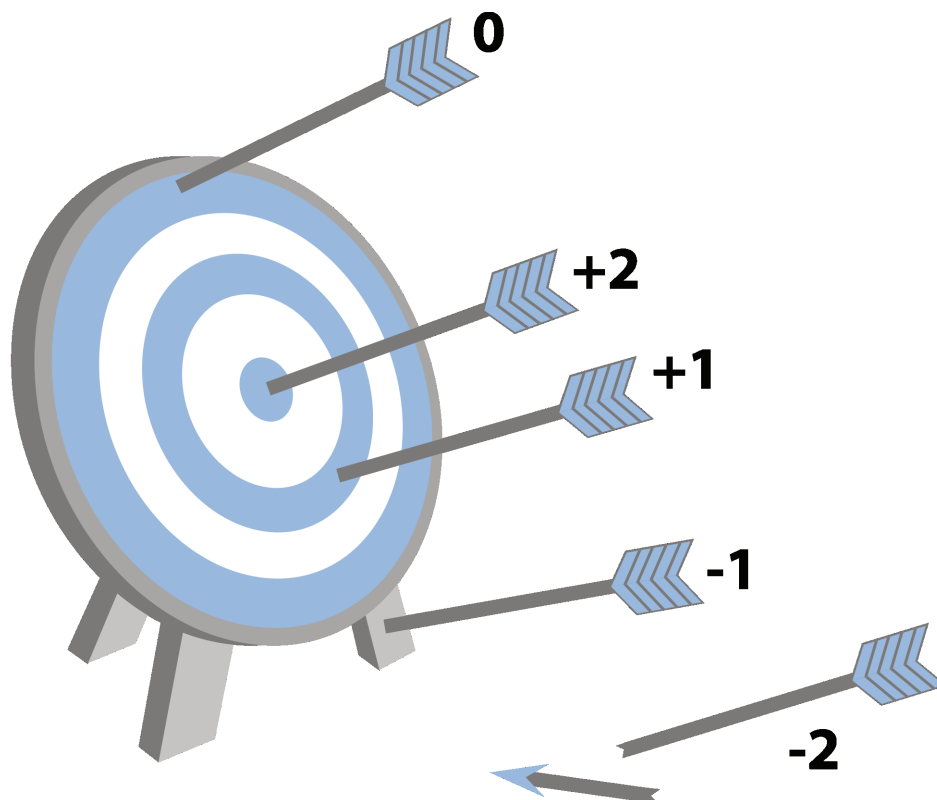
Draw a number of cards from the deck equal to the number of points in the applied attribute. You get one success for each of the following:

- One for each card drawn of the suit matching the attribute.
- One for each card drawn of the suit of essence.
- One for each skill point you can apply to the feat (regardless of what you draw).

Report the total number of successes to the guide.

Step 4: Result

The guide describes the results of your feat. If you achieved as many successes as required, the feat was at least minimally successful. If the number of successes is significantly less than the difficulty, the consequences of failure may be disastrous. Conversely, if the number of successes is significantly greater than the difficulty, the results may be spectacular.



Even after the result has been described, players may use fortune cards to change the number of successes (see [Fortune Cards, page 51](#)). You may play one or more fortune cards on any player's feat, as if they were more cards drawn by the player. For each fortune card of the desired suit, or of the suit of essence, add one more success. The guide then revises the result.

You may play one or more fortune cards on any player's feat, as if they were more cards drawn by the player.

Example Feats

Example #1: Antiope Hunts

Exploring the island in search of food, Antiope startles a free-ranging pig. Fortunately, she has a bow and arrows recovered from the wreckage of the ship.

Step 1: Antiope shoots an arrow at the pig.

Step 2: The base difficulty is 1. The guide adds 1 because of the island's trees and foliage. The pig has started running, so the guide adds 1 more and reports the difficulty as 3. This will be a dexterity feat, and Antiope can add her archery skill.

Step 3: Antiope has a dexterity of 2, so her player draws 2 cards: the first is in the suit of will, but the second is in the suit of dexterity, and provides 1 success. Adding 1 automatic success for her archery skill results in a total of 2 successes.

Step 4: 2 successes minus difficulty 3 equals -1. The arrow just misses, and the pig runs away.

Muttering curses, Antiope retrieves the arrow. Then she continues her hunt, bow ready, taking more care now to be silent. She soon has another foraging pig within bowshot, but this one hasn't yet noticed her.

Step 1: As quietly as she can, Antiope carefully draws, targets, and fires.

Step 2: The base difficulty is 1. The guide again adds 1 because of the trees and foliage, but subtracts 1 because she is taking extra time, and reports the difficulty as 1. Again, this is a dexterity feat, using her archery skill.

Step 3: Antiope's player again draws two cards. The first is a dexterity card and the other is an essence card, for 2 successes. She again adds 1 automatic success for her archery skill, and reports a total of 3 successes.

Step 4: 3 successes minus difficulty 1 equals +2. The arrow strikes home deep in the pig's ribs. It emits a startled—almost human—cry, takes a few steps, and collapses, dead.

Example #2: Splashes-in-Sunshine in the Dark

Splashes is busking in the busy corridors of space station Nineveh 9, juggling fruit as passersby beam credits to the credchip lying on the floor before him. He's earned a tidy sum when...

Steps 1 and 2: The guide tells the player to make an intellect feat.

Step 3: Splashes has an intellect of 3, so his player draws 3 cards: the suits are strength, dexterity, and intellect. He has no applicable skills, so he reports 1 success.

Step 4: The guide says that's good enough: Splashes notices a tentacle reaching for his credchip.

Splashes throws a ripe peachfruit at the tentacle and connects; juice sprays everywhere. (The guide didn't require a feat for this, deciding that it was something Splashes could do easily enough, given his dexterity and his juggling skill.) The spectators scatter, and Splashes sees a furtive tentacled figure duck into a maintenance corridor.

Step 1: Splashes scoops up his credchip and gives chase.

Step 2: The base difficulty is 1. The corridors are dark, but Splashes can echolocate to navigate, and he can follow the smell of the peachfruit, so the guide decreases the difficulty by 1. To adjust for running speeds, the guide compares Splashes's strength (3) to that of the tentacled figure (2): $2 - 3 = -1$, so the difficulty decreases by 1 more. The total difficulty is thus -1, but the minimum difficulty is always 1, and that's what the guide reports to Splashes's player.

Step 3: Splashes has a strength of 3, so his player draws 3 cards: will, essence, and will. He has no applicable skills, so he reports 1 success.

Step 4: 1 success minus difficulty 1 equals 0: Splashes eventually runs down the figure and grabs him by a trailing tentacle.

The figure wails and collapses on the floor. Splashes sees that it's a thin, immature squidling in ragged clothes: a hall urchin. Its skin pales, and ink runs down its legs.

Steps 1 and 2: The guide tells Splashes to make a will feat of difficulty 1.

Step 3: Splashes has a will of 1, so his player draws 1 card: dexterity. He reports 0 successes.

Step 4: 0 successes minus difficulty 1 equals -1: against his will and his better judgment, Splashes feels some pity for the little thief.

Splashes drops the credchip, nods, and says "Thanks for the workout." Then he returns to his busking, wondering how he'll get more fruit to juggle.

Example #3: Chang Markets Surreal Estate

Chang is attempting to get a potential client, the Shady Repose Tropical Resort Hotel, to hire Kung Fu Marketing (KFM) for a marketing blitz. Shady Repose is very skeptical, citing numerous businesses who have had bad experiences with KFM in the past, and it's a wonder they've agreed to talk to Chang at all.

Step 1: Rather than using a standard video presentation of what Kung Fu Marketing can do for Shady Repose, Chang uses his power to conjure illusions. He tailors his 3D presentation to their comments and suggestions in real-time, something his competitors cannot do. Chang's player roleplays the sales pitch effectively, and has the guide laughing by the time he's done.

Step 2: The task is a will feat. Given Shady Repose's skepticism, the guide initially sets the difficulty to 4. However, Chang's approach is clever and innovative, so the difficulty drops to 3. Additionally, because he was so entertaining (and the mood of the adventure is whimsical), the guide tells Chang's player to draw an extra card.

Step 3: Chang has a will of 4, so the extra draw means he draws 5 cards for the feat: the suits are intellect, strength, essence, dexterity, and will. He adds his salesmanship skill and reports 3 successes.

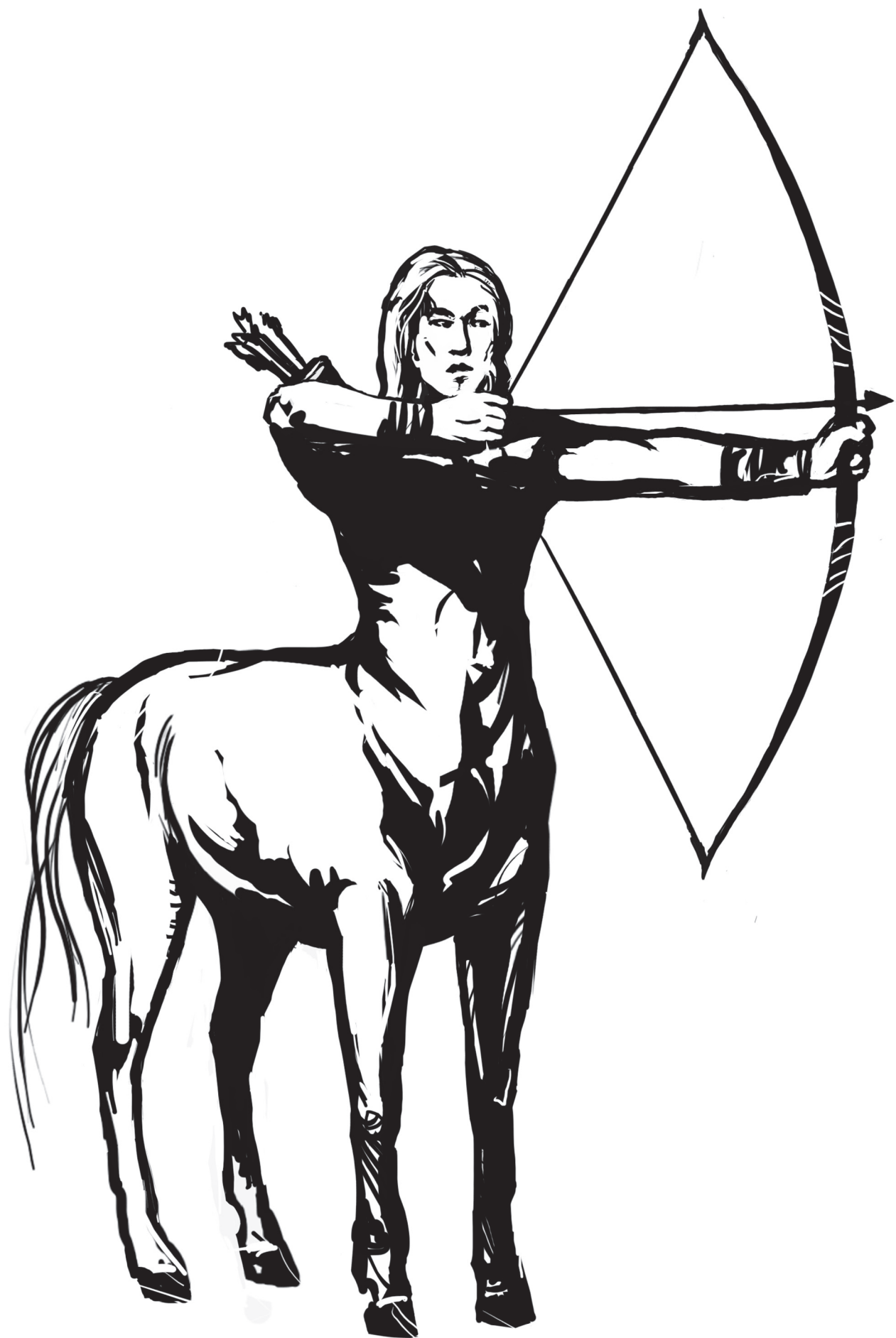
Step 4: Still somewhat skeptical, Shady Repose agrees to do business with KFM. They pay the up-front part of their fees in ancient gold coins, and invite KFM to their hotel so they can prepare their marketing materials.

Chang finds the tropical island home of Shady Repose as beautiful as described, and curiously deserted. The hotel is of the finest quality, but the staff seem...distant.

Steps 1 and 2: The guide tells all the players to make an intellect feat.

Step 3: Chang has an intellect of 3, so his player draws 3 cards: strength, intellect, dexterity. He reports 1 success.

Step 4: The guide has determined that the difficulty of this feat is 2, but Chang's own expertise with obfuscation and illusions reduces it to 1. This minimal success allows Chang to perceive that the hotel is an illusion. Two other players spend fortune cards (intellect and essence) to improve Chang's result to 3 successes; the guide reveals that the illusory hotel conceals the rotting remains of an ancient, barbaric palace, and the hotel staff appear to be the ghosts of pirates.



Combat

Nearly all adventure stories involve some sort of combat. Even if heroes aren't physically fighting, they'll engage in other sorts of contests in opposition to other characters, including sports, gambling, and court repartee. The guidelines below describe how to manage the sequence of alternating feats that constitute combat in a StoryCards adventure.

For a simple combat, especially if only a few characters are involved, the guide may simply ask each player in turn what action they will perform for the next six seconds, starting with the character who started the fight and then proceeding around the table. When all the players have had a turn, the guide determines the actions of the other characters. After that, it's the first player's turn again.

If there are a large number of combatants, or if greater realism is desired, the following combat sequence can be used:

0. Determine Initiative
 1. Ask Questions
 2. Prepare Actions
 3. Announce Actions
 4. Resolve Feats

The combat sequence groups all actions for each party into one *round*. After step 0 is resolved at the beginning of the combat, the characters in the first party follow steps 1 through 4, then the next party follows steps 1 through 4 on their round. Rounds continue as long as more than one party continues to act.

Step 0: Determine Initiative

The purpose of step 0 is to determine which party gets the first round. It is only performed at the beginning of the combat, and is not included in subsequent rounds.

Usually it's pretty clear which character started the combat: it's whoever first attempts to fire a shot or throw a punch. If there's any uncertainty, each character involved performs a dexterity feat: whoever gets the most successes starts. That character's party has the initiative and proceeds to step 1.

Step 1: Ask Questions

The beginning of your combat round is the time to ask the guide questions about the state of things. You won't be allowed to ask such questions later in the sequence; you'll have to make assumptions based upon what you know already, or wait until your party's next round. Eventually the guide asks "Does anyone have any more questions?" and if no one answers, step 2 begins.

Step 2: Prepare Actions

All the players silently decide their heroes' actions for the next six seconds. If you are working on a task that will take longer than six seconds, then your action is to continue to work on that task: the guide will let you know when you've completed it. You can't discuss your actions with the other players, since you don't have time to chat about such things in the heat of combat. You may speak as part of your action, but others won't be able to respond until their next round. When you have decided upon your action, signal the guide (a thumbs-up gesture works well). The guide starts step 3 when everyone has signaled that their actions are decided.

Step 3: Announce Actions

The guide asks each player in your party, in turn, to announce the actions prepared in the previous step. Don't change your action based upon what you hear other players announce, just announce what you had already planned. Don't resolve feats yet, since they may be affected by the simultaneous actions of others.

Step 4: Resolve Feats

After all actions have been announced, feats are resolved, and the guide describes the overall results of the round. Combat then proceeds to step 1 of the next party's round.

Example Combat

The guide is running three players in the "Galley Slaves vs. Circe" adventure: Allison (playing Antiope), Toby (playing Gordias), and Alex (playing Xanthus).

Guide: Circe orders her henchbeasts to attack!

Allison: Antiope stabs the nearest beast with her knife!

Guide: Hold on, your party and the henchbeasts are both reacting to Circe. Make a dexterity feat to see who goes first.

Allison: (Draws two cards: intellect and will.) No successes.

Guide: (Draws two cards.) The beast got one success, so they go first.

Toby: Wait! (Plays a fortune card: the Phoenix, associated with Speed.) Antiope was watching Circe closely, and reacted so speedily that she was already attacking before Circe finished her order. She stabs the beast first.

Guide: Okay, you guys go first. Does anyone have any questions?

Alex: We're sitting at the table, right? Where are the beasts?

Guide: They're arranged around the room. (Draws a quick pencil sketch of the room on a sheet of paper, and places tokens to show the locations of the players, the beasts, and Circe.) Any more questions?

Allison: What's Circe doing?

Guide: Her last action was to give her order. She won't have time to do anything else until the beasts' round. Any more questions? (No one answers.) Okay, prepare your actions.

Toby: (After a few moments.) What are we sitting on?

Guide: Time for questions is over. I'll answer this time, but in the future, to keep things moving along, please ask your questions before we prepare actions. You're sitting on stools.

Toby: Thanks! (Turns thumb up.)

Guide: (Noticing that Allison and Alex have their thumbs up as well.) Okay, looks like everyone's ready. Toby, what is Gordias doing?

Toby: (Grinning.) Gordias snatches up his stool and uses it to fend off the lion while he pulls out the slaver's whip.

Guide: (Laughs.) Okay, what's Xanthus doing?

Alex: He grabs the lamp off the table and hurls it at the tiger.

Guide: Okay, we'll check in a moment to see if you hit. What's Antiope doing?

Allison: Like I already said, she stabs the nearest beast with her knife. She also yells "Retreat!"

Guide: Okay, looks like you're stabbing the boar. Make a dexterity feat. Alex, make a dexterity feat to see if you hit the tiger. And Gordias, you start waving the stool at the lion; by the end of the round you have the whip out.

Allison: One success!

Guide: Okay, you gouge the boar. He squeals in rage and his eyes seem to glow red. He's bleeding, but looks more angry than hurt.

Alex: Two successes!

Guide: Excellent. The lamp smashes on the tiger's forehead. Oil spreads over its head and shoulders, and it roars as it begins burning brightly. That's everyone's actions, now its the beasts' turn....



Injuries and Death

Adventuring is dangerous, and performing feats or being the target of feats is bound to get someone hurt eventually.

In stories, injuries serve two purposes:

- They make the story more exciting by increasing the danger to the heroes.
- They make the heroes more heroic when they continue on despite them.

For that reason, the guide describes injuries in a narrative manner:

- One of the arrows strikes into your thigh. You'll have to decide how and when to remove it, and it will get in the way until then. Removing it may cause you additional injury from tearing and blood loss.
- By snatching the blazing talisman before it tumbles into the abyss, you burn your right hand. Blisters well up, and your hand will be painful to use.
- The explosion flings you into a wall, and you feel and hear one of your ribs snap. You'll experience difficulty breathing until it heals.

In roleplaying such injuries, it helps to have some knowledge of first aid, to provide some basic understanding of injuries that can happen to a human body and what effect they can have. However, these aren't real injuries; they're story injuries. We want them to seem realistic (or, at least, appropriate to the mood), but in general they won't be as deadly as they are in real life: the golden rule applies here too.

Here are some examples of the effects of a fractured arm in different moods. The nature of the injury is largely the same in each case, but the effects are more serious at the lower mood levels.

Mood	Description
Whimsical	Your arm bends in a new place. You can see stars and squiggles emanating from there, so it must really hurt. Don't worry: in about three minutes you'll have forgotten all about it.
Comedic	You clutch your arm and moan. Putting it in a sling makes it good as new, except that sometimes people throw things to you, forgetting you can't catch them, and they hit you in the face instead.
Balanced	Your arm hurts like heck, and you can't lift it. You'll want to get that in a sling.
Dramatic	You cry out in pain as your arm snaps. As you clumsily splint it with your belt and a stick, you see it swelling, and there's an odd bulge to one side.
Dire	A jagged shard of bone protrudes from your mangled arm, and the pain is excruciating. You feel dizzy. You may pass out.

Injuries increase the difficulty of feats, especially if they require the use of the damaged body area. Injuries to the head are especially troublesome, making it difficult to concentrate at best, and damaging your brain and/or major sensory organs at worst.

These aren't real injuries; they're story injuries.

If you are the target of a successful combat feat, you will receive damage according to the results of the feat. In general, if the feat was only minimally successful, you will receive a minor injury: a bruise or scrape. If the feat was more successful, you may receive a serious injury, which, when combined with previous injuries, could be incapacitating. If the feat was spectacularly successful, you may receive a mortal injury, which could incapacitate you immediately. The seriousness of all injuries is determined by the guide.

Injuries heal between scenes at roughly the same speed that they would heal in real life. If less than a day passes between scenes, no healing occurs. If a few days pass, each injury downgrades one level: minor injuries heal completely, serious injuries become minor, mortal injuries (if survived) become serious. If weeks pass, all injuries heal. In general, the lighter the mood, the faster the healing: characters in a whimsical adventure heal completely between scenes.

A hero can become incapacitated in either of the following ways:

- suffering a number of serious injuries equal to his strength
- suffering a mortal injury

When this happens, the hero may perform a will feat: if this will feat is successful, the hero may attempt one last heroic action. Remember that if the heroic action is a feat, the difficulty may be increased due to the hero's injuries. Whether the will feat or the heroic action is successful, the hero then succumbs. The guide then determines whether the hero dies or merely becomes unconscious.

In StoryCards, hero death is regulated not by realism, but by the golden rule. Since the death of a hero is of tremendous significance, it can only make the best story if it is handled in a way that fits the story's mood. The guide uses the following table as a guideline for what should happen when a hero is incapacitated:

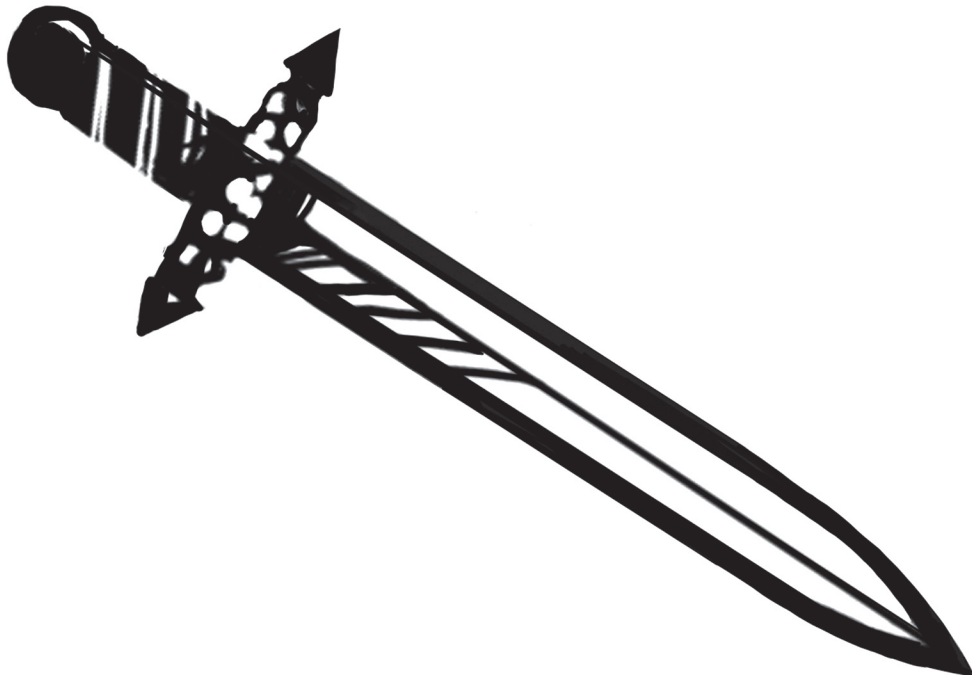
Hero death is regulated not by realism, but by the golden rule.

Mood	Description
Whimsical	Hero is knocked out for three minutes of real time, then returns to play fully healed. Even denizens never die, they are just knocked out for the rest of the game.
Comedic	Hero is unconscious for the rest of the scene.
Balanced	Without medical assistance, the hero will die by the end of the scene. If he survives, he must spend the next scene recuperating.
Dramatic	If no other heroes have yet died in the current scene, the hero dies. Otherwise the same as <i>Balanced</i> , above.
Dire	Hero dies.

The guide should avoid killing heroes in the first or second scene if it would limit the player's participation in the rest of the adventure. In the climax, the kid gloves come off: a heroic death in the final scene makes for a great story.

Even if a hero dies, the player can still participate in the adventure:

- The player still receives and uses fortune cards. (Perhaps the dead comrade provides a last bit of assistance from beyond the grave.)
- The guide can use the player to run minor characters for the rest of the adventure.





Fortune Cards

Players use fortune cards to influence the adventure. At the start of every scene, the StoryCards deck and discard pile are shuffled together, and each player draws one fortune card. At any time later in the adventure, you can spend a fortune card in one of the following ways:

- To add one success to a feat for any character, if the fortune card is of the right suit (see [Feats – Step 4: Result, page 38](#)).

Chang attempts a roundhouse kick to remove the head from a skeleton pirate. He makes a strength feat and gets one success: the guide says this is enough to connect, but not enough to knock the head off. Chang has a fortune card, but it's in the suit of will, which doesn't help. Another player spends one of his fortune cards, in the suit of strength, to give Chang another success. The skull goes flying down the beach, and Chang's opponent staggers off after it.

- To play to influence the adventure, as if performing a single-card reading. The card may be played either upright or inverted. Essentially this allows you to act as the guide for an instant, as long as you can somehow tie in the card. The guide may be required by the golden rule to veto your reading: in this case the card is returned to you and you may use it later instead.

In the process of fleeing the hideous mutant aliens which are secretly invading the space station, the heroes have become lost in the maintenance tunnels. Splashes-in-Sunshine's player plays a fortune card—The Shepherd, representing guidance—and says that they stumble across Ernestine the Plumber, a maintenance tech who guides them back to the city district. The player has added a new character to the adventure, something the guide may exploit in the future.

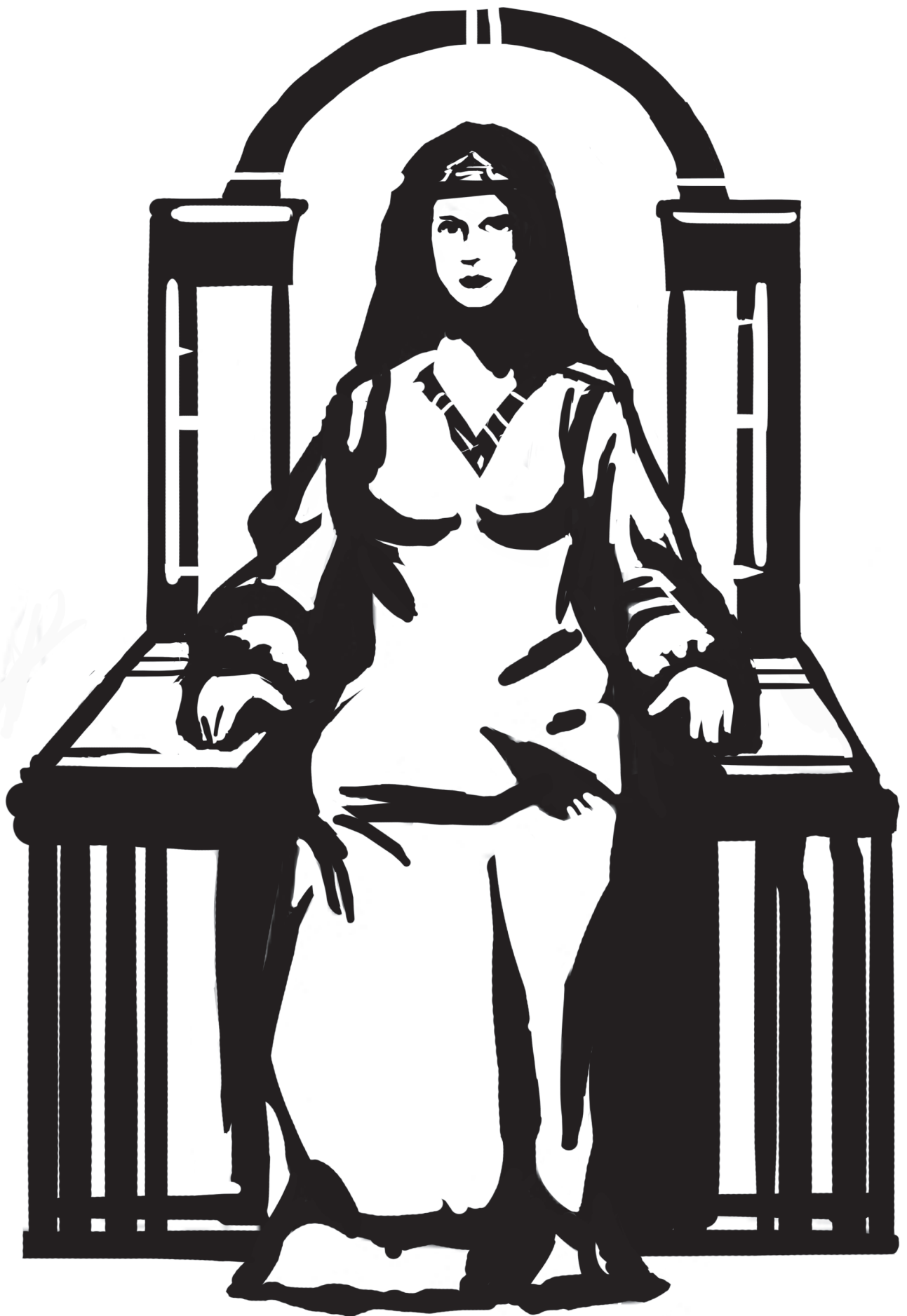
At the start of every scene, the StoryCards deck and discard pile are shuffled together, and each player draws one fortune card.

You may use fortune cards in the scene in which you drew them, or keep them for use in later scenes. However, unused fortune cards are discarded at the end of the adventure, so don't hold back when the adventure reaches its climax.

The guide may award you additional fortune cards for excellent roleplaying. Some examples:

- For choosing actions consistent with your hero when it's not the best choice strategically.
- For introducing an exciting plot complication.
- For making everyone laugh at an appropriate time.

Fortune cards help each player get a chance to shape the adventure. For that reason, try to avoid asking others to use their cards to help you, or suggesting how they may be used: it's best to let everyone make those decisions on their own.



Adventures

This section describes how to use StoryCards to generate adventures. All are welcome, but only the guide needs to read it.

A StoryCards adventure is a scenario that you, as the guide, create for the other players: their interaction with your adventure is what creates the story. If the adventure stands alone, you can think of it as an interactive short story. If it's part of a larger adventure (sometimes called a campaign in roleplaying parlance) it's more comparable to an act of a play, a chapter of a novel, or an episode of a television series.

The main purpose of the StoryCards is to help you create adventures for the players. The cards will help you create the important elements of an adventure from scratch in about an hour, about the time your players need in an impromptu StoryCards session to create their heroes.

It's far too easy as the game master of a roleplaying game to agonize for hours over the design of an adventure. But it just isn't necessary. Experienced game masters know that the more details they put into an adventure in advance, the more likely they are to have created details that the players will never encounter. All you really need is an outline, since all the detailed events of the adventure should be filled in by the actions of the players. In writer's workshops, participants can bash together the outline for a new novel from scratch in just an hour, so why should you need more than that for an adventure?

As the guide, it's important to relax and project confidence. The truth is, even though the adventure is important, most of the players' entertainment comes from playing their heroes and interacting with each other. If nobody stops play to look up charts or get hung up on rules questions, everyone will usually have a good time.

The steps in the adventure creation process are as follows:

1. Perform a StoryCards reading to determine the basic situation. (You may need to perform additional readings throughout the process to get more inspiration.)
2. Describe the characters that emerge from the situation.
3. List ideas for potentially interesting events and settings.
4. Combine the three best events with appropriate settings to create your adventure's scenes.
5. Figure out how the heroes get from each scene to the next.
6. Figure out how the heroes' mission leads them into the adventure.
7. After hero introductions, tailor the adventure to the heroes.

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Mood

Creating adventures is an artform, and the distinguishing feature of art is that it stimulates emotion in those that experience it. The mood value selected by the group indicates what emotions they want to experience.

- A group with a high mood value wants entertainment. Create for them a light adventure with thrills, humor, and/or wonder.
- A group with a low mood value wants catharsis. Create for them a dark adventure with anxiety, gritty violence, and/or ethical dilemmas.
- A group with a moderate mood value wants a little of each. Create for them an adventure that starts out light and gets darker toward the climax, but not so dark that some humor isn't appropriate.

Situation

The situation is the foundation of your adventure. It describes a problem with the environment and what the players will encounter when they try to solve it.

Readings

Once you and the players have agreed on the environment for the adventure, perform an initial StoryCards reading with the situation as the subject, and record it on an adventure playsheet. Then interpret the reading to get ideas for the adventure. The first reading may lead to more questions than answers: Who is the shadowy villain? What are the heroes seeking in the tomb? Where is the datachip hidden? Why does the empress want the heroes dead? That's fine: perform a new reading for each question and interpret it as well, until you have enough answers to proceed.

As always, some of the cards in the readings may not make sense, and you can ignore or alter them as you see fit. However, these cards present a great opportunity: if you can fit them into the adventure, you will create plot twists your players cannot anticipate.

As you perform each reading, make sure you remember the established mood: it should make a big difference in how you interpret the cards. Also remember the group's mission, so you can provide a reason for their involvement.

Past: This represents events that led to the current situation.

Present: This represents the situation itself.

Future: This represents the way in which the situation can be expected to resolve if the heroes do not intervene. This is probably something bad, at least from the players' perspective.

Gift: This represents a force working to help the heroes. It could be an ally, an aspect of the environment, or some advantage the heroes have.

Curse: This represents a force working to hinder the heroes. It could be an enemy, an aspect of the environment, or some disadvantage the heroes have.

Destiny: This is the crux of the situation, a dilemma that will be resolved by the heroes' involvement in the situation. It might also be considered the theme of the adventure: the basic principle of life that will be illustrated and/or argued by the heroes' experiences.

Don't reject a great idea because of card positions or orientations.

Example #1: Galley Slaves vs. Circe

A situation reading for our Galley Slaves vs. Circe setting doesn't seem necessary: the environment itself has supplied the situation.

Example #2: Spacefaring Circus Troupe

Here's a situation reading for an adventure for our Spacefaring Circus Troupe setting:

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Scorpion	Injury	I	Their ship has been damaged.
Present	World	Creation	U	They've arrived on a new planet.
Future	Raven	Punishment	I	They hope to be rewarded for performing here.
Gift	Fighter	Conflict	I	Entertainment here is mostly gladiatorial combat.
Curse	Cup	Justice	I	The gladiatorial championship cup contest is underway.
Destiny	Eagle	Nobility	—	Will they be able to fly the ship away?

Based on this reading, we could interpret the situation as follows:

The troupe's ship, *The Monte Python*, never in the best of repair, has been damaged by collision with space debris. They've managed to limp along to the nearest inhabited planet, Gladiux, where they hope to perform and earn enough to fix the ship. Unfortunately, the warlike inhabitants of Gladiux don't have much of a sense of humor: the only form of entertainment they enjoy is gladiator combat. The annual championships are underway, and everyone is so fixated upon them that there's very little chance of them attending a circus performance. Of course, this is all a setup to get the circus troupe to enter the championship themselves in order to win the prize money.

You may notice that this reading had a lot of inverted cards, and the fact that they were inverted was largely ignored. You may also notice that the Fighter in the gift position didn't really do anything to help the players; however, it *was* the key card that led to the idea of gladiatorial combat. Again, the reading is a creative inspiration tool, a framework to build ideas upon rather than a straitjacket to restrict them. If an idea comes to you while doing a reading, judge it on its own merits; don't reject a great idea because of card positions or orientations.

Example #3: Kung Fu Marketing

Here's a situation reading for an adventure for our Kung Fu Marketing setting. Given the setting, it seems a good idea to base the adventure off of interactions with some unusual potential client: but what is this client like?

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>U/I</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Past	Hound	Leadership	U	They formerly hunted their prey, like hounds.
Present	Vermin	Torment	I	Now they want to make themselves more appealing, to seduce unwary prey instead.
Future	Ruin	Disorder	U	They hope this will doom more victims.
Gift	Cross	Transition	I	They are unchanging: immortal?
Curse	Fish	Life	U	They can only feel anything by consuming the souls of the living.
Destiny	Scales	Payment	—	Will KFM accept payment from them after learning of their agenda?

Based on this reading, we could interpret the situation as follows:

Demonic ghosts haunt a beautiful island out in the Pacific, but they can no longer lure anyone there because the locals know of their existence. They want KFM to do a marketing blitz, portraying the island as the Shady Repose Tropical Resort Hotel, so more people will come there for them to haunt. They feed off people's emotions, the more intense the better: they don't need this to survive, but it's their only source of pleasure. They have money from a pirate treasure lost upon the island: actually, they are the ghosts of the pirates that left it there. They've used a magic orb from their treasure hoard to create the illusion of a hotel on the island.

Characters

An author, asked the three most important things about creating a story, will likely answer "Character, character, and character." Nothing will engage the emotions of your players as

strongly as the characters they encounter. Well-designed characters also help you adapt the adventure to the actions of the players during the course of play, because you can roleplay them to determine their reactions.

Major Characters

The characters that emerge from the situation reading will be the most important characters the heroes encounter. In most cases there will be at least one major character in the role of the antagonist. Your reading may indicate additional major characters in roles of mentor, guide, or victim. Fill out character playsheets for any such major characters: their histories, ambitions, and capabilities generate the plot of your adventure.

In general, build your main antagonist with the same number of points as the heroes, and add one more point for each hero in the group (don't forget to spend some of those points on henchmen). You might choose though to make major characters that are much more powerful than the heroes, depicting the heroes as pawns in a contest of giants. It depends on the nature of the adventure.

Keep in mind that you have to create a number of characters and the rest of the adventure in the time the players create only one hero each. You can't afford to get too bogged down in details: what you really need to know for each major character is:

- What does he want?
- Why does he want it?
- What can he do to get it?
- What is he willing to do to get it?





Nothing will engage the emotions of your players as strongly as the characters they encounter.



Example #1: Circe

We need to define the antagonist for our “Galley Slaves vs. Circe” adventure.

- Circe is busy with her potions and wants to not be interrupted by pathetic mewling mortals.
- Because she is fiercely independent, she’d never admit it even to herself, but the main goal of Circe’s research is to attain some measure of recognition from her peer deities. While she despises mortals in general for their weakness and depravity, she is rather lonely, and would genuinely enjoy the companionship of someone she respected: say, someone of intelligence and prowess who was capable of resisting her magic.
- As a sorceress and minor deity, Circe is a formidable adversary. She’s a 16-point character (10 for attributes + 0 extra for skills + 6 for powers), appropriate for facing 6 realistic (10 point) heroes.

	Attributes	Points
	Strength	2
	Intellect	3
	Dexterity	2
	Will	3

Skills	Points
Potions <small>(First point is free)</small>	1
Animal Training <small>(First point is free)</small>	1

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Henchbeasts: lions, tigers, and boars	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	5
Potions the transform humans to beasts	2: High	0: Rarely	0: Static	1

Note that the cost for the henchbeasts is discounted ($1 + 2 + 2 - 1 = 4$) because they are companions. Each one is an 8-point (4×2 points) creature. They cost an extra point ($4 + 1 = 5$) because there are several of them instead of just one. Also, the potions are discounted ($2 + 0 + 0 - 1 = 1$) because they are equipment.

- Circe has no more scruples about eliminating mortals from her island than a suburban homeowner would have about exterminating ants. She prefers pigs for her transformations, because they provide food for the henchbeasts, and she reckons it’s not much of a change.

Example #2: The Invincible Drax

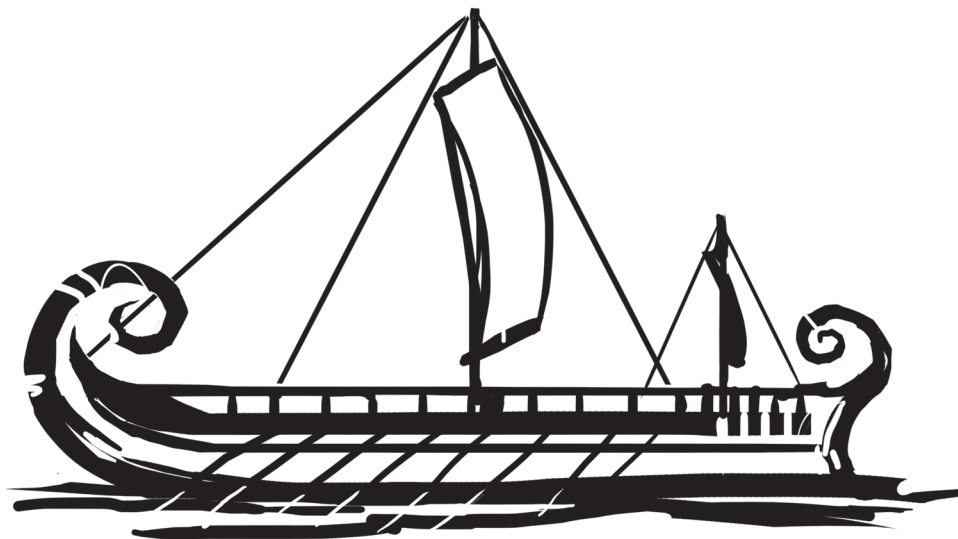
No characters emerged from our situation reading on planet Gladiux, but maybe there's a former champion who can help the players. Conveniently, he retired after winning the championship again last year. We'll call him The Invincible Drax.

- Drax wants all of his former opponents to lose.
- Drax wants this because of all the comments they made about him last year, talking about how he was getting old and soft. He proved them wrong last year, and this year he wants to humiliate them, by having them lose to offworlder freaks.
- Drax knows the contest and his former opponents better than anyone else on the planet. He's wealthy and influential, and can provide the finest equipment, trainers, and advice to the players. We probably won't need detailed characteristics for him, since he's in the role of a mentor rather than an adversary, but here they are, just in case. He's an 18-point character (15 for attributes + 0 extra for skills + 3 for powers).

	Attributes	Points		Skills	Points
⊕	Strength	4		Gladiatorial Combat (First point is free)	1
♩	Intellect	3		Showmanship (First point is free)	1
♀	Dexterity	4			
♂	Will	4			

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Wealthy and famous	2: High	1: Sometimes	0: Static	3





- Drax is willing to help the players cheat, as long as it isn't traced back to himself.



Example #3: Mr. Captain Krong

The leader of the demon-ghosts is the former captain of their ship, Captain Krong. He has ordered the crew to call him Mr. Krong in order to maintain their ruse, but every once in a while someone will forget and call him Captain anyway. If asked about this, he will claim that his first name is Captain.

- Krong wants people to flock to the Shady Repose Tropical Resort Hotel.
- Krong wants this so he and his crew can delight in their only source of pleasure during an eternity of undeath: tormenting mortal souls.
- Because this is a super adventure, Krong needs to be quite powerful. He's a 25-point character (12 for attributes + 0 extra for skills + 13 for powers), appropriate for facing 5 super (20 point) heroes.

	Attributes	Points
	Strength	4
	Intellect	2
	Dexterity	3
	Will	3

Skills	Points
Swashbuckling (First point is free)	1
Sailing (First point is free)	1

Powers and Weaknesses	Impact	Frequency	Variability	Points
Undead (unkillable by normal means)	2: High	2: Often	0: Static	4
Demon-ghost-pirate crew	2: High	1: Sometimes	2: Flexible	5
Magic orb of illusions	1: Medium	2: Often	2: Flexible	4

Note that the cost for the crew is discounted ($2 + 1 + 2 - 1 = 4$) because they are companions. Each has 8 (4×2) points. They cost an extra point ($4 + 1 = 5$) because there are several of them instead of just one. Also, the orb is discounted ($1 + 2 + 2 - 1 = 4$) because it's equipment, which the players might somehow take and control.

- Krong would sacrifice his dignity, his treasure, and the spirits of his crew for a steady stream of mortal souls.

Minor Characters

A few minor characters may appear when you describe the scenes. You can generally assume that these characters are typical denizens of the environment, with perhaps one high attribute and/or one skill or power relevant to their role in the adventure, but otherwise normal

(attribute values of 2, no other skills or powers or weaknesses). Don't worry about describing these characters in a lot of detail beforehand, because they don't shape the adventure—the adventure shapes them. Be prepared to invent any necessary details for them in the course of play, but for now just jot down their name and role on a character reference sheet, then move on: we still have a lot of work to do.

However, if you are struck with an inspiration to add something unusual or unexpected about such a character, especially something quirky or amusing, jot it down too. It may not be so important for a one-shot adventure, but repeated encounters with such characters across multiple adventures bring ongoing stories to life.

Example: Mr. Chee

Mr. Chee is Mr. Captain Krong's first mate. He's undead, like his captain, but other than that has typical attributes. He's acting as the concierge at the Shady Repose Tropical Resort Hotel. Though the illusions cover his true appearance, the heroes may notice that his movements are a bit odd, and that he clanks when he walks; thanks to a drunken ship's doctor, he has a wooden peg for his left arm and an iron hook for his right foot.

Thugs

Your adventure may also call for an encounter with thugs—a group of nameless characters that have no individual significance and are only interesting because they pose a threat as a group. Describe one thug in the same way as a minor character (see above) and assume the other thugs are identical. During the course of play it may become useful to come up with a single adjective tag for each (the tall one, the fat one, the leering one) but for right now keep moving. Generally you might provide one thug per player for a realistic adventure, two for an epic adventure, and three for a super adventure, but you may want to scale back during play if the players have been beat up pretty badly already.

Any substantial injury will eliminate a thug from combat. Unless they are fanatically loyal, when thugs are outnumbered they require a collective will check to see if they continue to fight; otherwise they will flee or surrender.

Example: Henchbeasts

Circe's henchbeasts include a lion, a tiger, a boar, a wolf, a panther, and a hyena. Each was formerly a human warrior. They follow her orders loyally, and are quite docile unless she orders them to attack.

Swarms

A swarm is a vast quantity of mindless attackers: examples include rats, locusts, goblin armies, and stampeding cattle. They are less of a character than an environmental hazard—like a fire or flood—and can't be fought in a conventional sense, because killing individual members of the swarm won't significantly reduce the threat. A swarm must be contained, avoided, pacified, or exterminated with some strategic wide-area attack.

Character Names

Some guides benefit greatly from some sort of random name generator. Creating context-appropriate character names at a moment's notice is difficult for many people, and can slow play down greatly for something that is ultimately of trivial importance. An Internet search for "random name generator" will turn up lots of resources, and there are several at <http://www.rpginspiration.com> alone.

Alternatively, you can use this simple name generation methodology:

1. Choose the most obvious name that pops into your head for the character. If it's a pun or blatantly stereotypical, that's fine. If it's someone famous or someone you know personally, that's fine too.
2. Alter parts of the name by replacing them with other names or words that are similar in sound or meaning. Repeat this step until you get something you like. For example:
 - Alteration of sound: Jim to Jake; Steve to Steven to Sullivan.
 - Alteration of meaning: Goldwater to Silverbrook; Patton to Patent to Copyright to Wright.

Scenes

A scene is the smallest complete unit of an adventure. If the mood, environment, situation, and characters are the elements of adventure, scenes are the molecules.

Composition

Each scene is composed of a premise to describe its function in the adventure, a setting to describe where and when it occurs, and a problem to describe the players' objective. The players' actions will determine how the scene unfolds. If they resolve the problem, the success transition will lead into the next scene; otherwise they will have to follow the failure transition.

Premise

The premise describes what the scene will do to make the adventure interesting. It relates the scene to the mood, to the heroes, to their mission, and to the situation. It tells a story about the story:

- Provide exposition as the heroes gather information about the fire in the library.
- Escalate tension as the amazon raiders break into the office building.
- The adventure climaxes as the heroes confront the alien in the boardroom.

One way to generate a premise is to ask yourself, "What is the antagonist trying to accomplish in this scene?"

For each scene in your adventure, writing a one-sentence premise will help you focus on its purpose.

Setting

Your setting descriptions are what draw the players out of the everyday world and into the extraordinary world you're creating together. The words you use establish the mood your group selected, because you control the players' perspective: they can only notice the details you provide.

In cinematography, new settings are usually introduced with an establishing shot: a broad view that creates a quick impression of the time and place. Here are establishing shots for the same location, but in three different moods:

- The trees are filled with impenetrable shadows. There's not a breath of air. The only sound is the occasional drip of moisture through the leaves.
- The woods are dark, obscuring the path ahead. The air is still. Droplets trickle from leaf to leaf overhead, and occasionally fall onto your heads.
- The trees here grow so thick and tall that you feel you've entered a temple to some ancient forest god. All is hushed. Moisture glistens on the leaves.

A problem is the difference between the situation as perceived and the situation as desired.

For each scene, consider writing a three-sentence establishing shot that you can read to your players as they arrive. Remember to engage not just their eyes, but at least one other sense as well: What do they hear? What do they smell? What do they feel on their skin?

Problem

The problem defines some aspect of the situation that the players must resolve before the scene can end. Some examples include an attack, a rescue, a puzzle, a trap, a mystery, hazardous terrain, or an argument: anything that's appropriate to the mood of the adventure, and that plays into the premise and setting you've chosen for the scene. Mix up the types of problems from one scene to the next to make sure each player has a chance to play an important part in at least one scene.

A problem is the difference between the situation as perceived and the situation as desired.¹ A problem is usually resolved by changing the situation to eliminate that difference, because action makes adventures exciting. However, there are other options. Some problems might instead be better resolved by a change of perception, revealing that the situation has been misunderstood, or that the difference is illusory. Likewise, other problems might be better resolved by a change of desire, if it is decided that the current situation is actually more beneficial, or that the cost of changing the situation outweighs the benefits: this is especially true if the players are being lured into a trap!

¹Gause, Donald C. and Weinberg, Gerald M. *Exploring Requirements: Quality Before Design*. New York: Dorset House Publishing, 1989.

Ideally, a problem should increase in tension as the players get closer to resolving it. If they are locked in a room that is filling with water, don't raise the water level arbitrarily in response to the passage of time: raise it in response to them performing the steps necessary to escape. Whether they are quick or slow, the room should be completely filled only just before they wrest open the door, when the rush of water dumps them into the hall beyond, where they gasp for breath and congratulate each other on their narrow escape.

For each scene, write a couple of notes about the problem the players will encounter. Don't define the solution: that's the players' job. You should have at least one possible solution in mind, but don't make that the only one that works: even if you think it's perfectly obvious, you may be surprised at how hard it is for the players to read your mind. On the other hand, feel free to define beforehand an obvious solution that *won't* work: if the players have it too easy, they'll get bored.

***Each StoryCards
adventure has
three interactive
scenes: a setup, a
complication, and
a climax.***

Transitions

Winning the stakes in a scene should provide the players some advantage in future scenes, perhaps in the form of information or a tool or a greater strategic position. A failure will impede—but not prevent—progress in future scenes, at least by taking that advantage away. Sometimes failure even means an antagonist gains the advantage instead!

For each scene, write a note about what will happen to lead the players to the next scene if they resolve the problem successfully. This is the success transition. Also, write a note about what will happen to lead the players to the next scene if they fail to resolve the problem successfully. This is the failure transition.

Sequence

Each StoryCards adventure has three interactive scenes: a setup, a complication, and a climax. The adventure as a whole is enclosed in a pair of non-interactive pseudo-scenes: a hook and an epilogue.

The Hook

The hook briefly describes an event that provides the heroes with their first encounter with the situation. The events that started the situation are probably well underway already, but this is when the heroes first learn something is going on that they should deal with.

The premise of the hook must be related to engaging the heroes with the adventure. Primarily, it must present the situation in a way that relates to the group mission. However, you want the hook to appeal not just to the heroes, but to the players as well. Appeal to their heroism, or at least their sense of duty. Tempt them with greed or curiosity. Incite them to revenge. Or throw them into deep water and make them fight to survive.

The hook is more descriptive than interactive, and has no problem component as such. Therefore it's best kept short in order to keep the players from becoming restless (and to keep yourself from giving too much away beforehand). If there's a mission briefing, keep it brief, then send the players on their way. If the adventure begins with an attack or a meeting with an unfamiliar character, set the stage with a brief description of why the heroes are there, then roll immediately into the first scene.

By the end of the hook, the players should be able to sum up their goal for the adventure in one imperative sentence: "get x" or "go to y" or "avenge z." It shouldn't be complicated, since the players will complicate things plenty themselves. Note that it's not required that their summary of the goal accurately describe the situation (see [The Complication, page 66](#)): what's important is that they have some clear idea of something to do next.

The Setup (Scene One)

The first scene is called the setup, because it sets up all the major forces that will come together at the end of the adventure. Whatever else the premise of the setup might be in your adventure, it should include the following:

- Allow the players to experiment with a new environment and/or new characters.
- Provide clues about all the major forces in the adventure, even if the players overlook them. (If you want to *ensure* they overlook them, provide lots of less important clues too.)

The setup's setting may be the players' home base, so they have maximum flexibility in choosing resources and direction. The setting may alternatively be the gateway to the unknown, on the border between the the heroes' domain and a place of mystery and exploration.

The setup's problem should be the most straightforward and easy to resolve of the three scenes. Partly this is because the players need to get used to the situation, but partly it is also because you want the adventure to build in excitement toward the end. Some good problems for the setup include:

- Attack by thugs
- Investigating leads
- Damage control
- Getting to an important location

***What's important
is that they have
some clear idea of
something to
do next.***

Try to define problems in this scene (and the next) so they can't be resolved in such a way as to subvert later scenes: if the heroes meet the antagonist too early, for example, they might kill him right then. Sometimes this will happen anyway, so be prepared to improvise. And don't cheat blatantly. Improvising is better than making the players feel irrelevant. The worst crime a guide can commit is to make a player feel irrelevant.

Successful resolution to this problem should allow the players to transition easily to the second scene. An unsuccessful resolution should cost the players something: time, money, magical energies, injuries, capture, or even a somewhat embarrassing rescue from someone whom they will owe a favor. However, under even the most-botched resolution at the direst mood setting, avoid killing heroes in this scene; being dead for the next two hours while the adventure continues isn't much fun.

The Complication (Scene Two)

The second scene is called the complication, because this is where the adventure becomes more difficult than it had at first appeared. This is the most flexible of the three scenes, because at this point, anything could happen. The only solid guideline is to make the problem tougher than in the setup.

*The worst crime
a guide can
commit is to
make a player
feel irrelevant.*

The premise of the complication can be anything you like. Some suggested premise types—with some relevant settings and/or problems—include:

- **Set Piece:** An idealized manifestation of the environment—a mighty battle, a palace of wonders, a forest of dreams.
- **Reversal:** A revelation that the hook was leading the players toward the wrong goal—a false prophecy, a misleading clue, a betrayal.
- **Continuity:** An encounter with someone from an overarching story—a traveling merchant, a rival party, a “bigger fish” antagonist that the players can't yet defeat.
- **Exploration:** A place to seek and find—a tomb, a lair, a trek through the wilderness.
- **Characterization:** A social encounter providing an opportunity to roleplay—negotiation, a contest, a conflict of duty.

In many stories, the complication is a contest between the heroes and the antagonists to acquire some essential resource (sometimes called a *macguffin*) that will give one side a decisive advantage over the other. In a substantial subset of such stories, the heroes *lose*: this is a surefire way to ratchet up the tension for the end of the adventure. So if the problem for this scene is not resolved successfully, it should seem like a disaster, and the players should have much doubt as to whether the adventure's final goal can be achieved (though it should still be possible—perhaps they find some inferior *macguffin* that can be used instead—and at least one hero must survive this scene). On the other hand, even if the problem is resolved successfully, you can escalate the tension by not providing the full advantage the players had anticipated: perhaps the *macguffin* isn't really what they thought, or they don't know how to use it, or it was damaged in the conflict so as to become unreliable.

The Climax (Scene Three)

The third scene is called the climax, because if we were to graph the dramatic tension of your adventure over time, this is where it should peak. All the forces introduced in the setup should come together here with a BANG! If you introduce new major forces here, or fail to reconcile existing ones here, the players will feel cheated. (It's okay if you don't reconcile all the *minor* forces here: of such stuff are sequels made.)

The premise of the climax, whatever else it might include, involves resolving the situation, for good or for ill. It should also bring one or more of the heroes face to face with their personal destinies, either to fulfill them or to increase or decrease their resolve to fulfill them.

The setting for the climax is the heart of enemy territory, the most dangerous place in the universe for the heroes to go. It may not be in the archvillain's throne room, but it should at least be in his castle.

The problem for the climax must be based upon the hook (whether the initial hook or a replacement hook introduced in a scene-two reversal). The climax might also include a second concurrent problem of a different type, so that everyone has something to do: for example, half the players might have to hold off the main antagonist while the others set up the macguffin to destroy him.

The Epilogue: The epilogue is the transition from the climax. It's not planned beforehand, but you create it on the spot based upon the results of the players' actions. Use it to tie up loose ends, and possibly set up a hook for another adventure.

This is also the time to let the players split up any money, goods, or treasure the heroes have earned. This can be their opportunity to reward each other.

If you might run a sequel to this adventure, then grant experience to the heroes, and take some notes about where everyone and everything ended up (see [Ongoing Stories, page 72](#)).

Generation

So, how do you generate the three scenes for your adventure?

By performing the situation readings and defining your major characters, you will begin to develop an overall idea of the adventure's plot. As you do so, jot down a pair of lists. The first is a list of interesting events that might happen. The second is a list of interesting settings that the heroes might encounter.

When you're done with your readings, pick the three most interesting events from the first list to use as the premises for your three scenes. Pick for each scene an appropriate setting from the second list.

At this point the problem for each scene will often be inherently apparent. If not, perform more readings until you have problems you're pleased with.

Once you have defined problems for each scene, consider how the heroes will get from each scene to the next. Remember that the first and second scenes require two transitions: one if they resolve the problem successfully, and another they can still follow no matter how badly they fail.

Finally, figure out how the heroes get involved, based upon their group mission. This is the premise for your hook. Pick a setting for the hook and come up with a transition into the first scene, and your adventure is ready.

Tailoring

After you've developed the adventure, take a couple of minutes to review the heroes. Then make adjustments to your scenes to better engage your players:

- Adjust a premise to align with a hero's personal history and/or ambitions.
- Adjust a problem or setting to align with a hero's skills, powers, and/or weakness.

Try to make sure that each player has the opportunity to stand out in at least one scene. Especially look for opportunities to incorporate powers and weaknesses into scenes, because that's how they are regulated.



Example Adventure

StoryCards Adventure Playsheet

Environment Summary:

Situation Reading (page 54):

	Title	Association	U/I	Interpretation
Past	Scorpion	Injury	I	Their ship has been damaged.
Present	World	Creation	U	They've arrived on a new planet.
Future	Raven	Punishment	I	They hope to be rewarded for performing.
Gift	Fighter	Conflict	I	Entertainment is gladiatorial combat.
Curse	Cup	Justice	I	Gladiatorial championship cup contest underway.
Destiny	Eagle	Nobility	—	Will they be able to fly the ship away?

Situation (page 54):

The Monte Python is damaged by collision with space debris. Nearest planet is Gladiux, whose only interest is gladiatorial combat. Annual championships are underway so no one will be interested in a circus. Troupe must enter contest to win prize money in order to fix ship.

Event Ideas:

- Show what happened to last circus on Gladiux.
- Team competition
- Training
- Individual competition
- Finding out that competitors are cheating.
- Meeting Drax

Scene Ideas:

- Competition arena
- Drax's estate
- Betting parlor

StoryCards Scene Playsheet A

Environment Summary: *Spacefaring Circus Troupe*

The Hook (page 64):

Premise: *Strand players on planet Gladiux.*

Setting: *Capitol city of Gladiux. The Monte Python is in dock, awaiting repairs they can't afford.*

Transition: *They enter a betting parlor, looking for a way to quickly turn last 100 credits into 10,000 needed for repairs.*

Scene 1: The Setup (page 65):

Premise: *Brawl in the betting parlor. Introduce Drax. Get players used to setting and characters.*

Setting: *Every surface of this room shows video of some live sporting event. Crowds surge between booths, roaring intermittently in praise or agony.*

Problem: *Something they do or say will start a brawl.*

Success Transition: *If they do well and escape, Drax approaches them about the contest.*

Failure Transition: *They are arrested. Drax pays fine and approaches them about the contest.*

StoryCards Scene Playsheet B

Environment Summary: *Spacefaring Circus Troupe*

Scene 2: The Complication (page 66):

Premise: *Get whole team involved in contest.*

Setting: *The grassy arena is open to a cloudless pink sky. Robots clean a rusty stain. Crowds jeer.*

Problem: *Defeat the opposing team.*

Success Transition: *Best fighter goes to individual championship. Win 5,000 credits.*

Failure Transition: *Same, but no prize. Either way, Drax reveals that last opponent is an illegal robot.*

Scene 3: The Climax (page 67):

Premise: *Get one player in contest while others try to sabotage robot.*

Setting: *Best fighter: arena Others: seedy warehouse district, smell of noxious chemicals.*

Problem: *Best fighter holds off robot while others shut down control center in warehouse. They can't reveal cheating because then they'd have to fight more contenders.*

Ongoing Stories

StoryCards isn't just for one-shot adventures. Each adventure can be an episode of a longer series. You just keep creating adventures for the same heroes.

Award fractions of points to each hero after each adventure: one third of a point for partially meeting the objective, two thirds of a point for completely fulfilling the objective, one full point for fulfilling the objective with outstanding style. When a hero has accumulated a whole point, the player can spend it to improve the hero.

At the end of each adventure, take some notes about where each character ended up, as well as any important objects. Before your group meets for the next adventure, ask yourself what each major and minor character wants to do next, and how he'll go about it. Then perform a situation reading for the new adventure as normal, and you're ready to run. You shouldn't need more than an hour to prepare between play sessions.

Encourage players to add their own work to the ongoing story. Grant players an extra fortune card at the beginning of the next adventure as an award for each of the following contributions:

- A background story about a character or the setting.
- An illustration of a character or scene.
- A log or diary of the previous adventure.

If a hero achieved his destiny or fulfilled key ambitions during the completed adventure, encourage the player to come up with new ambitions before the next adventure.

Later in the story you may need to introduce new heroes, either because a new player started or because an existing hero retires or dies. The new hero starts at the same power level as the original heroes, and should be created between play sessions. Players of new heroes should especially be encouraged to create campaign contributions for extra fortune cards.



About the Project

The Goal

I believe that roleplaying games are good and useful things. My best and longest-lasting friendships have been formed, or at least strengthened, across tables strewn with dice, pencils, and character sheets. My involvement in roleplaying has helped me become more creative, learn to cooperate with others, and better understand principles of probability, risk, and resource management. I also believe that we tend to become what we pretend to be, and therefore roleplaying an adventurous hero is more than entertainment: consciously or not, for good or for ill, it is an exercise in building personal character.

But there is a typical obstacle in any roleplaying group: who will create and run the adventure? In my own experience of running a weekly campaign for two years, I was the game master largely because otherwise I wouldn't get to play at all. The preparation for each week was exhausting and stressful, and much though I enjoyed running the sessions, that was exhausting and stressful too.

I have hoped, since I first played *Colossal Cave Adventure* in the early 1980s, that someday computers would be able to replace the work of the game master. As a veteran of many computer games since then, and as a professional software developer, I now understand that this will almost certainly never happen. Without a guiding human ingenuity, without a human spirit as a source for inspiration, a computer cannot generate an interesting adventure on its own, nor can it respond creatively to the inherently unpredictable actions of creative human players. It will take more than artificial intelligence to solve this.

And so the idea arose to create a tool, not for creating and running adventures, but for generating creative inspiration in human beings. The ideal tool would allow a group that has gathered together for an afternoon or evening to roleplay a fun and interesting adventure in any setting without even knowing beforehand that they were going to do so, with no advance preparation whatsoever, and with no other roleplaying materials required. StoryCards has met that goal more completely than I had ever dared hope.

I have developed StoryCards as a complete general-purpose roleplaying system. However, the cards are predominantly a tool for creative inspiration, and as such they can be a useful addition to any roleplaying system, or any other story-creation endeavor. They are available to be used in whatever way in you find them useful. Thank you for trying them, and I hope you enjoy them. I'd love to hear what you do with them: tell us at StoryCardsRPG.com!

— Carl Klutzke

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. —Philippians 4:8, *New International Version*

The People

The invention of StoryCards owes a great debt to the following people:

Bob and Mary Klutzke: my wonderful parents, who made me possible.

Mike Rieser: for introducing me to the works of E. W. Bullinger. Bullinger's *The Witness of the Stars* and *Number in Scripture* were the primary influence in the creation of the StoryCards deck. As of this writing, the entire text of both works is available on the Internet at Philologos.org.

Daniel Lawrence, Robin Laws, Jonathan Tweet, Erick Wujcik, and a host of other game designers: from whom I have shamelessly borrowed and combined the best ideas I could find.

Karen Alfrey, Andy Arenson, Jake Baker, Sharon Baker, Mike Brandl, Matt Carlson, Matt Forbeck, Mendy Foster, Phil Foster, Christine Gan, Cathy Hamaker, Thad Hutson, Arlene Jacobs, Steve Jones, Andrew Juell, Brandon Klutzke, Martin Leuschen, Charles Little, Alison Looney, Justin Love, Russ Luzetski, Mel Mason, Brenda McCartney, Dave Mott, Dale Rahn, Clark Rodeffer, Brian Skiles, Chris Sonneborn, Will Wagner, Mike Walker, Paul Weimer, Sarah Westcott, and several others: for playtesting, encouragement, and other feedback.

Kevin Pease: for the StoryCards ambigram logo.

Jeff Ward: for the card illustrations.

Scotto Starkey: for StoryCardsRPG.com, advice, friendship, and believing more than I did.

Karen Klutzke: art director, graphic designer, advisor, partner, best friend.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

—Philippians 4:13, *King James Version*

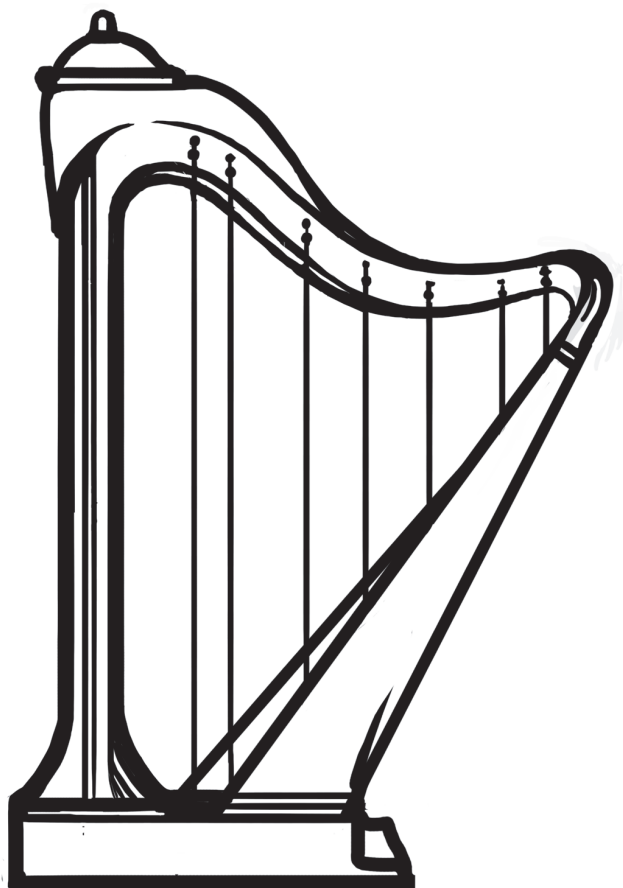
Appendices

Appendix A: Random Genre Determination Table

	Strength	Intellect	Dexterity	Will	Essence
1	Pirates	Feudal Japan	Law Enforcement	Cyberspace	Planar Travel
2	Tomb Raid	Victorian	Espionage	Weird Science	School
3	Magic	Renaissance	Invasion	Constumed Heroes	Sitcom
4	Ancient Evil	Greco-Roman	Martial Arts	Psionics	Dreams
5	Lost World	Tribal	Disaster	Post-apocalypse	Shapeshifting
6	Faerie Tale	Ancient China	Court	Mecha	Underwater
7	Ghosts	Arabian Nights	Medieval	Colony	Toys
8	Quest	Vikings	Big Business	Dystopia	Robots
9	Angels and Demons	Ancient Egypt	Show Biz	Space Station	Pets
10	Knights	Gangsters	Rebellion	Space Aliens	Holiday
11	Undead	Wild West	Film Noir	Mutants	Furry
12	Monster Attack	Dark Ages	Conspiracy	Time Travel	Little People

Appendix B: Sample Skills

Brawling	Smithing	Dancing	Fast talk
Running	Ancient lore	Lockpicking	Diplomacy
Melee combat	Ghost lore	Dodging	Concentration
Swimming	Deduction	Tumbling	Leadership
Endurance	Tinkering	Sleight of hand	Oratory
Resisting pain	Navigation	Marksmanship	Seduction
Blocking	Awareness	Driving	Bluff
Bashing	Climbing	Jumping	Steering
Riding	Throwing	Lifting	Stealth
Combat	Memory	Communication	Charm
Perseverance	Intimidation	Cooking	First aid



Appendix C: Power and Weakness Points

Impact	Rating	Points
Causes or prevents superficial injuries, or provides crawling-speed transport, or reveals or obscures cryptic clues, or inconveniences average denizens.	Low	0
Causes or prevents wounds, or provides running-speed transport, or reveals or obscures hints, or restrains average citizens.	Medium	1
Causes or prevents traumatic injuries, or provides vehicle-speed transport, or reveals or obscures important details, or restrains powerful denizens.	High	2

Frequency	Rating	Points
Has impact approximately once per adventure.	Rarely	0
Has impact in approximately two out of three scenes.	Sometimes	1
Has impact in nearly all circumstances.	Often	2

Variability	Rating	Points
Always manifests in exactly the same way.	Static	0
Effects can vary along one dimension: range, shape, intensity, size, direction.	Linear	1
Effects can vary along multiple dimensions.	Flexible	2



Glossary

Adventure: One session of StoryCards play, corresponding in narrative complexity to a short story, or to a chapter or episode of an epic story.

Association: The word at the bottom of a card in the StoryCards deck, describing a concept or principle associated with the card.

Attribute: A fundamental value associated with a StoryCards character, representing strength, will, intellect, or dexterity.

Character: Any person in the adventure's environment.

Climax: The third scene of an adventure. So called because it should contain the most exciting events of the adventure.

Companion: A power in the form of a guide-controlled character. Because of this inherent limitation, companion-based powers receive a 1-point discount.

Complication: The second scene of an adventure. So called because it is where the adventure is revealed to be more complicated than the heroes may have initially thought.

Contribution: Work done by players to add to an ongoing story, rewarded with extra fortune cards.

Curse: In a reading, a card representing forces that impede the subject.

Declaration: The first step in a feat: the description of the character's action.

Denizen: A typical inhabitant of the environment.

Destiny: In a reading, a card representing something important but unresolved.

Dexterity: The attribute that rates a character's physical finesse. Also, the corresponding suit in the StoryCards deck.

Difficulty: A rating that indicates how hard it is to perform a particular feat.

Draw: The third step in a feat: the player draws a number of cards equal to the feat's attribute, and compares the suits of those cards to the feat's attribute in hopes of accruing successes.

Environment: A description of the world in which the adventure takes place.

Epilogue: The end of an adventure, in which loose ends are tied up.

Equipment: A power in the form of a physical object which can be taken from the character. Because of this inherent limitation, equipment-based powers receive a 1-point discount.

Essence: A suit in the StoryCards deck which matches any attribute when performing a feat.

Evaluation: The second step in a feat: the guide's determination of the difficulty, as well as what attributes and skills the character will use to perform it.

Feat: A mechanism for determining the result of character actions.

Fortune Cards: Cards from the StoryCards deck that are held in each player's hand until used to influence the adventure.

Frequency: A rating for a power or weakness, describing how often it has an impact on an adventure. It's not necessarily how often it manifests, but rather how often it actually matters. The rating is either Rarely (at most one scene, 0 points), Sometimes (two scenes, 1 point), or Often (all three scenes, 2 points).

Future: In a reading, a card representing the anticipated outcome for the subject, should things continue on their present course.

Gift: In a reading, a card representing forces acting in the subject's favor.

Golden Rule: The guiding principle behind all StoryCards play: "What will make the best story?"

Guide: One who designs an adventure and helps the other players interact with it.

Hero: A character controlled by a player.

Hook: The beginning of an adventure; describes the heroes' first encounter with the situation.

Impact: A rating for a power or weakness, describing how much it can be expected to affect the environment. The rating is either Low (0 points), Medium (1 point), or High (2 points).

Intellect: The attribute that rates a character's mental finesse. Also, the corresponding suit in the StoryCards deck.

Mission: Part of the environment definition, describing the heroes' shared objectives.

Mood: Part of the environment definition, describing the desired emotional impact of the adventure. The mood values are Dire, Dramatic, Balanced, Comedic, and Whimsical.

Number: The numeric value of a card in the StoryCards deck.

Orientation: In a reading, the orientation describes whether the card was placed upright (rightside-up) or inverted (upside-down).

Past: In a reading, a card representing what has already happened to the subject.

Points: A mechanism for designing characters, especially heroes, so that their abilities are roughly comparable to each other.

Power: An ability which a character has that is not common to other denizens of the environment.

Power Level: Part of the environment definition, describing how powerful the heroes are relative to other denizens. The power level also controls how many points are used to create the heroes. The power level values are Juvenile, Realistic, Epic, and Super.

Premise: Describes the reason for including a scene in the adventure.

Present: In a reading, a card representing the current state of the subject.

Problem: Describes some aspect of the adventure situation that must be resolved by the end of a scene.

Reading: A technique for using StoryCards to generate ideas for characters and adventures.

Result: The fourth and final step in a feat: the guide compares the successes to the difficulty, and describes the outcome of the character's action accordingly.

Round: A mechanism for regulating combat. Each round represents the actions performed by one party of combatants for six seconds.

Scene: The smallest complete unit of an adventure. Each adventure has three interactive scenes: the Setup, the Complication, and the Climax.

Setting: Describes the time and place of a scene.

Setup: The first scene of an adventure. So called because it sets up all the major forces that will come together in the end.

Single-Card Reading: A technique for quick inspiration during the course of play.

Situation: The foundation of an adventure, describing a problem in the environment.

Skill: A mechanism that models a character's level of expertise in some learned ability. Each point in a skill adds one automatic success to an applicable feat. Every hero starts with a pair of one-point skills, and points can be used to improve them or to add other skills.

Status: A special type of power/weakness that models a character's wealth and social influence.

Strength: The attribute that rates a character's physical power. Also, the corresponding suit in the StoryCards deck.

Subject: In a reading, the subject is the topic for which ideas are desired, whether an environment, character, adventure, or some other situation.

Success: Used when performing a feat: the higher the quantity of successes relative to the difficulty, the more favorable the result. Successes are achieved by drawing cards in the suit of the feat's attribute, by drawing cards in the suit of essence, and for each point in an applicable skill. Fortune cards can also be applied to increase the number of successes.

Suit: One of the five card groups in the StoryCards deck: Strength, Intellect, Dexterity, Will, Essence.

Title: The name at the top of a card in the StoryCards deck.

Transition: Describes how the heroes get from one scene to the next.

Variability: A rating for a power or weakness, describing how much control the character has over it. The rating is either Static (always exactly the same, 0 points), Linear (variable along only one dimension, 1 point), or Flexible (highly adaptable, 2 points).

Weakness: A character disability that is not common to other denizens of the environment. Weaknesses provide additional points for defining the character. A hero may be created with no more than one weakness.

Will: The attribute that rates a character's mental power. Also, the corresponding suit in the StoryCards deck.

