

THE STORYTELLING GAME

Tales for a Thousand and One Nights

We marvel at Scheherazade's feat—telling a never-ending sequence of stories for almost three years with her life as the price of being less than fascinating on any night—but the Book of Tales contains the seeds of that many tales and more. These rules use those seeds to create a true storytelling game—a game true to the spirit of the Tales of the Arabian Nights, combining the pleasures of social gaming and the entertainment of dramatic storytelling.

Try this version of the game after you've played the Standard game several times and have gotten a feel for how that game works and the flavor of the adventures found in the Book of Tales. **A word of advice:** Don't be surprised if you feel a little awkward the first time you play this version of the game. **YOU HAVE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE!** There aren't any other games quite like this one.

Note: It is best played with at *least* four players; many players feel uncomfortable telling stories at first, but a large number of players all of whom are cheerfully making fools of themselves makes things more congenial.

Changes from the regular game

All Standard game rules are used in the Storytelling game, with a few modifications:

- **Game Sequence:** Keep the Book of Tales during your turn. Do not pass it to the player on your left. You act as your own Reader.
- **The Encounter Paragraph:** When you read the paragraphs of an encounter, **do *not* read them aloud!** This is where the storytelling part of the game begins.

Telling Your Story

Your encounter paragraphs are the basis for the story you will tell to the other players. You will dramatize and embellish the story for your listeners, just as if you were Scheherazade telling her stories to Shahriyar so he wouldn't put her to death.

You will not be put to death if you fail to tell a story—that seems a bit harsh for a friendly game. Instead, if you tell a good story, and tell it well, you will receive extra points and other awards. **Important:** *You do not have to tell a story!* If you decide not to tell a story, you don't lose anything—you just don't receive the extra points or awards.

Storytelling Overview

When you have an encounter, read the paragraphs quietly to yourself and take one minute to prepare to tell the story. You get two minutes to tell your story, or as much of it as you can tell in two minutes. As you tell your story, the other players may add sound effects, extra dialog, and appreciative noises at your direction. Then you will propose awards and the other players will vote to determine the actual award you receive.

Preparing to Tell the Story

The story you will tell should be based on the being or event you have encountered, your chosen response (Court, Grovel, Attack, etc.), and the outcome as described in the Book of Tales paragraphs. If a secondary paragraph is appropriate (if you have the appropriate skill, status, or possession), you may choose that paragraph as usual and take it into account in your story.

You have up to one minute to read the paragraphs and prepare to tell your story. Then you have two minutes to tell your story. You must begin your story by the end of the one-minute preparation period.

Your story ends after three minutes of preparation and telling, but you may use less than a minute to prepare if you like.

Telling the Story

Your story should follow the basic outline described in the paragraphs, with the same setting, characters, and events. You may invent additional events, add new characters and circumstances, embellish the details, even wander from the original paragraphs to a certain extent, but don't abandon them completely; if you do the other players should deny you any additional awards.

Your basic purpose, other than earning points and awards, is to charm and entertain your fellow players. "The tale is in the telling," and in below we give you some suggestions on how to tell a good tale.

As you tell your tale, encourage the other players to participate. Prepare them before you start your tale by assigning additional roles or sound effects, or simply point at other players in the middle of your tale, encouraging them to provide a whistling desert wind, crowd noises, the cackle of an evil wizard, or the sigh of a lovesick prince.

Three minutes after you have begun your preparation for the story, the other players should tell you to stop, whether you have completed the tale or not. (The other players always have the right to waive the three-minute limit if they are entertained enough to want you to continue, but be warned—this is a great way to have the game run to all hours.)

Reading the Paragraphs Aloud

After your time is up, read the paragraphs for your encounter aloud so the other players can compare your story with the one in the Book of Tales. If you have considerably enriched the original paragraphs in your telling, the other players should vote for additional awards. If you have failed to account for the events, characters, and settings given in the paragraphs, they should be less generous in their awards.

Proposing Your Additional Awards

When you'd finished reading the paragraphs, announce an award that you think you ought to receive *in addition* to the awards you would normally receive as listed in the award paragraph. The proposed additional award should be of the following form:

- One point for experience (either Destiny or Story);

PLUS

- An additional award for excellence (either a random treasure, a wealth level, a specific status or skill, an opportunity to enter a Place of Power, or another Destiny or Story point).

Note: The act of storytelling should not be confused with the Storytelling skill.

Selecting the Best Supporting Player Award

After you propose your own additional awards, secretly write the name of another player that you feel should receive an award for "Best Actor/Sound Effects/Audience in a Supporting Role." That player will also receive additional awards that you receive, if any.

Voting for Additional Awards

The other players now vote, one at a time, beginning with the player on your left. Each player votes on whether your story was Unremarkable, Satisfactory, or Outstanding. (You yourself may not vote.)

If the majority vote that your story was Unremarkable, you receive only the awards listed in the encounter paragraph—no additional awards. Better luck next time.

If the majority vote that your story was Outstanding, you receive the normal paragraph awards, the experience award (a point of some kind) and the excellence award.

In any other case your story is assumed to be Satisfactory, and you receive the normal paragraph awards PLUS the experience award (the one point of either kind you suggested), but not the excellence award (the treasure, wealth level, status, etc., you suggested).

Making the Best Supporting Player Award

You now reveal the name of the player that you selected as best supporting player. That player receives the same *additional* awards that you do. If you didn't get any additional awards, he doesn't either. The best supporting player **never** receives any of your normal paragraph awards.

After the Tale is Told

Once the story is told and the awards voted on, you receive the award described in the Book of Tales. Then the "Encounter" part of your turn is over. If you have any City or Quest cards to resolve, you do so now.

Judging and voting for additional awards

Three things can improperly influence a player's judgment of another's story: 1) reluctance to give something to an opponent that will help him win; 2) the desire to use votes to influence other players to become allies or enemies; and 3) reluctance to publicly judge another person's creative efforts.

Many games promote competition and diplomatic maneuvering. This game promotes and rewards storytelling above all. To appreciate this game at its best, suppress your competitive urges and emphasize your appreciation of a good storyteller. Be as objective as possible about the quality of storytelling when you vote on awards: consider whether the tale was entertaining and well told, not whether your vote will damage or improve your chances of winning.

Making public judgments of others' creative efforts always creates a tough social situation. "My, you made that dress yourself? Err . . . nice." "My, what a wonderful idea for a new casserole—liver and fruit cocktail—. How *original!*"

We strongly recommend that you remember these principles as you prepare your votes:

1. Play nice. When in doubt, be generous and supportive. Avoid the temptation to build yourself up by knocking others down.
2. Reward improvement as freely as you reward achievement. As folks catch on, they get better and better at this type of game.
3. Some of us are natural storytellers. It is our job to inspire and encourage the others by our efforts, not to crush them under the burden of our casual competence. Don't gloat or be scornful. Applaud honest effort and improvement. Offer suggestions. Make others feel good.
4. At least in the beginning, play mainly with good friends, folks you trust. Later you can bring the gospel to the uninitiated.

The next section offers useful criteria for judging the quality of stories and the skill of their tellers. Keep these in mind as you vote, and refer to them specifically when you tell the player what your vote is: "Gee, Doug, you really had a lot of detail and creative ideas in that one, but you forgot completely about the beggar you were supposed to encounter. I'd like to say Outstanding, but I really have to vote Satisfactory."

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STORYTELLING TIPS

This section serves two purposes: first, to help the player prepare for and tell a good story; and second, to suggest standards to guide the audience/voters in evaluating his tale.

Effective Storytelling

Here are five things to look for in good storytelling:

- **Exploit Your Own Experience**

When telling a tale, use your own experiences to help bring the tale to life. By "experiences," we mean both personal experience—events you yourself have participated in—and vicarious experience—experience you have gained through reading, TV, movies, and so on. Use these to lend added depth to your story and to create the illusion that you are telling of something you have seen or done yourself.

Telling a story as if it were your own creates an emotional bond between the storyteller and audience. When the paragraph setting is a crowded city street, think of your own feelings when caught in the crush of human flesh. If the paragraph features a powerful 'efreet, recall a film or cartoon genie and keep him in mind as you tell your tale.

- **Creative Imagination**

As you tell your story, don't hesitate to improvise, add details, follow impulses, and make up new characters and events. Don't expect to be creative and clever all the time—sometimes your paragraphs just won't inspire you. You can't force yourself to be creative, but you *can* recognize and exploit creative impulses when they appear.

- **Develop the Background and Sense of Place**

The setting of *Tales of the Arabian Nights* is a time and place very different from the modern Western world. Try to capture the atmosphere of Arabic culture—the piety of the dervishes, the power of the sultans, the sordid shrewdness of the beggars, the mystique of distant lands, the marvels of the magical world. As you play the game, you will become more familiar with the customs, beliefs, and settings peculiar to the Arabian Nights.

- **Provide a Dramatic Role for Your Audience**

Though it is entertaining to be an audience for a good storyteller, it is even more fun to participate. Whenever possible, provide other players the chance to play minor roles, improvise their responses to your characters, or provide sound effects—storm winds, crashing thunder, the reserved murmur of the Caliph's viziers, the cruel taunts of the hunchbacked jailer.

- **Use Voice and Gesture to Dramatize the Action**

Stand up. Wave your arms. Climb up on your chair. Shout through cupped hands to simulate the powerful commands of the djinn. Act out a sword fight. Pantomime your stealthy entry into the rich merchant's house and your shock when you open a chest to discover a magical guardian. Put emotion and emphasis in your voice where necessary—in anger, terror, scorn, and misery. Even when simply narrating facts, exaggerate the rise and fall of your voice, just as if you were reading a story to a child. Overdo it. Be a ham. If you are an adult, forget that you have a responsibility to be restrained and dignified.

Elements of a Good Story

The basic elements of the story you tell should come from the paragraphs: the plots, the characters, and the setting. As you read the paragraphs in the one-minute preparation period, go over these basic elements: what happens in the story I'm going to tell; who are the characters; and where does the story take place? You may want to add a few characters or events, but don't forget—you have a limited time to tell your story. If you make it too complicated or invent too many new elements, you will find it hard to deliver the story in the time allotted.

Budget your storytelling time. If the setting is important (for example, if your character is threatened by a storm or whirlpool), spend time describing the setting. If the characters (or creatures) are important (for example, the merman, the roc, or a wicked vizier), make sure they get described properly. If the story is a comic sequence of increasingly absurd situations, make sure you have time enough to get through them all.

If the story has a moral (and in the Arabian Nights, they often do), emphasize that moral as you tell the story and when you reach the conclusion.

Keep the mood of your story consistent. If it is comic, keep it comic throughout. If you want a pathetic tragedy, start out pathetic and end pathetic.

One distinctive feature of the original Arabian Nights is its use of "the-tale-within-the tale." Often the narrator will start out telling one tale, then tell another tale to illustrate some point in the original tale. For example:

"My daughter came to me and said she wished to marry this poor ne'er-do-well. I told her the following story about the foolish merchant and the raunchy slave girl: . . .

. . . and so the merchant was properly chastened for his unwise actions. And through this tale, I demonstrated the folly of marrying beneath your station. Nonetheless, I gave her permission to marry this ne'er-do-well, and it came to pass as I predicted."

The most important tool of effective storytelling is concrete detail in describing the setting and characters. Visualize them—the echoing darkness of mysterious caverns, the rich ornamentation of the Sultan's audience room, the grotesque warts and wrinkles of the old hag's face, the glittering evil eye of the Magian wizard, the vast and empty silence of the City of Brass. Don't forget the senses other than vision—the sting and stench of the smoky house fire, the tremble and chill of the terrible storm, the roar of the lion.

Using Game Elements

- **Exploit Your Statuses and Skills**

Use your statuses and skills as improvisational cues to make your story appropriate for your character. Even if your skills or statuses are not listed in the paragraphs, think of ways that your character's distinctive abilities and limitations will fit into your story. For example, if your character has Piety, Wisdom, Storytelling and the Respected status, and you choose to honor a Friendly Sage:

" . . . and the venerable wise man was so moved by my tale that he wept and begged me to become his companion, that he might share my wisdom and experience, and achieve enlightenment."

- **Angling for a Specific Award**

Suppose you really want a treasure, and you choose to "rob" the "All-Powerful Wizard." Even if there is no treasure award mentioned in the award paragraphs for your encounter, you can set your story up in such a way that the other players may award you the treasure. Portray the wizard as extremely powerful, and describe in glowing detail the wondrous treasures he has in his cavern. Tell how you used each and every one of your skills just to stay ahead, and how at last, through desperation, courage, good fortune, and the will of Allah, you managed to snatch a marvelous sword and flee for your life, bleeding profusely, only steps ahead of the wizard's evil minions. How could they refuse to reward such heroic exploits as these?

- **Summary**

When telling a story, keep in mind:

1. Exploit your own experience.
2. Use your imagination.
3. Be true to the background and mood of the Arabian Nights.
4. Provide roles for your audience.
5. Use voice and gesture to dramatize the action.
6. Be consistent.
7. Provide concrete detail.
8. Exploit your skills and statuses.

And keep these guidelines in mind when voting, as well!

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AN EXAMPLE OF STORYTELLING

You are in Damascus and have encountered a "Destitute Beggar." Foul cur that you are, you decide to "rob" him. You find the appropriate paragraphs and learn that none of your skills are mentioned, so you will have to use the "no skill" paragraph as the basis for your story. Here are the main and "no skill" paragraphs:

Despite an outward appearance of poverty, the other is secretly amazingly wealthy.

NO SKILL: You are so amazed at the wealth of this apparently destitute soul that you cry out in surprise. Others hear you, and you are caught in the act. Your victim turns out to be a Vizier sojourning among the people to learn of their condition. You are jailed for your crimes. [D1/*Imprisoned*]

Here's your preparation:

Setting: Not given, but the streets of the city where you encountered the beggar will do. Figure a big crowd, merchants and vendors hawking their wares like in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Later, when you are judged, you'll be in the Caliph's chambers, surrounded by advisors and sumptuous wealth, and finally in the prison cell, with a taunting jailer and hours among the cold, clammy stone walls.

Characters: The robber—you—and the beggar/vizier are the main characters. The crowd, the citizens or soldiers who arrest you, the court of the Caliph when you are judged, and the hunchback, are minor roles you may assign to other players or play yourself. If you have time, give a thought to visualizing the minor characters.

Plot: 1. You see a seemingly harmless beggar. Slime that you are, desperate for money, and too weak to handle tougher game, you attack the wretch. 2. You open his ragged coat and discover robes of many hues and of the finest silks. You shout in surprise, and others notice you standing over the beggar. You are quickly clubbed to the ground by an angry mob and taken before the Caliph. 3. In his chambers, the Caliph explains why he has sent his vizier among the poor—to see about their welfare. He curses you for your behavior, and condemns you to prison. 4. You are locked away in a jail cell, with no company but a cruel hunchback. However, the solitude and hardship gives you time to reflect, and you decide to lead a virtuous life henceforth.

You figure that the Wisdom skill would be an appropriate additional award for which to ask. You ask the players to provide the noises of a busy marketplace and the court of a rich Caliph. You assign the role of the beggar-vizier who gets pounded and the unpleasant jailer, but you reserve the Caliph's role for yourself, because you want him to be completely sympathetic to you.

All this planning takes place in seconds, but you think you have enough to start, so you begin telling your story.

You start off with a quick description of the crowded streets, getting the players into the act with crowd noises. You describe the beggar-vizier, encouraging the chosen player to look and act beggar-like. You tell the other player to stand and face away from you. You pantomime sneaking up behind the beggar as you tell your tale, then mime clobbering the beggar, encouraging the other player to slump and moan convincingly.

You continue through the outlined events, encouraging the other players to participate where appropriate, acting out anything dramatic with voice and gesture as you develop your tale.

Suddenly, in the middle of telling your story, you realize that your Beguiling talent might help you with the Caliph, so you improvise a quick twist to the story. (Hail to the Creative Imagination!)

When the Caliph chastises you for abusing the vizier, your response is to plead that the very thing that the Caliph hoped to learn by sending out the disguised vizier—the condition of the people—is the reason for

your attack. You are so hungry and poor, as are the rest of the people, that you are reduced to crime to stay alive. The Caliph is impressed by the wisdom of your words, and decides to alter the terms of your imprisonment to labor in his service, where he may speak to you of the affairs of the common man.

Alas, you have planned a bit too much, for you run out of time just as you are presenting your plea to the Caliph. You give a quick summary of the rest of story ideas you had intended to develop, then read the paragraph aloud to the others. Then you make your proposal for an award—a Story point for having a dramatic experience, and Courtly Graces skill, for becoming a confidant of a Caliph. You jot down the name of the player who did the beggar-vizier as best supporting player, for he was most cooperative and dramatic in his moaning.

The other players consider for a moment, then announce their votes. One votes only Satisfactory, because he thinks you tried to twist the intent of the paragraphs too far, but the others vote Outstanding because your tale was full of action, violence, and drama, and they liked the little twist at the end. You get 1 Story point and the Courtly Graces skill, as does your choice for best supporting player (the one who played the beggar-vizier).

Don't forget, though, that you get DI and the Imprisoned status from the paragraph itself.

Above all, have fun! Telling stories is one of the most fundamentally human things we can do.