Canon

Ashcan ("Decameron") Edition

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Canon is a game about creating the myths of an imaginary culture: short, strange stories whose original cultural context has been lost to time. As you build a living body of stories, you'll also invent the people who have told and preserved these stories, deciding who these storytellers are, what their culture is like, and why they've kept telling these myths for so long. You might enjoy this game if you like seeing a setting and culture emerge collaboratively as you add details one by one, you really like mythology and folklore, or if you've ever wanted to sit around a campfire telling ancient stories that you've never heard before.

Canon is a game for 3 to 6 players. You can play a full game in under six hours.

> You can stretch it out a lot longer if you want, telling more stories and lingering longer over the details of the storytellers. You can break this into multiple sessions of a couple hours each, or even start telling stories in spare moments between other activities.

You **don't** need to read these rules in advance: when you start, the rules will tell your group how to start playing step by step.

All you need before you start is:
- A player in charge of reading some directions out loud and facilitating some discussions. You can have one person facilitate throughout, or you can take turns.
- A copy of this document in an accessible form: at any moment, the facilitator will need to be looking at the whole document, and everyone else should have access to the "handouts" (starting on Page 18) at the end.
- Some way for everyone to share written information. You'll want a bit of space specifically dedicated to each character, and also some collective space. A single shared text document will work if people don't mind scrolling up and down it; a Discord or Slack server with a channel for each character would work too.

When you're all gathered together and ready to start, whoever's facilitating should take the next page and follow the directions on it.

Introduction and Safety

Tell the group:
*We're about to create a body of ancient, mythic stories, and as we do that we're also going to create the culture that tells and remembers those stories. The storytellers might be very different from the people in the stories, much in the way modern Americans still tell Greek myths, despite being very different from ancient Greeks, and even more different from the people **in** Greek myths.*

Before we start, we should establish some boundaries on the kinds of stories we're going to tell. Canon does this in two ways. First, we use Lines and Veils. Lines are content we're going to avoid entirely - they're just off limits and no one should introduce them into a story. Veils are content for which there's a soft limit: it's okay for the topic to come up, but it shouldn't be a central focus or get a lot of detail. If one does come up, we'll usually "fade to black". You're invited here to name anything you want to put on either of these lists.

Make two lists, one for Lines and one for Veils, and give the group a little time to suggest anything they want to put on either list. Put the lists somewhere everyone has easy access to see what's on them.

Once it seems like people are done, tell the group:
It's impossible to predict everything that might come up during our stories. So we also use the X-card. That means that if something comes up in a story that's uncomfortable or triggering, you can indicate that you want to remove that element from the game by saying or typing "X card" or just "X". At that point, the group will pause and rewind the story, or maybe just drop that story entirely. We might also update the Lines or Veils when that happens.

> A note about the X card: In general, we *don't* think the X card is appropriate for all games: if someone has just put something very personal into a game, it can be hurtful if someone else X's away the topic without resolution. We think the X card is appropriate for *this* game because Canon stories don't usually get so deeply personal that that issue comes up. But if your group finds itself going in that direction, you might need to replace the X card with a more flexible approach. You can find some ideas for how to do this in the TTRPG Safety Toolkit. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a resource created by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a compilation of safety tools that have been designed by members of the tabletop roleplaying games community for use by players and GMs at the table. You can find it at bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit.

You or someone else should start reading the next page.

The First Question

Make sure everyone sees the Setting Creation sheet (page 18).

Tell the group:
The first thing we're going to do is to start making the world within the stories, the setting where the myths take place. These kinds of stories always take place in a distinctive landscape, like frozen mountains or a deep forest. It might be a single landscape, or it might be a couple related landscapes, like both a valley and the mountain range surrounding it.

Tell the group:
This is the first time we'll reach a consensus together. I need three ideas to get us started.

> We're going to follow the Consensus process (pages 26-27). Since this is the first time we're using it, the instructions on this page will walk you through it step by step.

Ask three specific people to suggest landscapes. Tell them:
Don't worry too much about coming up with a really unique or stylish idea. It can be one of the ideas from the Examples in the Setting Creation sheet, as long as it's a landscape you'd enjoy telling stories in. In Canon, if something seems like "the obvious thing", it's probably the right thing.

Give people a short amount of time to respond to the suggestions, then make a single concrete proposal. It might be one of the suggestions someone made unchanged, or you might try to combine a couple of them into a single landscape.

Tell the group:
We're going to take a Temperature Check to see how the group feels about this proposal. You should vote Thumbs Up if you're happy with this being our landscape for our mythic stories. You should vote Thumbs Down if you don't like this landscape, or think there's a problem, or need more discussion. You should vote Thumbs Sideways if you're okay with this being our choice but not necessarily excited.

If everyone votes Thumbs Up, you've picked a landscape. Write it down somewhere. You or someone else should start reading the next page.

The first time through, if anyone voted Thumbs Sideways or Thumbs Down, talk about it. Ask those people what their reservations are. Let people discuss a little, and then ask someone to make a new proposal incorporating what's been said. It might be a modification of the first proposal that incorporates what was discussed, or it might go in a totally different direction.

Take a second Temperature Check. Again, if everyone votes Thumbs Up, write down the proposal and move on to the next page. If:
● anyone votes Thumbs Down, OR
● someone voted Thumbs Sideways and you're not sure why, or you think they might change to Thumbs Up with a little more discussion
repeat this process: discuss, then ask for a concrete proposal, then take a Temperature Check.

Mythic Elements

Tell the group:
Next we're going to choose the mythic elements of our setting. These are ways the world of the myths is different from the ordinary world. It includes things that might exist there that we don't see every day, like magic, or talking animals, or gods. It also includes things that have a special resonance in our myths: perhaps swords, or blood, or ice are particularly meaningful. Take a look at the examples on the Setting Creation sheet. What we create here will give us a shared palette for creating stories together: they'll give us both the mythic elements themselves, and name a few groups of people in society that are going to show up in the stories we tell.

Tell someone:
You'll start the first mythic element. Pick a mythic element and a fact that everyone knows about it.

If necessary, remind people that they should feel free to use examples from the sheet, and that if something seems like an obvious or easy answer, they should use it.

Tell the person to their right:
You'll finish the first mythic element. Pick a group of people who have a special importance to society in the myths, and what those people know about the element.

Write down the mythic element. Keep going around in a circle until everyone has created the first half one mythic element and the second half of a different one. (If you have an even number of players, you'll have to skip the first person when you return to them and then have them contribute to the last half of the last element when you get back to them.)

> If you only have three players, you might want to pick two people to add a fourth mythic element to flesh things out more. If you're playing with more than six players, you'll have to decide how to order things so that everyone gets to contribute close to evenly, but you don't end up with more than six mythic elements.

If someone gives an answer that doesn't quite follow the rules, ask them to tweak it:
- The first half of a mythic element needs to introduce an actual thing that might show up in stories (runes, dryads, holy berserkers). Be careful of answers that are cool or atmospheric (e.g. "everyone knows the world is dying") but don't do this.
- The second half establishes a group (or, rarely, an individual) that's important to society; watch out for second halves that don't actually establish a social group or entity (e.g. "but the end can still be averted").

When you've recorded your mythic elements, record them somewhere so that everyone can see them during play; they should be present and visible to help inspire story ideas. When playing in person, you might need to ask people to help you make one or two extra copies so that everyone can see them.

You or someone else should start reading the next page.

Characters

Tell the group:
Later on we're each going to create a legendary figure who people have told a lot of stories about. Right now, we're going to decide what kinds of people - or creatures - show up as the central figures of stories. Are stories in this body of tales about kings? About regular people? About ghosts? We're going to make a list of a few kinds of characters a story might be about.

Let the group make some suggestions. If you aren't getting enough, ask whether the kinds of people and creatures mentioned in the mythic elements make appropriate main characters.

2-3 answers is a good number, but more is fine.

You can do some synthesizing and organizing. If there are several ideas that have something in common, you might suggest a category that incorporates all of them - for instance, if people have suggested several different ways someone might be an outcast, you can suggest that outcasts in general might be the category and see if everyone agrees with that synthesis.

Tell the group:
Later you're going to make a character who belongs to one of these groups. Take one more look at the list and make sure there's at least one group there you're excited about.

Give people one more chance to add groups to the list.

You or someone else should start reading the next page

Utmost Power

Tell the group:
We're going to decide the utmost power in our myths. This is something like "the mighty gods rule everything", or "the world is doomed", or "love conquers all". The utmost power is the inner logic that suffuses the stories, even if it doesn't show up directly in every story. For instance, not every Norse myth is directly about Ragnarok, but nonetheless the world's inevitable doom colors and influences the body of stories as a whole.

Facilitate deciding what the utmost power is, following the steps on the Consensus sheet.

Once the group has decided, record the answer where everyone can see it.

You or someone else should start reading the next page

Ritual Phrase

Tell the group:
The last thing we need to decide is how the storytellers begin these stories. These stories always begin with the same phrase. Just like "Once upon a time" tells us that we're about to hear a fairy tale, this phrase tells the storytellers that they're about to hear one of these myths. This is the first little thing we're learning about the storytellers, because it tells us a little about their relationship to the stories.

Facilitate deciding what the ritual phrase is, following the steps on the Consensus sheet.

You or someone else should start reading the next page

Creating Characters

Make sure everyone sees the Character Creation page (page 19) and the Character Sheet (page 20).

Tell the group:
We're each going to make a mythic figure. Each of these characters will be the central character of their own series of stories. There might be stories where some of them meet each other, but mostly each one will have their own stories centered around them. Each character will be one of the types of people we picked earlier. To make a character, we'll fill out a character sheet.

If you're in person, demonstrate folding a character sheet in half and standing it up as a tent so that the side with most of the text faces you, and the mostly blank side faces the group.

Tell the group:
On the back, we'll fill out five facts about the character: a name, a legendary role, a personal trait, a story snippet, and a characteristic action.

> Some people like to coordinate on making the names share a consistent phonology. That can be fun if everyone's into it, but it's not the central focus of this game. If your group wants to do it, now's the time to talk about that phonology, but keep an eye on everyone and cut the discussion off when someone starts getting bored.

Tell the group:
The legendary role is a short phrase that describes some way the character is unique and memorable. For each of these parts of a character, the Character Creation sheet has some examples.

Each character has a personal trait, which is something that characterizes the way they behave (e.g. clever Odysseus). The personal trait should be a single concept, but it doesn't have to be a single word. But it should feel like something that could be a single word: maybe it was one word in the original language.

The story snippet is a fragment of the character's history; it might be something about their past, like their lineage, or an event in their future that there might be a story about. It could be something in general about their kind of stories, like "lover of kings and priestesses".

Finally each character has a characteristic action. It's what they're best known for doing (e.g. Odysseus tricks people, Hercules beats them up, etc). The characteristic action is here in part for characterization, but also to help you tell stories: if you're not sure how to end a story, just do your characteristic action - even if it doesn't seem like it makes sense. That means that if you

pick something complicated, like "Saying something clever", it means you'll have to come up with what they say; it doesn't have to actually be clever, but it has to be something the story can believe is clever. So make sure to pick a characteristic action you're comfortable narrating when it happens.

Give people time to make their characters. Answer questions and repeat explanations, and direct people to the examples, as needed.

If people ask:
- If someone discovers now that they really don't like any of the kinds of characters the group picked earlier, let them add a new one and add it to the list.
- It's fine if the characteristic action repeats one of the other items, or is heavily implied by it. But legendary role, personal trait, and story snippet should each contribute something distinct to the mythic character.

As people finish making characters, tell them:
Once you've created a character, write down the information listed on the Character Sheet where everyone can see it. The character's introduction will be part of the start of each of this character's stories. There's a suggested format on the character sheet, but you can edit or rearrange it if something else sounds more poetic.

Once everyone's finished, have everyone read their character's introduction out loud.

Tell the group:
You might also have a clear idea of what sort of tone your character's stories have - maybe you already know they're comedic, or tragic, or cautionary tales. If so, you should let the group know. But it's also fine if you don't have a particular tone in mind.

You or someone else should start reading the next page

Telling Stories

Make sure everyone sees the Storytelling Summary (page 21).

Tell the group:
*Here's how telling stories works. One of us will begin a story using the formula: "**Listen, once…**" and then our ritual phrase, and then the introduction of one of the other players' characters. They'll start a story about that character. The best story starters usually present an opportunity, a threat, or both. Don't be afraid to put the mythic character right in the middle of a situation - surrounded by bandits, about to get married, imprisoned, having been tricked by a dryad, even already dead! - and don't worry about setting up a story with a clear or obvious ending.*

*When you've finished narrating the situation the character is in, and you're ready to turn over narrative control, say, "**And so…**".*

At that point, the player of that character will take over and narrate the conclusion, and they have total and absolute power over how the story ends. Feel free to suddenly grow wings and fly away, trick someone into a marriage, or anything else. It doesn't have to follow in an obvious way from the setup, it doesn't have to form a satisfying narrative whole, and it doesn't even have to make sense. It also means you don't have to be a master improviser. If you're ever stuck, just narrate your characteristic action and end the story. These are ancient stories - it's up to later interpreters to figure out what they meant: you just have to tell them!

*When you're ready to end the story, **knock three times**.*

> An example of a story about a protagonist whose characteristic action was "hitting things with a hammer". **Listen, Once, when the islands were scattered**, there was clever Heyur, daughter of the mountain goddess, who died twice. One day, she overheard a flower and a rock arguing about whether flowers were more numerous than rocks, or rocks more numerous than flowers. They were arguing so violently that it threatened to shake the land apart. **And so….** they turned to Heyur and asked her to resolve the dispute. She thought a moment, gently tied the flower into her hair, and then lifted up her hammer and brought it down on the rock, which shattered into hundreds of pieces. "There are more rocks", she said. **[Knock, knock, knock]**

This is a good moment for the group to take a brief break to stretch and think about stories they might start. People can also look over the sample openings on page 22.

When the group gets back together, you or someone else should start the first story. Make sure it follows the format, beginning with the ritual phrase and the introduction before the story itself.

After the story ends, tell the group:

After each story, there are two things that happen. First, anyone can decide that a detail of the story was particularly compelling or memorable, and they might announce that that element Echoes Through the Ages*. This is something people strongly associate with that story, and more generally with the character, so much that it becomes emblematic of that character. It might be something really important to the story, but sometimes a stray detail really catches people's attention. The Biblical Joseph's coat of many colors is mentioned only twice in passing, but it's one of the best known and most vivid details about him. That's what Echoes Through the Ages are like.*

Pause to see if anyone wants to point out a piece of the story that Echoes Through the Ages. If someone does, record it and try to put the record near that character's sheet so it will be remembered with them.

Tell the person whose *character* just finished the story:

Second, you'll get to choose between asking the group to Discuss a Question about the Story and Establishing a Truth about the Storytellers. If we Discuss a Question about the Story, you'll ask us all a question about how to interpret the story, and we'll go around and each give our own answer. If we Establish a Truth, you'll ask a question about the culture of the storytellers, and we'll decide as a group what the answer to that question is.

Let the player decide between them; directions on how to do each are on the following pages.

> Different people like one of the options more, so it's okay if your group favors one. But you do want some of each; as a guideline, doing the same one more than three times in a row is going to get excessive.

Once you're done with that, keep telling stories.

There's one more rule you'll need to know: a character can only have two Echoes Through the Ages. The first time someone suggests an Echo for a character who already has two, tell the player of that character:

People only remember so many details about a mythic figure, so a character can only have two Echoes at once. It's up to you to decide which two are visible. You'll make those two active, and keep all the others out of the way in retirement. (You might want another, less attention-getting, place near that character's information to remember the retired Echoes.)

Every time there's a new Echo, you have can pick any two to be active: you can immediately retire the new one, or take an old one which used to be retired and bring it out again.

Make sure someone - maybe you - has taken a look at the Breaks and Recounting page and knows they'll need to call for a break from telling stories at some point.

Between Stories: Discussing a Question

Make sure everyone sees the examples on page 23.

The first time someone decides to Discuss a Question, tell them:
You'll ask the group a question about how the story is interpreted. Then we'll each take turns giving an answer, and we will not resolve the different answers in any way. Because this is about how people interpret the story, there's not a single right answer - we'll end up with many irreconcilable perspectives, just as there always are with stories.

Let them ask a question. Make sure it's a question about the interpretation of the story, not a question about the storytellers themselves or their culture.

Tell the group:
Now we'll each say an answer someone might give to this question. It's okay to give the same answer as someone else, or to change theirs a little. It can be an interpretation you believe in, an interpretation from a particular perspective ("scholars generally believe…"), or one you think is foolish.

Starting with the person to the right of the person who asked the question, everyone says an answer. The person who asked the question goes last.

Once everyone's answered, it's time for the next story.

Between Stories: Establishing a Truth About the Storytellers

Make sure everyone sees the suggested questions on page 24.

The first time someone decides to Establish a Truth About the Storytellers, tell them:
You'll ask the group a question about the storytellers. Then, since this is a question of facts about the storytellers, we'll decide as a group what the answer is. At first, these truths will all be working towards an answer to the broader question of who the storytellers are. You can pick a question from the Establishing a Truth About the Storytellers sheet, or ask one of your own that's similar. It could be inspired by the story, but it doesn't need to be. It could just be something you're curious about, or something you think is cool.

> Some questions do more than others to fill in concrete details about the storytellers. If you're playing a quick game, it will help to lean towards directly establishing facts about the storytellers' lives, with questions like "what is the society's form of government?" or "what are their family structures?". If you want a more leisurely game with time for lots of stories, it will help to lean towards questions which focus on the way the storytellers' think about themselves, like "what kind of animal do the storytellers associate themselves with?".

While answering questions from the first group make sure the question really is about the storytellers. Do *not* let it slip into questions that start connecting facts about the storytellers to elements of the stories.

> This is really important: You really want to emphasize that we should NOT assume that the storytelling culture is anything like the culture in the stories - they may not live in the same landscape, or even on the same planet, and may be as distant culturally and technologically as we are from ancient Egyptians or the protagonists of a space opera are from us. Players will often slip into asking questions that assume the storytellers live in the same landscape or have major cultural continuity with the stories. You should push back on that. It's not against the rules, but it should be a deliberate, conscious choice.
>
> While answering the first group of questions, make sure the answers stick to talking about the storytellers, and don't slip in connections between storytellers and the stories yet. The first group of questions is about establishing a sense of who the storytellers are. People may be excited to skip ahead to finding the thematic connections between the storytellers and the stories they tell, but it's important to wait to have a developed picture of who the storytellers are before you do that.

The person who asked the question should follow the Consensus rules to help the group reach an answer to the question. The answers do not have to be inspired by or related to the story (though it's fine if they are). Once the answer has been recorded, it's time for the next story.

Breaks and Recounting

When the group has established four truths about the storytellers and also every character has at least one story about them (wait for both, even if one happens long before the other), call for a break in the flow of stories. Make sure everyone sees the steps on page 25.

> You don't have to take this rule literally, and can exercise a lot of judgment about when to take a break. This is one of the big determinants of how long the game takes, so if you want to fit a complete game into a shorter period of time, you call a break sooner, and if everyone's having a good time telling stories, you can wait for more.

Tell the group:
We're going to think about what we know about the storytellers.

Read all the truths you've established so far. Then ask the group the unifying question from the Establishing a Truth sheet that you've been working towards (the first break it will be "Who Are The Storytellers?"; in later breaks it might be "How Do Them Storytellers Relate to the Stories?" or "What is the Critical History of the Stories?")

Ask the group to answer this question. The answer will build on the truths you've established about the storytellers, but is also likely to fill in other details.
- Your group might come to an enthusiastic consensus, with people shouting out additional ideas that fit with your collective picture about who these people are.
- If not, you can use the Consensus rules to negotiate an answer to this question as a group.
- If you're really not on the same page, you may not be ready to answer it yet: you can go back to telling stories and Establishing Truths and come back to this in the next break.

  If you know you want to play a longer game, you can intentionally wait longer before answering. Instead of expecting that the group is ready to answer the unifying question, you can ask: *Do we know the answer to this question yet?* And unless the group is enthusiastic about knowing the answer, go back to telling stories and continue Establishing Truths working towards answering the same question.

If you're going to play the game in several play sessions, this is a natural point to stop for the moment.

The first two times you answer a unifying question - or if you decide not to answer it - go back to telling stories. If you've answered the unifying question, the next time someone Establishes a Truth about the Storytellers, remind them to move on to the next group of questions.

Answering the third question - completing the picture of who tells these stories, why, and how these stories reached their current form - finishes the game. (Not that that stops you from telling more stories anyway if you want.)

If you continue playing - or when you start playing again after a break - tell the group:
We're going to revisit the mythic elements and see if we want to change any of them.

Read one of the mythic elements to the group. (Try to start with the ones which have been used the most.) Tell the group:
We can decide to leave it alone, to retire this element entirely, or to change it. We can change it to reflect things we've learned from stories, or add something new that we want to see show up in later stories.

Wait a moment to see what people want to do with this element. If necessary, use a Temperature Check to reach a consensus, but usually the group will be able to reach an agreement informally.

One by one, read the other mythic elements and have the group consider each one in turn.

After this process, if the group has fewer than five mythic elements, tell the group:
We can also add a new mythic element, if we want.

See if the group wants to add a new one. Again, you can use a Temperature Check if you need it, but usually you'll be able to reach an agreement about whether to add one, and what element if there is one, without that.

Tell the group;
Reread your character. If you want to change anything about them, you can do that now. You might change things that turned out not to describe the character as well as you expected, or change things you've gotten bored with so that the next stories we tell about them can be different. You don't have to change anything. Cross out anything you change and write the new version above or next to it. You can also retire or un-retire Echoes now if you want.

> People could also choose to retire their character for a time and make a new one now if they want.

Once everyone is finished, ask everyone to reread their character's introduction - whether or not anything has changed - and remind the group of their Echoes.

With thanks to:

Setting Creation

What is the range of landscapes?

Examples: A fertile plain surrounded by vast desert, the forest primeval, the cold and inhospitable north, the archipelago, the fertile plain at the foot of a mountain range as well as the mountain range, the ruined lands after the volcano erupted, the blackness between the stars

What are the mythic elements of the stories?

Examples
- ○ Everyone knows runes cannot write a lie; those who society has abandoned can use them to write lies that become true.
- ○ Everyone knows you need to leave offerings out for the fair folk; only the foolish believe their promises
- ○ Everyone knows tide pools transport you to other worlds. Farmers know that they don't open for people who have family to return to.

Example elements: Ghosts, talking animals, witches, sorcerers, giants, gods, incantations, potions, swords, blood, ancestors, fortune, caves, ice, lightning, death, wells
Example groups: the old, the wicked, the foolish, the well-traveled, those who have faced death, brewers, townsfolk, those without family, talking animals, the oldest tree at the heart of the woods, descendents of Liggh, carefree people

What kinds of people get stories told about them? (Often 2-3 answers.)

Examples: Kings; culture heroes; ordinary people; people who have been displaced from their lives; talking animals; ghosts

What is the utmost power in this world?

Examples: There is fate; the gods are mercurial and powerful; the primordial forces of nature can be interacted with but never controlled; there is a god who makes promises that fulfill themselves through the ages no matter what; there is a vast and meticulous order to all of creation; there is a highly organized celestial bureaucracy; the world cannot be saved from its own destruction; in the end, there is no power greater than the simple truth; all of this has happened before, all of this will happen again

Once:

Examples: upon-a-time, in our first days under the sun, when the gods still walked the earth, before the first winter, in the days of fire, in the days of your mother's mother's mother, in Harathana's dream, after the altar of the sea was broken, even as the empire was rising

Character Creation

Legendary Role:

Examples: the first queen, the second-to-last great hero, the mother of us all, the giant slayer, the strongest man who ever lived, the god of thunder, the wise fool, the foolish merchant, the betrayer

Personal Trait:

Examples: wise, wrathful, big of heart, who could not lie, who loved her people, patient, generous, vain, beautiful, loyal to a fault,

General trait:

Examples: who spoke the word of winter, lover to kings and priestesses, first among the gods, whose loyalties tore him apart, last child of the King Penar, whose father was a snake, who slew her brother, who died twice, the shadow of our people

Characteristic action:

Examples: Beating someone up with an oar; lying; negotiating a compromise; doing something stupid; naming something; fainting; finding a third option; necromancy

Character Sheet

To make a character, choose:
Name:
Pronouns:
Legendary Role:
Personal trait:
Story Snippet:
Characteristic action:

To record these publicly, create an *Introduction*, like
　　　　[Personal Trait] [Name] the [Legendary Role] who [Story Snippet]
but feel free to edit or organize it differently to make it sound better.

Publicly post:
- The Introduction
- The Characteristic Action
- Pronouns

Storytelling Summary

Telling a Story:

Listen, once...there was…
First person establishes the story
And so
Player finishes the story
(Player knocks three times to end it)

After a Story:
Anyone may declare that a piece of the story
Echoes Through the Ages

The Player asks the group to either:

Discuss a Question
Player asks a question about the story; everyone gives an answer in turn.

or

Establish a Truth About the Storytellers
Player asks a question about the storytellers. Three people suggest answers. The group discuss the question, possibly adding or changing the suggested answers, until we settle on an answer by consensus or vote.

Some Sample Story Openers

- A flower and a rock near the protagonist are arguing about whether there are more flowers or rocks in the world, and they're getting so loud it's going to cause an earthquake

- A wedding. The protagonist is getting married to ease tensions between two families. Except the intended spouse is horrible and tensions are about to boil over.

- The protagonist encounters a magical creature who offers to buy something from them, and they're offering an unsettlingly *high* price for it relative to its value (e.g. a sack of gold in exchange for a sack of flour)

- The protagonist is traveling and encounters two landowners feuding over a boundary because *one of them* has allegedly been moving the boundary stone an inch at a time to steal land, and they won't let anyone - including the protagonist - pass until the dispute has been resolved.

- Three people approach the protagonist in the wilderness, and each makes a wild promise or threat, and asks for a night with the protagonist (e.g. to bear them a child who will grow to be a monarch, promises that they will always be safe under the light of the moon, knowledge of who really created the world, that the protagonist will never escape the wilderness, etc).

- The protagonist is in jail for thievery and will be executed in the morning.

- A village which is going to flood in the next few days begs the protagonist for help (either to stop the waters, evacuate them, or otherwise).

- A rival king has hatched a plot to steal the protagonist's kingdom, and has come with an offer that is really just a pretext to land an army on the shore.

- The protagonist's spouse returns from a long journey, and is now clearly one of the undead.

- The protagonist encounters a mysterious black plant that is two persons high and glistens unnaturally.

Discuss a Question about the Story

Example questions:

What was someone's motivation? (e.g. Why did prince Rolo steal the green bag?)
What was the significance of a detail? (e.g. Why is the bag Rolo stole green?)
What literally happened/how literal is a detail? (e.g. Did prince Rolo really die?)
How should we feel about someone's actions? (e.g. Are we supposed to approve of Rolo stealing the bag?)

When you answer, if you want, you can answer from a specific perspective, like:
Children/Parents/Scholars/Politicians/Priests/Heretics/etc say…

But you can also just say an answer.

Establishing a Truth

Example questions for early in a game: Who Are The Storytellers?
What profession does the culture identify with?
What is the current form of government?
What is the current religion?
What mode of production?
How technically sophisticated are these people?
How materially secure are these people?
How is wealth distributed?
How independent (politically or culturally) are these people?
How big is the culture (in population)?
What are 1-2 adjectives these people use to describe themselves (maybe 2 versions, pos and neg)?
How do their enemies describe them?
What animal does this culture identify with?

Example questions for the middle of a game: How Do Them Storytellers Relate to the Stories?
What sort of people in the culture tell these stories?
What is the significance of these stories to these people?
How many degrees of cultural disconnection are there from these stories?
What would one emulate in one of these characters?
Which traits of this person make them a figure of narrative?
In what way are we alienated from the people in these stories? How are they different or hard to engage with?

Example questions for later in a game: What is the Critical History of the Stories?
How are these stories misunderstood?
How many authors are there?
How was this story changed when (something) changed in the culture? (Pick a detail and explain how it's changed and what cultural change was responsible from that)
What is the understood chronological order of (blank)'s stories?
Which of someone's stories are known to have been written later?
Which stories are popular/central, or which are unpopular/viewed as less canonical?

Between Rounds

1. Mythic elements
    Review each mythic element, one by one. Read it, then consider as group whether to modify it or retire it. (Try to start with the ones which have been used the most.)
    After reviewing all of them, consider whether the group wants to add a new one, either reflecting what has appeared organically in the stories, or to bring the stories in a new direction.

2. Characters
    Consider changing part of each character's description (including the characteristic action). If it changes the character's introduction, cross out the relevant part and replace it. Don't scratch it all the way out; just cross it out.
    Consider retiring the character for a time and making a new one for the next batch of stories.
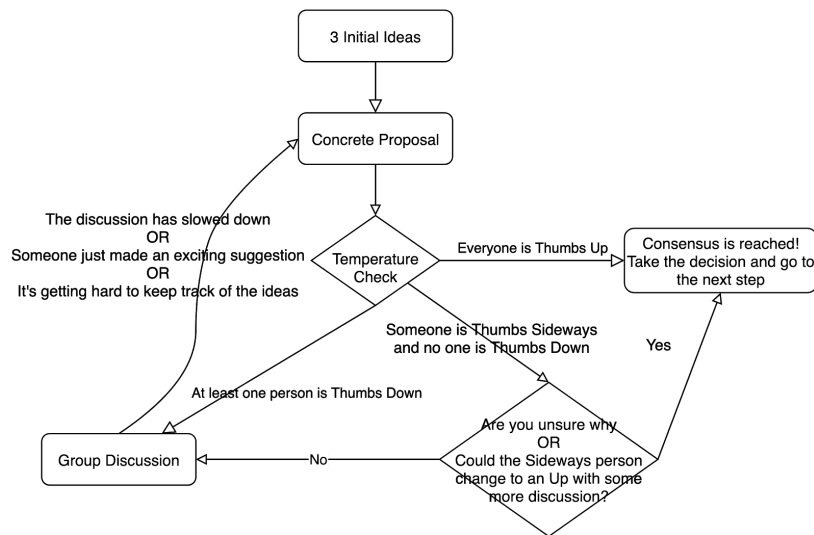
3. Setting
    Review each of the established truths and each Echo
    Discuss the bigger underlying question for this part of the game. If you feel like you have a satisfying consensus that fully answers it, record the answer and move on to the next group of questions with the next batch of stories.

Consensus

When the group is going to reach a consensus, the steps are organized like this:

```
                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │ 3 Initial Ideas │
                        └──────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │ Concrete Proposal │
                        └──────────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
  The discussion has slowed down    ◇ Everyone is Thumbs Up  ┌─────────────────────┐
           OR                    Temperature ─────────────────▶│ Consensus is reached! │
  Someone just made an exciting    Check                       │ Take the decision and │
  suggestion                                                   │ go to the next step   │
           OR                                                  └─────────────────────┘
  It's getting hard to keep track                                        ▲
  of the ideas                                                           │ Yes
                          Someone is Thumbs Sideways                      │
                          and no one is Thumbs Down                       │
                                                                          │
  At least one person is Thumbs Down      ◇ Are you unsure why
                                            OR
  ┌──────────────────┐                     Could the Sideways person
  │ Group Discussion │◀──── No ──────      change to an Up with some
  └──────────────────┘                     more discussion?
```

If you're the person facilitating the, here's what you do.

Initial Ideas
Ask three people to make suggestions to start things off. These suggestions can be similar or very different. People can pass if they really don't have an idea they like.

Concrete Proposal
Take these ideas and make a single, specific proposal; you could repeat one of the suggestions, or combine some of them into a common idea. Make sure the proposal is clear and simple enough that everyone understands it, and that it doesn't add in too many extraneous details beyond the question the group is trying to answer.

Temperature Check
Everyone indicates their reaction to the proposal by publicly voting Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, or Thumbs Sideways. Thumbs Up means someone *actively likes* the proposal. Thumbs Sideways means someone *is comfortable with* the proposal - they're okay with that being the group's decision, even if it's not their first choice. Thumbs Down means they're *not okay* with the proposal being the group's choice or would like to talk more.

If:
- anyone voted Thumbs Down, OR
- someone voted Thumbs Sideways and you're not sure why, or you think they might change to Thumbs Up with a little more discussion

Then the group should discuss more. Otherwise, you've reached consensus; record your group's answer and continue playing.

Discussion
If you're going to discuss more, let the group have a free for all discussion about the ideas that have been suggested, new ideas, and what they like or dislike about them.

When:
>	The discussion has started meandering or slowed down, OR
>	Someone has just made a suggestion that the group seems especially excited about,
OR
>	There have been a lot of ideas suggested and it's getting hard to keep track of all of
them:
End the discussion and return to the Concrete Proposal step. (You can ask someone else to make the Concrete Proposal instead of you - maybe someone who's just said an exciting idea, or someone who was Thumbs Down last time.)

> The rules here call for a consensus, and sometimes that can be hard. We think it's important for this step: sometimes making the wrong decision here will make the game Not Fun for one of the players, and no one wants that. If you're really struggling to reach a consensus, it's because you have a real conflict between different visions for where to go. Ask people what they *need* to be okay with an answer. Look for creative solutions. Break out of ruts and try a totally different proposal.