

Storypath Cards

Credits

Original Design: Mark Rein•Hagen

Additional Card Design: Roderick Robertson

Card Face Art: Richard Thomas

Card Back Art: Jennifer Wieck

Original Editing: Lisa Stevens and Stewart Wieck

New Edition Editing: Roderick Robertson

Layout & Border Design: Aileen E. Miles

Whimsy Cards were originally created by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein•Hagen

Storypath Cards offer your gaming group a new way to roleplay, no matter which game system you use. These cards provide a unique way for you to create more dynamic and detailed stories by harnessing your players' imaginations. Storypath Cards empower and encourage the players to add to the story of your game.

These cards allow a player to break into the action and add a new detail or twist to the story. Usually, this is something which adds to the mood or atmosphere of the story, but often it can actually affect the plot. Each Storypath Card suggests a different kind of intervention, but interpretation of just what a particular Storypath Card allows is up to the player and GM. Players should never be pawns thrust about by the GM's schemes, but they can now be full participants in an unfolding story.

The Deck

Each deck of Storypath Cards contains Theme Cards, Tone Cards, and Climax Cards. Each of the cards has a title, a short description to guide their use, an illustration, and a number from one to seven that determines when it can be played.

The Cards

Storypath Cards allow a player to add to the story. Think of them as special effects cards that allow players to add dramatic and atmosphere-building elements, such as sound effects, plot twists, new characters, surprising successes, or unexpected obstacles.

Though you may be somewhat confused as to what Storypath Cards are, you shouldn't be fooled into thinking they're complicated. Storypath Cards are a natural extension of the roleplaying you are doing now. They simply give permission for the players to act a little bit like a GM from time to time. Everyone gets the chance to add their ideas to the story, but because the cards create mostly "mood and feel," the authority of the GM is never threatened. The GM has veto power over the use of the cards, so he or she can always retain control of the game, but the GM is encouraged to allow Storypath Cards to empower players direct the narrative of the story.

Often what is described by the players using Storypath Cards are things the characters might think they know but may not actually be true.

Abbreviations and Terms Used

Troupe: A group of roleplayers/storytellers

Story: The adventure or plot, or a segment of it.

GM: Gamemaster, Storyguide, Storyteller, referee

PC: Player character, a character played by a player

NPC: Non-player character, character played by the GM

The characters may believe they see someone watching them from the shadows, but the GM can later decide that it was nothing. Other times, the description may be of something the characters do not see, but is added only for the sake of the players' enjoyment — sort of like when the camera in a movie shows you what the hero missed when she searched a room.

Using the Cards

At the start of the game, the GM gives each player 2 or 3 cards, keeping the remaining cards in a deck and holding all of the Theme Cards for himself.

Play starts after the GM plays a Theme Card (which is any card with the number 1 on it). The GM decides what kind of path he would like to start and plays an appropriate Theme Card.

Players can then add cards from their hand. However, only cards that have a number equal to or one greater than the last card played can be used. Thus, the first card played after the Theme Card has been placed by the GM must be one of the number 2 cards. The third card must be either a number 3 card or another number 2 card. The idea is to use the Tone Cards to build toward a Climax Card, which always end the story path when played and can have powerful effects on the story. The best Climax Cards have the highest numbers and are thus the most difficult to reach. Climax Cards have numbers between 4 and 7.

The card played is put face-up on the table, alongside the previous card, showing the path that the story is taking. The player describes what happens and, if accepted by the GM, it is incorporated into the story. The way a player describes the effect of the card on the story must fit the theme of this particular path, as determined by the Theme Card that the GM has played.

After a card is played, the GM determines whether to veto the use, edit it, or allow it to stand. Once the GM accepts the Storypath card, it becomes part of the story line. The GM may veto any play of a card if it doesn't naturally and completely fit within the unfolding story, but the GM is encouraged to find a way to incorporate any reasonable play. When a story ends without a Climax Card being played, the path ends as if a Climax Card had been played, and a new Theme Card can be played at any time.

For the Players

When using a Storypath card, you interpret how the card affects the story. You should describe the effects of the card you have played in as much detail as possible, as if you were the GM at that moment. Attempt to build up the mood and atmosphere, creating the desired effects in the other players through your words.

While you have the right to describe what the characters perceive and what they might presume, the GM has the right to make reality out of it — and the reality can sometimes be a far cry from your preconception. Whether the apparition you describe was real or simply a hallucination is at the GM's discretion, and you may even describe the event allowing for a degree of interpretation that allows the GM to work your description into the flow of the story.

You can be very creative employing Storypath cards by looking at only the intent and flavor of the card's title and coming up with an entirely new way to use it. Additionally, you don't need to always apply the cards to the PCs; you can use them to affect the NPCs as well (sometimes you can get the best effects that way). But remember, if you go too far or get too selfish, your card will be vetoed and you won't get a replacement. Playing a Storypath card on yourself is not common, but it can justify actions that may seem out of character.

Sometimes you will play a card that hurts the characters, instead of helping them. While this may win you a reward of a replacement card, if you are particularly creative, you will find yourself doing so simply because it makes the story better and more fun. There is no better way to use Storypath cards.

Different troupes will develop different rules of Storypath etiquette. In general, we find the following guidelines to be helpful:

Do not abuse the power of the Storypath cards. Using them to save your party is legitimate, but they have many other interesting uses besides those that benefit your characters. Often they provoke non-lethal trouble or a horror-filled atmosphere that leads to enjoyable roleplaying.

If you are affecting the story in a major way, stretching the bounds of the use of a card, or changing the orientation suggested by the card's explanation, it's usually best to discuss it with the GM first, so as to avoid a veto.

Avoid slowing the game down too much. If you introduce a plot twist just before the game is about to end, you could keep the story from coming to a satisfactory conclusion in the time available.

Always remember that GM's who give you Storypath cards are sharing some of their power voluntarily. Accept a GM's judgment on a card, even when she cancels one you have played.

For the Gamemaster

As the GM, you have the primary responsibility for guiding the story, so you also have final power over Storypath cards. Essentially, you retain absolute control. Your rights are as follows:

To play Theme Cards, which determine which other cards can be played after it and the way in which those cards are interpreted. This can be done both at the start of the game and at any point in the story (even if a previous path hasn't been concluded), in order to change its pace and tone. Never give Theme Cards to players — they are yours alone to use.

To give Storypath cards to the players whenever you wish and in whatever manner you desire. In this way you can reward your players.

To veto the use of any Storypath card (or edit and change them). You must also interpret them after they have been played, weaving them into the story in an appropriate way. The player describes how the characters see the card's effect; you determine the reality.

At the start of play you may pick out not only which Storypath you want the players to use but which specific cards. You may even decide to combine Paths — you could combine Horror and Hope — or select a handful of cards from several decks to see how the players use them to affect the story. You may want to take that a step further and assign players certain Storypath cards.

As the GM, you should try as much as possible to incorporate the players' imaginations, as expressed through the playing of the cards, into your scenes and plots, but don't hesitate to use your veto power.

Vetoed and Edits

Veto or edit the use of a Storypath card if the change to the story is undesirable. You know more than the players, so they might try to change the story in an impossible way. For instance, if the story depends on a certain NPC befriending the party, any Storypath card that would turn this character into an enemy must be vetoed unless it also offers a solution, which is an edit you could make to the play. You don't need to explain why you are editing or vetoing a card if by doing so you give away your secrets.

If the player was being greedy, don't give them back their card when you veto it. Instead, place it in the deck and don't give them a replacement. If it was an honest misunderstanding or played out of ignorance, it is good to return it to them and let them try again at a later time. Alternately, discard the vetoed card and allow the player to have a new one.

There are several ways to restrict Storypath cards if they are getting out of control. You can set conditions under which they cannot be played, such as not during combat or not in the same scene as a previous Storypath card. You can also place limits on their power, such as not

allowing them to cause a character to be killed or healed. Restrict them however you wish in order to maintain control of your story.

Example of Play:

The session has just started and all you know is that your characters are about to enter the tomb of an ancient king. To begin, the GM plays the Animosity Theme card. You have the Veiled Threat (3), Startling Discovery (6) and the Lasting Impression (2) Intrigue cards in your hand. If you wish, you may play the Lasting Impression card immediately, as it is a number 2 card and the Theme Card is a number 1 card. After the party enters the tomb, and creeps into the already looted outer chamber, you decide to go ahead and play it. You might say, "From underneath the pile of rubble in the corner, we see a hand poking out and we can see the glint of gold on its finger from the reflection of our torches." The GM responds, "Well, you see a hand all right, or at least what's left of it. It's only a skeleton and there isn't any ring." You aren't surprised, you threw in the ring expecting it to be rejected. You hope to get some clue to the dangers of the tomb by digging out the body of this previous explorer. However, the GM has decided that there is a ring, but that it fell off the hand long ago and is on the floor covered with dust. Unfortunately, neither you or your companions ever find it.

Later in the adventure, you or another player could play a card numbered 2 or 3. This means you could play your Veiled Threat if, for example, you found a prisoner in the tomb who warned you about not freeing him.

Rewards

During the story, players should be able to gain new cards to replace those which they have used. However, don't simply give players a card because they need one, but rather give cards as rewards. Use them to encourage the players to participate in the game and add to the story. You may also decide to give additional cards to players with characters currently off-scene so that they have a way to participate in the story even when their characters are not present.

Creating Adventures

You can use Storypath Cards to create a story. They can spark your own creativity and help shape a consistent story line. You start by picking a Theme Card which reflects the type of story you want to tell, and then use this theme to direct your imagination so that every element of the story illuminates this theme. Then pick a card from whatever sort of deck you are using to guide your ideas on what to include in the story. Think of what kind of encounter the card suggests and what kind of roleplaying it might engender. However, you may need to rearrange elements and elaborate to make the resulting story complete. This procedure can even be used to create a story on the spur of the moment. It's a great way to give direction and organization to extemporaneous roleplaying.

Look for these PATHS

We will be producing many different decks of Storypath cards, allowing you to create a mammoth deck of cards where you can mix and match cards depending on what type of story you wish to tell. A large deck allows for a huge variety of events to be played out in the story.

PATH of ADVENTURE

Nail-biting cliffhangers, harrowing escapes, larger-than-life characters and sudden reversals are found along this path!

PATH of CHIVALRY

Heroic deeds, legendary creatures, white knights and damsels in distress are found on this path. Not to mention the dark arts and dark-hearted villains.

PATH of HOPE

This path shines a ray of light on the most desperate situations, and while complete salvation is probably not possible, the worst effects may be mitigated.

PATH of HORROR

This path is one that begins with omens and premonitions and grows into fear and suspicions on the way to all-out panic and surprise.

PATH of INTRIGUE

Along this path are the schemes and conspiracies of mysterious figures as well the secret messages, veiled threats and mistaken identities they use to further their agendas.

PATH of MORALITY

Special rules apply to cards on this path where the choices you make — i.e. the way you play a card — turns the climax of path toward darkness or light.

PATH of SHADOWS

This noir-inspired path applies equally to any genre with corrupt officials, more corrupt police and the corrupting influence of money (or gold!).

WHIMSY CARDS

Before Storypath Cards there were Whimsy Cards, a deck with similar use but less focus and less structure. Whimsy Cards include a smattering of all types of decks, but (as their implies) and their use overall has less impact on the story. They are mainly for mood and details, or prompts for roleplaying situations.