

# **Rule of Three: A Fairy Tale Game**

By

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## Background

**A game scaffolding intended for any number of players who can communicate using a shared language.** Based on improv principles and the oral storytelling structures in written fairy tales, it is intended to encourage collaboration between players of different ages and abilities, and skews toward exploration of local spaces and problem solving over conflict or imaginary violence (though totally leaves room for that for groups that wish to explore those themes).

## Instructions

*“...If any creature tells you that it hungers, feed it. If it tells you that it is dirty, clean it. If it cries to you that it hurts, if you can, ease its pain.” –Instructions, Neil Gaiman*

Some players may find it useful to read a fairy tale together before playing the game. This can familiarize players with story beats and support idea generation.

## Players

A game for players of all (sentient, conscious) ages.

1. Minimum of 2 players, no maximum
2. Each grouping of players must be a party of three or more
3. Players can be imaginary, as long as there are 2 non-imaginary players with a shared language in each group.

This game is explicitly designed to include players who wish to have less agency or involvement and the imaginary/NPC player position can be used to drop in and out of play, with remaining group members taking control of the player role. Additionally, infants, pets, consenting bystanders, and other participants with agency but without a shared language can be included in the game as creatures or treasures. These types of players do not count toward the minimum group numbers. Their actions in the environment may be described as part of the setting and context of the game. (See Somethings and Someones).

## Agreements

1. This game involves no touching, unless all players agree to it. If age or power differentials are involved, default to no-touching as a baseline rule.
2. No one is in charge: all decisions need at least two-player agreement.
3. Each player, before picking roles, is asked:

*“Is there anything we don’t want included in the game?”* Offer examples such as acting out fighting, people being mean, or more specific things like mention of bugs or spiders.

**Also ask:** *“Is there anything that needs to happen for this to be a fun game?”*

Offer examples like: our adventure should involve snacks, the bigger people should make sure the smaller ones can see and reach things, or the cat is actually a dragon.

**Safety and Fun:** Let players know that **any** signals to stop or slow down are taken seriously, from “No,” to “I don’t like that,” “Time Out,” or hand up, palm out in the Stop gesture. When in doubt, ask. If someone isn’t having fun, they can take a break or ask for help from each other. When a new player joins, someone drops out, or the group decides to take a break for any reason, it’s a good time to check in to see if everyone is still having fun.

## Characters

In each group, the core roles are:

1. *Guardian*: keeps the group safe from real-world and imaginary hazards
2. *Guide*: leads the group toward the agreed-upon destination or goal
3. *Gatherer*: collects and keeps track of the agreed-upon collectible items

There may be additional roles as agreed upon by the group, but all groups must have these roles, and players may not double up on roles. See [Creating Game Constraints](#) for how character roles shape game constraints.

## Imaginary Players

If an imaginary player is playing a role in the group, decisions about the imaginary player's actions are made by agreement of all other group members. If players cannot agree, the imaginary player does nothing.

*Remember, inaction is a choice: doing nothing is doing something.*

## Splitting the Party and Adding Players Mid-Game

As groups grow or shrink, any subset of players may venture off to take on side quests or explore their own strategies for achieving their goals.

At a group size of two players, there is always one imaginary player

At a group size of three players, each player takes on one of the core roles.

For groups of four or more players, the following may happen:

1. Create additional roles from the core roles of Guardian, Guide, and Gatherer.
2. Create apprenticeship/mentor roles to the core roles
3. Split the group into smaller groups. Each must have at least two non-imaginary players

*Each subgroup must have at least 3 players (minimum two non-imaginary players)*

Sometimes, during an exciting game, new players may want to join.

If it seems safe to do so, answer any questions about the game, tell them the roles being played, who the characters are, and what you are doing right now. Also, ask them to agree to any ground rules, including transformations. Then, ask them:

***“Are you friend or foe?”***

-If they are a *friend*, add them to the group (and if need be, split the party into new groups)

-If they are a *foe*, explain the current obstacle to them and ask them to play a role that makes the obstacle more challenging. See [Somethings or Someones](#) for additional ideas.

*Additional players bring additional ideas and energies! Let them add to the story of the game.*

## Somethings or Someones

As you play, you may encounter *objects*, *creatures*, or *people* in the default environment. Some of these are best left as is and interacted with as they appear to all viewers, in and outside the game. However, at times, it may make sense to *transform* Somethings or Someones. Each player should start the game by transforming something, and the players accept it without challenge.

Subsequent transformations can be *modified* by the other players.

*To perform a transformation, say “\_\_\_\_[the original thing] is now \_\_\_\_” three times in a row.*

*To modify a transformation, say, “ok, and the [new thing] also [new quality or aspect]. Each player may offer one modification to a proposed transformation.*

If players can't agree, the transformation fails. Changing the essence of a thing requires Belief.

*Creatures* and *people* introduce randomness to the game. When either are present, it is ideal to give them a role in play. This may be a pet, a younger sibling, or other people in the environment not participating. Accept all observed behavior as actions of the character. These creatures and people may also be considered imaginary players, if they can be relied upon to stay nearby during the game.

Transforming yourself is allowed, but risky! To make it safer, players should only perform a transformation on themselves if they can change something about themselves during the game to show it. This may include holding or wearing something special, like a hat or cape or basket.

Objects that *do not move* are encouraged to be transformed into game-relevant scenery or obstacles. For instance, a couch might become a hedge. Or, a hedge might become a castle.

*Remember to change things back when you leave the game!*

### **The Treasure**

Many stories involve finding or protecting a *treasure*. Players may begin the game with a treasure or make it an early game discovery.

Decide if it is:

1. *Dangerous*: this treasure is a threat, but to who and why? How do you keep it safe?
2. *Precious*: this treasure is of the highest value and is totally unique. In what way does it need your care?
3. *Secret*: a secret object is one that the group does not yet know what it contains and have decided to figure out together as they play.

The treasure may become an obstacle to or tool for achieving the goals or be traded for something more useful in the game. *What is the treasure?*

## **Creating Game Constraints**

To support player collaboration, each player decides certain constraints of the game:

### **1. Setting: Where are we?**

The *Guide* decides on the route the group takes, and what tool they will use to figure out the way. This may be maps, trail markers, road signs, etc.

However, the Guide must remain silent when deciding the *setting*.

Instead, the Gatherer and Guardian decide the setting, aka where the adventure is taking place.

It is helpful to include elements from real-world constraints to support imagination. It is also important to also include some made-up details. See [Somethings & Someones](#) and [Suggestions for Play in Various Locations](#) for ideas.

### **2. Goal: How do we know we have “won?”**

The *Gatherer* manages the inventory for the group, and seeks out the items or people that the group is after: any item that can be noticed by all players. Based on the setting, players may physically collect the item or simply announce when they see the item and state that it is added to the group's inventory.

However, the *Gatherer* must remain silent when deciding the *goal*.

Instead, the Guide and Guardian decide what defines success. See [Goals of the Game](#).

### 3. Obstacle: What is getting in the way?

The *Guardian* is most responsible for protecting and defending the group. They keep track of risks in the shared game space (dangerous paths, crosswalk signals, items not safe for players to engage with) and also may choose a Tool that keeps the group safe from imaginary threats (a magical umbrella, or demon detector, for instance).

However, the *Guardian* must remain silent when deciding the *obstacle*.

Instead, the Guide and the Gatherer decide what Somethings or Someones are trying to stop the characters from reaching their goals.

## Goals of the Game

To complete a given round of the game, players work together to:

1. *Find* one or more allies,
2. *Discover* a new truth, or the hidden meaning of a thing, AND/OR
3. *Solve* a problem together

Character actions can be:

1. *Acted* through movements, dress up,
2. *Described*: with shared language, reading aloud an existing story, or writing notes or playing in chat format AND/OR
3. *Symbolized*: with found/available objects representing items in play, with images on cards or taken from scraps, or through emojis, signs, or other non-spoken/written formats

The choice of which method(s) to use should be based on the access needs of players and the limitations of the play area.

### 1. To Find Allies

Most adventures need information the characters didn't have when they started. Who do you get advice from? Are they trustworthy? Did you invite others into play? How did they help?

### 2. To Discover a New Truth

A core element of adventures and stories is the process of learning something new. What did you discover that you didn't know before? This could be a fun fact, a new friend, or a strength or quality in yourself or another. Statements like "Wow, I didn't know I/you could do that" or "I didn't know that" are good indicators of achieving this goal.

### 3. To Solve a Problem Together

This game play inherently involves collaboration and problem-solving. To meet this goal, the group must decide what the problem is, and agree when they've solved it.

## Attempt, Attempt, Reward

Allow enough room for a pattern and reversal to happen. Remember that often success doesn't happen right away. For each attempt at a goal, the players must figure out how to fail first in an interesting way. *Failure makes the story interesting.*

1. Who or what interferes?
2. Is the disruption *silly*, *sad*, or something *too powerful* right now?
3. How does what you learn, find, or discover from the failure help you in the final attempt?

## Suggestions for Play in Various Locations:

This game is a setting-neutral freeform LARP, however, here are some ideas for play in various settings:

**Urban:** a shopping trip, dogs may be monsters, a sibling in a stroller may be the treasure, Guardian checks for vehicles, Guide takes the long way to the destination, Gatherer notices fliers, wildflowers, doors of specific colors.

**Cemetery:** certain types of headstone decorations, hiding behind mausoleums, looking for a word or name (for players that can read),

**Forest:** navigating trail markers or maps, bird or creature finding, gathering other people's garbage scraps, listening for hidden threats behind trees or hills

**In Transit:** whether a private vehicle or mass transit, this may involve more stationary activities and noticing/saying items rather than acting out. How obvious (or secret) is your game to other passengers?

This form can be adapted to sleepovers, a chat server (like Discord), and many other settings.

I'd love to hear what you come up with!