

99 chances

The storytelling card game where you take your chances.

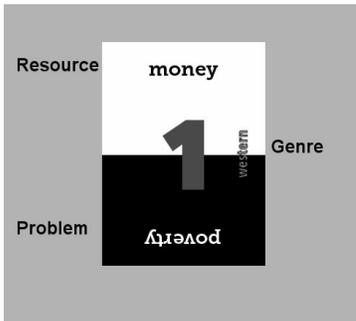
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3 to 8 players will select a theme, then become characters in a collectively-created story. Each makes their case for how they will use resources to overcome problems, with a difficulty determined by the other players. Success generates resources, failure generates more problems.

The tale's climax comes after everybody has a chance to deal with their problems. One player becomes the hero and determines the outcome of the story.

the cards

Here are the four modes in which a card can be played:



Note that they don't overlap (a card in Problem mode ignores its Number, Genre, and Resource values).

In these rules, capitalization of one of these words is shorthand for a card played in that mode.

You always immediately draw a replacement card whenever you play one. If the deck runs out of cards, reshuffle it.

play overview

Setup

- *Hand* – Deal 5 cards to each player
- *Story Meeting* – Each plays 2 Theme cards, then the group consensus-picks a theme (the player whose theme is chosen becomes Lead Storyteller with an extra Resource), then decide on characters
- *Trouble* – Each player gives themselves a Resource and somebody else a Problem

Storytelling

Each player repeats in turn:

- *Plan* – Tell how you solve a problem
- *Evaluate* – All others play a Number card
- *Median* – Discard all but the middle Number
- *Resolve* – If turned card is lower than Median, plan succeeds. If higher, plan fails and turned card becomes a Problem.

Climax

- *Frame* – Player with the most Resources frames the final conflict
- *Bid for Hero* – each player bids a Number, trying to be closest to the Finale card without going over it
- *Finale* – Turn the top card of the deck, reveal bids, gain or lose Resources.
- *Denouement* – starting with the hero, all describe in turn how the story worked out for them.
- *Victory* – The player with the most Resources wins.

setup

Shuffle the deck and deal 5 cards to each player.

Story Meeting

Each player plays two cards together in Theme mode as their suggestion for the game's theme. Starting with the dealer, each player makes a brief pitch for their two-card genre mashup.

The group chooses a theme by consensus. If a consensus can't be reached, the theme with the lowest numbered card wins. The player whose theme was chosen gets the top card of the deck as a bonus Resource and becomes the Lead Storyteller. All other Theme cards are discarded.

All players now chat a bit about who they want to be in the story, then write their character roles on open notes in front of them. (Don't try to work it all out now, more details will come into focus during Resources, Trouble and Storytelling.)

Resources

Going clockwise beginning with the Lead Storyteller, each player plays a Resource card in front of themselves. They must describe how this resource manifests itself within the story. **Order** might mean being the sheriff in a western setting or having mad computer skills in a sci-fi setting. It's a good idea to write a dry-erase

note on the card to remind everybody what the Resource represents (i.e., "sheriff" or "mad skilz").

Each Resource played in this phase should involve another player, preferably one who hasn't yet been referenced. This is subject to approval by the target. Declarations should be brief, interesting and engage other players.

Trouble

After all the characters have been brought to life they need some problems to round them out. Starting with the Lead Storyteller and going clockwise, each player plays a Problem from their hand on another player that doesn't already have one.

Setup is complete, you are now ready to play.



storytelling

Beginning with the Lead Storyteller and proceeding clockwise everyone takes their turn as the storyteller going through all of the following steps in order:

1. Plan

Describe how you will use your Resources to tackle one of your Problems. The more convincing your story, the more likely your plan will succeed. You may use your own Resources, and borrow Resources or otherwise enlist other characters with their player's consent. Make the storytelling process as brief as possible while still leaving the listeners both fulfilled and wanting more. (See the example for more detail on this process.)

2. Evaluate

The rest of the players now evaluate your plan. If there is an odd number of players, you will also participate in evaluation. The other players should not discuss anything, but silently play a face-down Number card from their hand recording what they believe the chances are that your plan will succeed. (A higher Number indicates a more likely chance of success.)

3. Median

Now reveal the evaluation Number cards. Discard all but the median (the one centered numerically between the others) which

becomes the actual chance of success. The player who played the median gets to keep it in Resource mode by relating it to their character and the theme within the context of the story.

4. Resolution

Flip the top card off the deck. If it is lower than the median card's number, you succeed; discard the deck card and spin the Problem around to become a Resource for you. Otherwise, the flipped deck card becomes a new Problem to add to your woes. As with any new card, you must narrate how this new card fits into the story.

climax

After all players have had a chance to address a problem, the story as a whole will move toward a conclusion. The player with the most Resources (if tied, the most recent storyteller chooses between them) becomes the Lead Storyteller to gather consensus about the nature of the climax. In the "Western Heist" below it might be a great train robbery. In a whodunnit, it might be the moment when the murderer is confronted, caught, or put on trial.

Hero Bidding

Beginning with the Lead Storyteller, each player describes briefly how they are trying to influence events of the climax. Then they play one Number from their hand face down as their climax bid card, trying to be as close as possible to the Finale card without going over.

Finale

After all bids are in, flip the top card of the deck to find the Finale number. Each player whose bid Number is lower than the Finale draws a new Resource from the deck. The player who is highest without going over doubles the Resources instead, and becomes the Hero.

Players with higher bids than the Finale lose *all* of their Resources and suffer a tragic end.

Denouement

In clockwise order beginning with the Hero, each player describes how events played out for them. Characters with more Problems than Resources will have tragic endings. Those with more Resources than Problems have a happy ending (they won the fight, got the girl, happily ever after). Even if their ultimate aim wasn't achieved, (i.e., if they didn't get to be the Hero) they still had a personal win (going the distance with the champ, maintaining their dignity, discovering greater meaning in life).

Victory

The player with the most Resources wins. The Hero breaks ties. To be perfectly frank, this game is more about having fun and telling stories than winning.

other notes

The Rule Of "Yes"

Unless somebody totally hijacks your character, it is best to let people add to stories rather than stifling them with a flat "No." The game is more fun when people are free to create. Try to avoid killing a player off unless they agree that your doing so will make the story even more fun.

Optional: Act II

For a richer experience, add a second or even third act before the Climax. (Decide this by consensus before starting Setup.) Each act has a Trouble round and a Storytelling round.

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Rules Editing Neal Sofge

"99 chances" is dedicated to Barry Alu, a great storyteller and even better friend.

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play example

Peter, Dean, Jeff, Nicole, and Sean have gathered for a rousing one-act game of “99 chances.” Jeff shuffles the cards and deals 5 to each player. Each plays two Theme cards and then draws two replacements to keep their hands at 5.

- Peter – Western, Heist
- Dean – Biblical, RomCom
- Jeff – Adult, Bollywood
- Nicole – Gothic, Game Show
- Sean – Caveman, WWII

After a brief debate the players agree that Adult Bollywood would be fun but this demo game needs to have a G rating, so they go with the Western Heist. This makes Peter the Lead Storyteller. The players talk a little about roles, and note that a western heist sounds like a train robbery.

We recommend you keep your deck handy from this point on, so you can reference the cards as they are played.

Peter plays **order** in front of himself. “I’m the new Sheriff in town. Mayor Jeff appointed me after the last Sheriff drowned in an outhouse.” (He points at Jeff, who nods agreement.) Peter won an extra Resource for having his theme picked so he pulls a card off the top of the deck: **nourish**. “I won the chili cook-off the last three years running and it pisses off the local saloonkeeper.” Nicole glares at Peter to get in the mood for hating him in the cook-off. He writes “Sheriff” on the **order** card and “Chili” on **nourish**.

Dean wants to be the outlaw “Mac McDougal”. He plays **technology** and says, “I acquired this gatling gun in the civil war with the help of my little brother Doug (Sean’s character). He writes

“Gatling” on his **technology** card but doesn’t really need to - no gamer will forget who has the big gun.

Jeff, the Mayor, plays **mobility** to indicate his ownership of the stage coach and controlling interest in the train line that just put a depot in the center of town. He adds that the McDougal brothers helped to clear Indians out of the right of way. He starts to add the pony express to this as well but the card is getting full and the general grumbling shuts him down.

Nicole is the saloonkeeper and says her **confidence** card represents secrets held on every red-blooded man in town, *especially* the sheriff. It’s a broad interpretation but nobody objects.

Sean “Doug McDougal” is Mac’s half-wit brother. He plays **cooperation** as his loyal gang of former soldiers that are willing to back up the criminal brothers. Somebody points out that Sheriff Peter isn’t yet involved in anyone else’s resources, so Sean erases the note and says **cooperation** is his honorary deputyship (granted by the Sheriff) for his work clearing the land of Indians.

Now for some problems.

Peter gives **savagery** to Sean. The last of the local Indian tribes is stalking Doug for his role in their massacre.

Dean gives Peter the **noise** card, representing the ringing in his ears since his civil war artillery experience. Sometimes it is deafening.

Jeff gives Nicole **decrepitude**, saying “the saloon girl is getting long in the tooth.” The icy cook-off glare seems like a look of love in comparison.

By the way, this is easier to keep track of than it might

seem because the marked-up Resources go on the table next to the players’ character notes. So it’s clear that Jeff and Dean still need problems.

Nicole returns Jeff’s favor and gives him the **denial** card. He’s been blackballed by the saloon for his mistreatment of dancing girls. (In a less family-friendly writeup the dancing girls might have an older profession. Jeff writes “blackballed” on his new card.

Sean is last, and must give Dean a problem. So he bestows **broken** upon him. The outlaw’s broken back severely limits his once-great physical prowess.

We have our cast:

- Peter: the Sheriff, with a civil war injury that hurts his hearing but not his cooking.
- Dean: Mac MacDougal, heavily-armed outlaw with a broken back.
- Jeff: the transit czar and Mayor who can’t get any love.
- Nicole: an aging saloonkeeper with the dirt on every man in town.
- Sean: Doug MacDougal, dimwitted outlaw and part-time lawman hunted by a vengeful savage.

The stage is set – it’s time to get some storytelling started.

Peter goes first to address his **noise** problem.

Peter’s had ringing in his ears for years. He can’t see how being sheriff is going to help with his trauma but figures maybe being in a quiet room above a loud dance hall will help take his mind off his troubles. He announces, “I’m going to make a nice pot of chili as a love offering and spend some quiet time with a loud girl to help ease that blasted ringing in my ears.” Nicole consents, so they

proceed to evaluation.

Because we have an odd number of players, Peter gets to participate. The cards are revealed as follows:

- Peter 87
- Dean 18
- Jeff 24
- Nicole 78
- Sean 34

Sean’s 34 is the median so the 34 card becomes **comfort** as a new Resource for him. He says it is a comfy saddle (and writes “saddle” on the card) while 34 becomes Peter’s chance of success.

He pulls a 42, which is higher than 34 and thus fails to resolve his problem. The 42 card is **greed**, which Sean gets to resolve because he played the median. He says the girl dumps the chili out the window and demands cash, leaving Sheriff Peter even more miserable than before.

Dean wants to deal with his **broken** back. He’s an outlaw with a gatling gun, so with the theme in mind he announces: “I am going to rob the train to get enough money to hire the best surgeon in the West to fix my back.” When he adds “I’m getting my brother’s help as well” Sean shakes his head, saying “I’m trying out my new saddle – I don’t want to get mixed up in that.”

Noting that Dean’s action is now solo, everyone plays evaluation cards:

- Peter 11
- Dean 89
- Jeff 23
- Nicole 51
- Sean 6

Surprisingly, Jeff’s low 23 is in the middle so he gets to add **hope** as a resource. He says it represents the **hope** of the cross country train line meeting in our town.

Dean pulls a 9 from the deck, and the heist goes off without

a hitch. He gets the money, a famous French surgeon comes to operate on him, and his **broken** Problem inverts to become a **repaired** Resource.

Jeff goes next to tackle his **denial**, announcing this plan: “I’ll use my control of the railroad to block whiskey shipments to the saloon until the old battleaxe takes me off the naughty list and I can resume getting naughty.”

Each player plays a Number:

- Peter 23
- Dean 56
- Jeff 99
- Nicole 13
- Sean 41

Sean’s 41 falls in the middle so he gets to keep **generosity**. Sean explains how he got a reputation for **generosity** after carrying his brother off the battlefield at Antietam. Jeff flips the top deck card: 53. No joy for the Mayor. Sean gleefully describes how the railway workers take Jeff’s boycott-enforcement payoffs but end up unable to resist the pull of Nicole’s dancing girls. The **lock** to the Mayor’s office is busted open and the whole town has a wet celebration on Mayor Rail Baron’s dime.

Nicole is next, to deal with feeling **decrepit**. She decides to hold a Miss Whiskey Gulch contest (it’s pretty late in the story for the town to finally be named but there it is) with a \$100 cash prize. Of course, all of her young dancing girls are eager to win but Nicole uses the secrets she holds over the town’s menfolk to sway the vote. All players except bitter Jeff like her plan:

- Peter 67
- Dean 81
- Jeff 3
- Nicole 94
- Sean 88

Dean’s 81 is the median so he gets to keep **earned** (he earned a medal in the Civil

War). The deck card is a 52 so Nicole pays herself a hundred dollars, feels like a million, and spins her **decrepitude** into **youth**.

Sean’s got that Indian after him because of his previous **savagery**. He goes into an elaborate plan for an ambush set up with a posse of fellow deputies. His reputation for **generosity** is what inspires the deputies to help him out, as he doesn’t think **cooperation** sounded convincing by itself. He can’t think of how to work his **comfortable** saddle into things so he leaves it out.

- Peter 42
- Dean 18
- Jeff 46
- Nicole 91
- Sean 89

Jeff’s 46 is the median so he gets a new Resource. He describes finding the discarded pot of Sheriff Chili and bringing it to the deputies, earning a new reputation for **caring**. Unfortunately for Sean, the resolution card is 74. Jeff describes the deputized outlaw as **selfish** for sitting inside his warm cabin while his colleagues wait in the bushes for an Indian who’s too smart to be bushwhacked.

At this point everybody has had a chance to address their Problem. Some new Resources and Problems have appeared along the way.

Almost everyone is tied for Resources at 4, and Sean was the latest Storyteller, so he chooses himself as Lead Storyteller and sets the stage for the climax. He says Dean’s train robbery took the payrolls for the railroad (nearly the whole town) and the nearby fort holding the 6th Cavalry. Another train is coming through loaded with twice as much cash. If it doesn’t get through, the soldiers will desert and abandon Whiskey

Gulch to lawlessness and Indians.

Sean wants the McDougal brothers to go down as history’s greatest train robbers. He is going to ride his lucky **comfortable** saddle and plays a daring 65 as his face down bid.

Peter declares he will cook up a **nourishing** pot of chili for his forces and stand behind **order** represented by his badge, to stop those lousy crooks once and for all. He plays a bid of 23 face down.

Dean says he doesn’t care if this town goes up in flames. He’ll have enough money to run off to France and do as he pleases. He’s going to fire up his gatling gun **technology** and take down that train. Dean plays a 49 card face down.

As the mayor, Jeff wants to see the town thrive. He puts it all on the line using his continental rail line **hope** and everything he knows about railway logistics and **mobility**. Everyone sees him as **caring** and thus are willing to fight that much harder for him. Jeff’s face-down bid is 61.

Nicole doesn’t want her livelihood to go up in flames. If the cavalry goes AWOL she loses her best customers and all her protection. She uses her **confidence** and **youthful** charms to find out when and where the train will be hit so she can tell the sheriff. Nicole plays a bid card face down of 22.

Since Jeff is writing this example game, the Finale card turns out to be a 63. This means everybody who bid below 63 gains a new Resource. The highest below 63 is Jeff’s 61, so he doubles his Resources and is the Hero. Everybody above 63 (in this case, only Sean) loses everything.

Our hero Jeff ends up with 8 Resources. Peter, Dean and Nicole each add one Resource and go to 4, 5 and 5 respectively. Sean loses everything.

Jeff describes how he leads a daring charge and the McDougal brothers gang just can’t bring themselves to fire on their beloved mayor. Dean (Mac McDougal) explains that he was actually using the gatling gun to defend the train from the Indian raiders that have been hounding his brother. It was a mistake to think he’d ever rob a train. He is credited with driving off the Indians (and the robbery never got started). Nicole is happy to have her business thriving again. Peter can finally find peace now that he’s faced down a gatling gun and won. Sean was the only character to bid over the final card. He loses everything and declares that he rides off (bareback) into the sunset, intending to find his nemesis and bury the hatchet – but the hatchet ends up buried in his back.

Of course, had the Finale been a different number, things could have gone differently. A Finale of 41 would have devastated everybody but Heroic Peter and Nicole. In this scenario, the Cavalry comes in and thwarts the robbery but the mayor and the McDougal brothers are all wounded, captured or killed in the process. Peter’s 3 doubled Resources become 6 and Nicole ends up with 4 again for second place.

If the Finale card were a “20” everybody loses – maybe the robbery went wrong and the runaway train derailed, burning the town to the ground.

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