

MAP-A-PLOT CARDS

A metagame and story building aid by [Eric Nieudan](#)

This tool was salvaged from a story game that didn't go past the prototype stage, circa 2013. It is useful for prepping adventure game scenarios, plotting stories alone or in a group, workshopping ideas, etc. It was originally used to build the plot of a tabletop roleplaying game as the game went. If you're adventurous (or lazy, or bad at time management), you can absolutely use it that way in your own games.

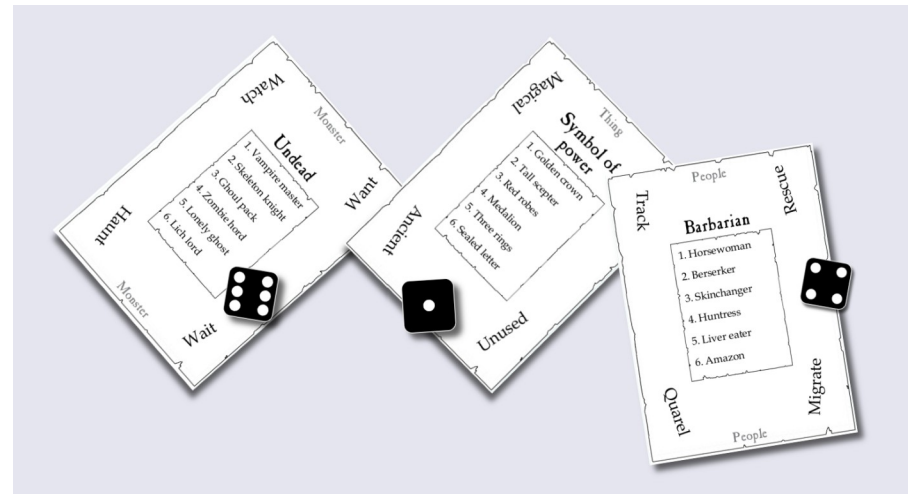
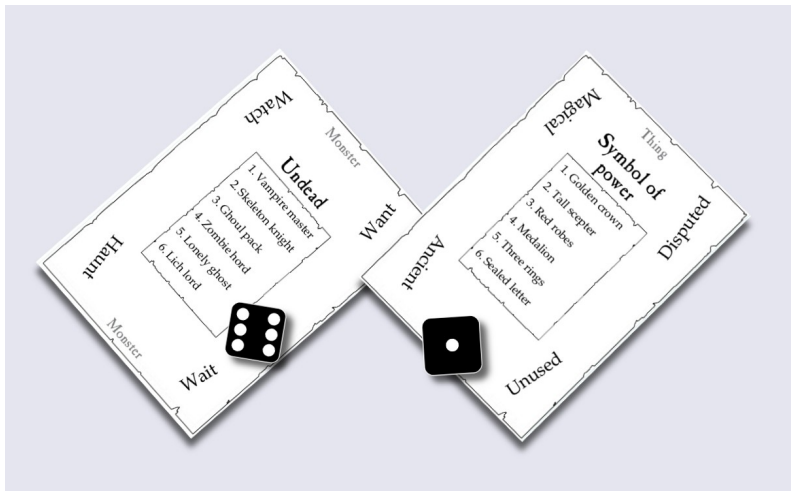
HOW TO MAP A PLOT

The cards have a type, a name (top), a list of six suggestions (central box), and four connecting words (corners). You arrange them on the table to indicate how the elements of your plot interact. The exact positioning doesn't matter, as long as you can clearly see how each card is connected to the next one.

When it comes to deciding what the card represents in your story, choose one of the

suggestions in the centre, or roll a six-sided die. You can leave a die on the card to remember which option you chose (picture on the left below: a lich lord wants a golden crown, which is an ancient symbol of power).

Most times, you will want to cover a word with another to make the connection simpler (picture on the right below: a huntress has been tracking the crown.)



SIMPLE MAPS: FOR BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

This is what you do when you need inspiration to write a story or an adventure. Draw 3-5 cards and arrange them in whichever way feels right.

Do not connect the cards that don't make sense together. Instead, leave them apart and draw another one. The relationship will present itself at some point.

Or you can have another map on the side, with a yet unrelated plot. It's also okay to discard the elements that don't fit.

If you're playing with other people, have them draw the same number of cards and take turns playing them, one at a time.

PROGRESSIVE MAPS: FOR ROLEPLAYING AND STORY GAMES

Mapping as you go

On an off night, when you haven't prepped your game, you can use the method above to get the juices flowing behind your GM screen. But if you feel like building a story together with the players, or if you're playing a GM-less RPG, you can make this a game inside your game.

Getting started

- ◆ 1. Everyone draws 3 cards. Go around the table until each of you has played one card. A card can be played connected or unconnected. It's OK to pass your turn.
- ◆ 2. Does the map make enough sense for you to begin playing? If not, have everyone draw another card and go another round. And another if it's really necessary.
- ◆ 3. If the game has a GM or other keeper of the narrative, they may want to veto cards that really don't work for what they had in mind.

Building on the map

Start playing as usual. At the end of a scene, or at a milestone in the adventure, add more elements to the map. Only one or two cards should be played at a time, so you have to decide who gets to contribute to the story:

- ◆ The player(s) who were instrumental in solving the problem, overcoming the obstacle, killing the monsters, etc.
- ◆ The player(s) with the best lines/intensity/jokes.
- ◆ The player(s) who lost the most resources (hit points, pool dice, gear, etc.)
- ◆ Just go around the table, remembering who played a card last.

Drawing cards

The GM can reward players with new cards: a good idea, an in-character joke, a reckless move that put their character in danger, etc. If a player doesn't have any cards, they draw three cards and the next player (depending on the system in use) plays instead.

RANDOM SCENE IDEAS

If you need more inspiration to kickstart things, here's what to do: think up what kind of scene you want as an introduction. Choose one below or roll a d10:

Type	Description	May lead to...
1. Exploration	Search a lost temple, find a monster's lair or scout a way to the guildmaster's office.	Obstacle, Ambush
2. Obstacle	A cliff or chasm, an unbeatable guardian, a wall of fire.	Exploration, Survival
3. Chase	Catch a thief in a busy marketplace, win the Queen's ostrich-riding tournament, break out from jail.	Sneak, Fight
4. Fight	A duel to the death, a tavern brawl, a mass battle.	Chase, Survival
5. Sneak	Infiltrate a castle, crawl through enemy lines, leave the city of thieves before dawn.	Ambush, Investigate
6. Trap	Explosive runes, acid pit, crushing ceiling. Ouch.	Sneak, Social
7. Ambush	Clever monsters waiting to pounce, bandits hiding on the road. Can you spot them before they attack you?	Fight, Chase
8. Investigation	Look for clues to a murder, find out who stole the prince's favourite horse, interrogate witnesses.	Social, Explore
9. Social	Convince the vampire, bluff your way in, defend yourself from an accusation, or negotiate a peace treaty.	Investigate, Obstacle
10. Survival	Lost in a jungle or in a world of illusions inside your head. No monsters here, just you and the elements.	Exploration, Trap