



Some Small Games

*twenty-five games
of all sorts and sundries
guaranteed to amuse and bemuse
each wrought from ores unique to the Underplace
by the world-famous*

Matthew R.F. Balousek

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

Some Small Games is a collection of small games. There is nothing specific unifying these games aside from their approximate length and the staple holding the pages together.

Some of the games in this collection first appeared as tweets. In particular, **1b. Consulting an Expert** appeared in an earlier form as **Snapcharm**, co-written with Emma Stewart. See @snapcharm on Twitter for more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew R.F. Balousek is a game designer, new media artist, and bad joke teller. He lives outside of NYC with his partner and his housemate's two cats. You can see more of his games at <http://mrfb.itch.io> and read his word crimes on Twitter at @mrfb.

1. PAINTING THE SKY WITH STARS

A game of creating constellations.

Beginning the game

| The game may begin when a Question is asked.

| Give each player three pieces of paper.

Playing the game

| Players write down one piece of Evidence on each piece of paper they have. Collect, shuffle, and redistribute.

| Each player picks one piece of evidence and narrates how it helps to answer the Question.

Ending the game

| The game ends when the Question has been answered.

How to make Evidence: each piece of Evidence is a possible fact of the fiction, lacking a how or why. The best ones will gesture at a potential answer to the Question, but not dictate it entirely. This allows the other players to surprise you with how they make the dots connect.

Question suggestions: choose one using your dice or desires, or use them as inspiration for new Questions of your own.

1. What terrible beast will we find at the end of this trail of destruction?
2. What happened here recently?
3. What is the secret name of this artifact that thrums with power?
4. Which part of the transcript is doctored?
5. What's the Public Service Announcement at the end of this episode?
6. What does this button do?

Variant A: Guiding the Ship to Shore with the Stars as My Guide

The player who most recently looked at the night sky and was able to name a constellation they saw is the Navigator. They collect all of the Evidence and keep it for themselves.

The Navigator steers the course of answering the Question as they see fit. Not every piece of Evidence must be used.

Variant B: Consulting an Expert (Snapcharm)

Take a photograph and caption it with one piece of Evidence and a Question. The first person to answer is correct.

Variant C: Looking Upon The Aleph

After the Question has been answered, answer it again. Each piece of Evidence can only be used for one answer.

If it is necessary to have a single answer, players may come to a consensus on which of the three answers is true. Otherwise, each answer is a fragmented glimpse of truth from the infinite expanse of dimensions.

2. INQUEST

A game of running from answers.

How to play

Each turn: give an answer; ask the next player a loaded question.

Stop when the first answer finds a question.

3. IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE

A game of preparation.

How to play

One player is The Procurer, who offers an odd assortment of items for use in the upcoming mission.

The remaining players each describe an item that catches their eye, then asks The Procurer: "What does this one do?"

Optional Rule: "Oh, I bet I know exactly what this is."

A player may rush to answer the question before The Procurer has a chance to properly explain. This answer is incorrect.

4. PIZZA PIZZA PANIC

A cooperative racing game for multiple players.

Rules

Order pizza, then every player gets naked. A player wins if they are already dressed when the pizza arrives.

A Note on League Play: In organized play, separate player groups based on their preferences regarding pineapple on pizza.

Social Distancing Social Distancing Panic: As above, but play is mediated through audio or video conferencing. Players win if they are already dressed by the time their pizza arrives.

I Trust You To Top Responsibly: As Social Distancing Social Distancing Panic, but players may not order their own pizza.

5. TOASTMASTER

A game of oratory.

Rules

The Master of Ceremonies introduces the Toastmaster, as well as the subject of their speech, then makes toast. Eat toast once the Toastmaster's speech ends.

6. THE CARE AND FEEDING OF WARRIORS

A game of fueling.

Rules

While playing World of Warcraft, keep track of your character's daily calorie intake. Nutritional guidelines suggest that athletes aim for about 3,000 to 4,500 calories per in-game day.

7. HYDRATION ZONE

A game of self-care.

Rules

Every now and again, pause and let Sonic rehydrate by letting him stand still in the water. Take a moment to drink water yourself when you do so.

8. AFTERWARD

A game of mourning.

Rules

When the dust has settled after you've taken life in a game, take a moment to express grief or remorse.

These actions may be taken either inside or outside of the game, as whim and affordance permit.

9. GAME STUDIES

A game of borders.

Rules

Give someone a game. They win if they can provide a definition of “game” that excludes that game.

Variant A: Naysayer (Or: Art History)

Give someone a statement about *a thing* and *a category* that it falls into. They win if they can provide a definition of that category that excludes that thing.

Examples: This painting is art; Harry Potter is literature;

Variant B: Yeasayer (Or: Sandwich Studies)

Give someone a statement about *a thing* and *a category* that it does not fall into. The other player should provide a definition of the category such that the thing is included.

Examples: Pizza is not a sandwich; a raven is not furniture.

10. FALLING

A game of collection.

Rules

Catch a leaf before it hits the ground. Each leaf is worth one point when the season concludes.

Leaf validity: Leaves which have fallen due to human interference may not be claimed for points.

Storing leaves: Once caught, leaves should be stored out in the open until the season ends. It is best to keep them in a perpetual state of falling by suspending them in midair. (e.g., by using a clothespin.)

Beginning the season: The players gather for a potluck. After the meal, the rules should be discussed and players should agree on the terms of the league.

Ending the season: The players gather for a potluck. After the meal, players admire the collections, then let them continue their journey by throwing them on the ground.

Variant A: Falling From Grace

Ownership of leaves may change over the course of the season by way of theft, sabotage, persuasion, bribery, et cetera.

Variant B: Falling Apart

When it is unsafe or unfeasible to gather in person, don't.

Instead, make a digital space and gather there. Use this space to share leaves as you catch them. Use this space also to share things seen while outside and to cyberbully other players into taking a walk once in a while.

11. FIDGET FIGHTERS

A game of bloody combat.

Rules

Players spin their fidget spinners up to full speed. The bearer of the last spinning spinner wins. No holds are barred.

12. CONCRETE BLOOMING

A game of bursting.

Rules

As Red Rover, but the smallest player is The Seed. The remaining players are Concrete.

The Seed tries to break through.

13. THERE IS NO MAGIC CIRCLE

A game of failure.

Rules

The game begins when someone else is holding a ball, frisbee, or some other object which is passed as part of a game.

Enthusiastically request that the object get passed to you.

Do not move or make any attempt to catch the object when it is passed. Repeat as often as possible.

14. CRAB TAG

A game of signifiers.

Rules

As Tag, but the player who is It must walk and talk like a crab, using their pincers to tag other players.

Variant A: The Carapace Plague

Itness does not pass between players, instead it spreads like a virus.

The game ends when all the crabs perform a magnificent dance under the light of the moon.

15. CALVINBALL

A game of

16. SPINNING

A game of endings.

Rules

The game is played at a gathering place where any may freely come and go. Every player should be able to see and hear every other player.

When the first players sit down, they have come together to a place which is new and unfamiliar to them. Take turns saying what your character left behind, and what you hope to find here. Tell stories. The first story should answer the question of what happened to the people who were here before you.

When a new player sits down, they are born. When they feel they are ready, they should tell a story.

When a player tells a story, they begin by saying how they came to know the story. The story may be old or new, the teller's own or someone else's, but is always true while it is being told. When a story has finished, other players may ask any number of questions. The teller may remain silent or choose one question to answer. A player may not tell two stories in a row.

When a player steps away from the gathering place, they die. A player may step away at any time. The dead may quietly listen from the shadows. The dead may guide new souls to the gathering place. The dead may move on. The dead may not return to the gathering place.

When the last player has stepped away from the gathering place, the game ends.

17. PORING OVER THE BONES OF THE PAST

A game of object lessons.

Beginning the game

Each player is an archivist or docent in the employ of a particular institution. Establish the institution, as well as the nature of the collection that has come into the institution's holdings.

Presenting the item

One player begins by giving some physical descriptions of an item in the lot.

Telling the history

A second player volunteers to become the Speaker for this object, and is in charge of telling its story.

Any player may ask a question during this phase, and the speaking player may answer, or may defer to the expertise of another player.

Ending the game

The game ends when each item in the collection has been described, or when it's time to end the game.

Seeds: choose one using your dice or desires, or use them as inspiration for a new collection.

1. The hundred-hand wizard was the most fearsome of the magus-monarchs. For each enemy defeated in battle, they claimed and reanimated an appendage to aid them in their casting. With these they were able to weave dozens of spells at once with ease.
2. Here we inter The Humble Memorious, who catalogued every one of their defeats with a tattooed tableau.
3. We have mountains of verified reports of objects stolen by the great thief. We're out of leads, so... let's review the evidence.
4. You mean... this old book devoured every one of the people listed on this library card?
5. And here in this gallery, you'll find the largest public collection of abstract paintings. Of course, there's so much more to each of these than just what's on the canvas.
6. It's unfortunate, but these are all that remains of the creatures who went extinct during The Season of Fire.

18. BAIT AND SWITCH

A game of lying to your friends.

Rules

Gather players under the pretense of playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. Tell a story together. Insist when necessary that yes, this is *Dungeons & Dragons*. The game ends in a loss if any of the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* are followed.

19. REPLACEMENT GRAPPLE RULES

(for use in Dungeons & Dragons, or anytime when you're playing pretend)

Instead of making opposed checks when grappling:

You and the opposing player each reveal your hand with up to five fingers revealed. At the same time, shout the total number of fingers you think will be revealed in total. Repeat if necessary, until there is a winner. The player with the correct guess wins the contest.

20. THE SEER'S JOURNEY

A game of queries.

Rules

As the tabletop roleplaying game of your choice, but played by yourself. Reframe all dice rolls as a yes-or-no question, and use the answer given to you by a Magic 8-Ball.

21. ZOZO HAS PREPARED AN ADVENTURE

A game of dictation.

Rules

As the tabletop roleplaying game of your choice, but replace the GM with a Ouija board. Reframe all dice rolls as a question, and use the answer given to you by the Ouija board.

22. I'LL BE YOUR MIRROR

A game of reflection. For myself.

Rules

Play this game only when someone gives you a compliment that brings you joy.

Write down the words you were given. When you have a moment, take a photograph of yourself. Post the photograph with the compliment as a caption, or keep both to yourself.

23. INFINITE ONION

A game of burial.

Rules

When you see in your feed that someone has added an overlay to their profile photo, take it on for yourself as well.

Collect as many of these cares, worries, memorials, pleas, burdens, jokes, and well-wishes as you can. Number them as they accumulate, catalog who they came from, or just let them collect in a pile.

24. IRON & FIRE

A game of upkeep.

How to begin

Your cast iron skillet is no longer a cast iron skillet. It is now a giant robot, a machine of war dealing death and destruction on land, sea, air, or in the vacuum of space.

You have been promoted as well, from a cook and scullion to the chief mechanic in charge of the maintenance of this machine.

Your skillet and your robot have the same name. What is it? Say it out loud. Say a different name if that one didn't sound cool enough.

Maintenance logs

You play this game a little bit at a time. Every time you use your skillet, a pilot sorties in the machine you're in charge of. Your maintenance on the skillet is also the maintenance on the machine.

When you're done with maintenance, make a brief note somewhere about how it went. Did the surface get scratched or gouged? Did it perform flawlessly? Did it return to the hangar smoking, without the pilot you bid goodbye to?

Filing a report

When you fire up the oven to reseason the skillet, write a debriefing to central command with a summary of the slings and arrows that the war machine has suffered. Your report must be submitted before the machine can be cleared for duty again.

25. LETTERS FROM ABROAD

A game of ketchup.

Rules

When your thoughts turn to a friend or loved one you haven't spoken to in a while, drop them a line: "What's new in the Valley, Moomin?"

Take turns answering each other's questions.

If you miss them, tell them. If you love them, tell them.



Prui?

June 10, 2021
Mount Vernon, NY