

A Thousand Quests and A Hundred Lifetimes

Fantasy adventuring for a pair of mismatched heroes

A Trust System Game by Dan Brown (@brownorama)
For Two Players and One GM

As the twain eyed each other challengingly through the murky fog lit indirectly by distant torches, they were already dimly aware that they were two long-sundered, matching fragments of a greater hero and that each had found a comrade who would outlast a thousand quests and a lifetime -- or a hundred lifetimes -- of adventuring.

-- Swords and Deviltry, Fritz Leiber

Welcome to the Partnership

Well, partnership may be too strong a word. Convenient alliance may be more apropos. Temporary arrangement. It's not that you two dislike each other so much as you don't really care about each other. You just fit well together. When you don't do so well, they do. Where they struggle is where you shine. You don't get ahead in this world by being one-dimensional, but who has time, energy, or coin to become well-rounded. Besides, there's almost always someone looking to claim your head or turn you in or demand recompense. You have to keep moving, and though your "partner" may slow you down on occasion, together as a team you are well-rounded.

A Thousand Quests and A Hundred Lifetimes is a tabletop roleplaying game for two players and one GM. In this game, you play a pair of mismatched adventurers with complementary foibles, aptitudes, and skill sets. Though you perhaps have a few adventures under your belts at the outset, you haven't yet developed into a well-oiled machine.

Inspiration

A Thousand Quests is inspired by Fritz Leiber's Fahrd and the Grey Mouser series, as well as other mismatched pairs in fantasy like Geralt and Jaskier from the Witcher series, and Xena and Gabrielle. My favorite example of the genre is Michael Chabon's Gentlemen of the Road.

The most common tropes in this genre are:

- World-changing political events are happening around them, and they sometimes become enmeshed in them, but unwillingly.
- They are often pressed into service to help someone, with the hope of financial reward at the end.

- When one of them is in trouble, the other comes to save them, but not without a measure of resentment.
- Every conflict is an opportunity to relitigate age-old arguments.
- One partner has a pet peeve or quirk that gets under the skin of the other.

About the Trust System

The Trust System is a flavor of Powered by the Apocalypse. Players roll 2d6 to resolve moves, which in turn propel the narrative. In this game, however, the characters have one shared attribute score: **Trust**. As they work together, their trust increases, making them more effective partners. Every story of partnership also comes with the set-back -- betrayal, separation, disappointment. As the characters' relationship grows, they will experience the occasional break-up.

Characters

Besides, these two looked extremely dangerous.

– The Circle Curse, Swords Against Death, Fritz Leiber

Distinguishing Features

The defining aspect of the fantasy pairs subgenre is that the two main characters are near-polar opposites. The Witcher's Geralt and Jaskier, for example, have different strengths and personalities. The same is true for Fafhrd and The Grey Mouser. Likewise, Xena and Gabrielle have different demeanors and fighting styles.

To accomplish this, the players will select a set of descriptive tags describing the distinguishing features of their characters. These tags, however, will be drawn from concise lists, ensuring that the characters feel like polar opposites.

Before going through the lists, the players should identify what's important to them. Each player at the table will have a chance to pick a dimension that defines the characters.

Each player answers this question, and may not pick an option from the same bullet item as the other:		
	What did you study?	• Magic or Religion • Combat or Craft • Stealth or Politics
Each person at the table picks one question from the list below (for a total of three), and each player answers the question from the available options.		
	How do you wield your weapon?	• I swing my weapon with strength • I hit my adversary's weak spots with precision • I shoot at adversaries from afar with accuracy • I am trained to parry and feint • I flail about clumsily hoping to hit something
	How do you deal with dangerous situations?	• I face them head on with endurance • I weave my way around with speed • I use quick thinking and cunning • I hide from danger like any rational person would do
	How do you avoid being detected?	• I fool others with misdirection • I walk among them in disguise • I conceal myself with stealth • I pay others to look the other way • I can't help but stick out like a sore thumb
	How do you support your comrades?	• I can heal wounds • I can inspire people around me • I can tinker with machines and devices • I can protect them from harm • I offer unsolicited, ill-informed, & usually poor advice
	How do you get what you want from people?	• I win them over with charm • I trick them or argue with wit • I instill fear with intimidation • I impress them with my confidence • I'm not above bribery and pleading
	What guides your actions?	• I choose the option with the strongest rationale • I follow the teachings of my spiritual guide • I go after what will serve my selfish interests • I am trying to overcome an old trauma • I tend to follow the crowd
	How do you assess a situation?	• I go by what I observe through sensation • I pick up how people feel through empathy • I relate it to my knowledge of history • I don't bother! I just charge right in
Each player should ask the other one of the questions below.		
	What event from your past shaped who you are today? (Pick one from each list.)	• I lost someone important to me... • I witnessed a devastating event... • I was given up by my family

		• ... and I think it was my fault • ... and I had to make a difficult choice • ... and I am obsessed with revenge
	How do you display antisocial behavior?	• I am withdrawn and surly • I indulge in self-destructive behaviors • I cover my anxiety with slander and sarcasm • I am the life of the party, but hopelessly unreliable
	What complicates your life today?	• I have been cursed by a vindictive wizard • I am wanted for a crime I may not have committed • I am in love with someone who hates me • I am in debt to a notorious criminal • I am being pursued by my sibling, who I betrayed • I can't remember certain parts of my life

Lore

Their comradeship became firmer than a rock, stronger than steel..

– The Circle Curse, Swords Against Death, Fritz Leiber

Lore are events from the characters' shared history that form the basis for their relationship. Lore is expressed as a sentence of the form "Remember the time we..."

Have a conversation to define two Lores. If you prefer, hold off writing anything down until you need them. You may have no more than two to start.

If you need some suggestions, ideas, or starting points, try one of these random Lore generators:

Remember the time... (Lore involving creatures)		
We...		So that we could...
(d8) 1. Attacked 2. Escaped 3. Tricked 4. Captured 5. Challenged 6. Fled from 7. Snuck by 8. Pursued	(d8) 1. The Dragon of the Western Falls 2. The Troll of the River Caverns 3. The Vampire of the Moonlit Mountains 4. The Three-Headed Hound of the Steppe 5. The Serpent of the Eastern Sea 6. The Skeletal Army of Death's Keep 7. The Giant Spiders of the Southern Wood 8. The Carnivorous Vines of the Murky Jungle	(d6) 1. Claim the treasure 2. Learn the truth 3. Return home 4. Rescue a loved one 5. Steal a magic item 6. Prove ourselves

Remember the time... (Lore involving people)			
We...		And then...	
(d8) 1. Attacked 2. Escaped 3. Tricked 4. Captured 5. Challenged 6. Joined 7. Stole from 8. Blackmailed	(d8) 1. The Fell King 2. The Commandant of the Glorious Knights 3. The Avenging Princess 4. The Patron of the Arts & Sciences 5. The Gray Ranger of the Eighth Battalion 6. The Frost Queen 7. The Sorceress of Fire 8. The Demon of the Plains	(d6) 1. One of us 2. Both of us 3. They 4. An ally of theirs 5. An enemy of theirs 6. A love interest	(d6) 1. Got caught 2. Became trapped 3. Had a change of heart 4. Were mistaken for another 5. Became the object of affection 6. Were cursed

Remember the time... (Lore involving places)			
We...		And then...	
(d8) 1. Snuck into 2. Escaped from 3. Retreated to 4. Ransacked	(d8) 1. The Citadel at Weathers End 2. The Crimson Vault 3. The Stronghold of the Glorious Knights 4. The Camp of the Eighth Battalion	(d6) 1. One of us 2. Both of us 3. The owner 4. Another crew	(d6) 1. Got caught 2. Became trapped 3. Had a change of heart 4. Were mistaken for another

5. Vandalized 6. Stole from 7. Disappeared from 8. Stumbled upon	5. The Prison Dungeon in the North Tower 6. The Sunken Fortress 7. The City in the Clouds 8. The Central Keep in the Royal City	5. A love interest 6. A mentor	5. Became the object of affection 6. Were cursed
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Equipment

Name a signature **item** you carry with you.

Harm

Characters each get four marks of Harm. If either of them has four marks and must mark another OR between the two have a total of 5 marks of Harm, they suffer a Set Back.

Quarrel

The characters have one topic or event they always argue about. With a topic, they have opposing views. With an event, they have different ideas of exactly what happened. For an event, you can use another Lore. For a topic, talk about what kinds of things your characters might disagree about, or pick or roll from this list:

	1-3	4-6
1	Sports team	Which bard best captures the zeitgeist
2	Bakery with superior honey pastry	Whether wood nymphs are real
3	Preparing a specific type of food	Which city has the best cuisine
4	Romantic preference of a local celebrity	The best spot for a vacation
5	Each other's bad habits	The effectiveness of a superstitious gesture
6	Styles of music	Where to find edible mushrooms in the forest

Trust Level

Your trust level starts at the far left. Tick the box above -1. When a move instructs you to roll +Trust, roll 2d6 and add the trust score below the tick mark. Every time a move instructs you to “mark Trust”, tick one box to the right.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-1	0	1	2	3

How to Play

The Structure

Characters go on quests, an adventure with a clear objective (at least at the outset). They need to gather information or items (called **Assets**) related to the quest and then confront a final obstacle. The GM and players can brainstorm together what these things are.

During the course of collecting Assets, they may encounter something that takes them off the track or introduces a complication into their progress (called a **Plot Twist**). At any point, they may decide to go after the final obstacle to complete the question. The outcome will be influenced by the Assets they've gathered and the plot twists they've experienced.

Checklist: First Session

- **Concept.** Describe the genre and concept of the game, perhaps using the CATS description in the Appendix.
- **Safety.** Describe at least two safety tools and ask the players if they would like to use any others.
- **Palette.** Ask the players what tropes and conventions they would like to include and exclude from the game.
- **Characters.** Walk through character creation.
- **First scene.** Drop the characters into the action. Do this before the quest starts to get the action going and give the players a chance to try out one or two moves.
- **Quest.** Introduce the first quest. You'll spend the most time here triggering Action moves as the characters progress through the story. Be sure to activate Grab the Goods at least once in the first session.
- **Reflection.** Spend at least 10 minutes at the end of the session reflecting on the session. Use a framework like Stars and Wishes, or just ask the players what worked well for them and what they'd like to see next time.

Checklist: Regular Session

Moves

As the conversation about the quest proceeds, the narrative will trigger moves. Moves are rules that help resolve the action when the direction may be unclear or the stakes are high. They almost always involve rolling two regular six-sided dice and following the prompts to keep the story going.

Who rolls? Since this is a game about partnership and collaboration and building trust, the moves triggered most frequently involve both characters. It doesn't really matter who rolls for moves where both characters are involved in the action. You could have the player whose character is driving the action roll. You could switch off. Or, each player can roll 1d6.

Advantage and disadvantage. When instructed to roll with advantage or disadvantage, roll three dice instead of two. With advantage, you read the results of the two highest-rolling dice, and with disadvantage you read the results of the two lowest rolling dice.

Quest Moves

The Quest Moves drive the narrative of the overall quest, providing a framework for starting a quest, gathering **Assets**, and then resolving the quest's conclusion. The quest move **Grab the Goods** may introduce a Plot Twist into your story.

The quest moves also address set-backs in the characters' relationship, and what happens when they reunite or reconcile. The pair separating (physically or emotionally) is an essential part of the genre.

Action Moves

The game expects the characters to act together, working in tandem toward their objectives. The main Action Moves involve both characters, and each player should describe how their character contributes to the action. Likewise, the outcomes of these moves will affect both characters or their relationship. See Approach and Consequences for more information about how they work together and how they deal with the aftermath.

If a character ever acts on their own without any support or involvement from their partner, they activate the **Go it Alone** move. This move has a substantial cost (marking Harm) because the characters are meant to be stronger together, even when their trust is low.

Lore and items. If they roll lower than they would like on an Action move, the players may choose to mark Lore to bump the result of the roll by one tier. For example, marking Lore would change a 7-9 result to a 10+ result. The players must decide together to spend the Lore in this way. On Go it Alone, the player may choose to mark an Item to bump the result one tier.

Downtime Moves

After the characters have attempted to make progress in their quest and things get quiet, they can use their downtime to recover what was lost or build their strength.

Approach and Consequences

Regardless of whether the pair is fighting, investigating, or infiltrating, they should describe how they work together – the Approach. Depending on the result of the roll, they will also face the same Consequences. When using a paired action move, the duo must describe their Approach: how are they working together – cooperatively or in tandem – to achieve the desired outcome? There are questions to help them formulate their description, and these questions are tied to their current Trust level.

Likewise, the outcome of the move may impose Consequences. The Consequences are stakes or costs for undertaking a risk, and more than likely impact both characters. These, too, are governed by the Trust level.

Example: Appraise

Sabra and Cantel are at Trust level 0. They are on a quest to rid the town of a giant ant infestation. They've infiltrated a magic shop – rumored to be the source of the giant ants – to find an artifact but instead come across the shopkeeper, working late into the night. They decide to interrogate the

shopkeeper. The GM asks how they approach it. Looking at the list of questions, they decide on the prompt "How do you narrowly stay out of each other's way?" They describe how they interrupt each other to ask the shopkeeper questions, sometimes asking the same question twice. They make it work because Sabra seems more intimidating and Cantel seems more charming. They roll and get a 7. They decide to ask "What here is not as it seems?" and the GM reveals that the shopkeeper appears to be under the influence of a supernatural entity. The result also directs them to pick a Consequence, and they decide "Someone is alerted to your presence." The GM says that the supernatural entity may be alerted, but the commotion inside the shop also alerts the town's night watchman, who bursts in the door.

GM Agenda, Principles, and Moves

Agenda

- Portray a world filled with danger, intrigue, and opportunity
- Lean into the differences between the characters
- Play to find out how their relationship builds

Principles

- Make them to work together
- Give them a chance to shine individually, on occasion
- Set one up to fail so the other may succeed
- Reveal someone's vulnerability

Moves

- Cause Harm
- Separate them
- Introduce a Set Back to their partnership
- Break their Items
- Reveal someone from their past
- Reveal impending threat

GM's Guide to Moves

Action Moves

Even when characters are not in the same place, they can be working together. One character distracts the guard outside while the other questions the prisoner. One character

Quests

One moment they were looking down upon the twisted corpse of Lord Rannarsh. The next moment their legs were weak, their guts were cold, their spines prickling, their teeth clicking, their hearts pounding, their hair lifting at the roots.

– The Jewels in the Forest, Swords Against Death, Fritz Leiber

Fantasy pairs go on a quest together, culminating in a big finish -- the defeat, the rescue, the acquisition, the what-have-you. Along the way they gather information and collect artifacts and uncover revelations to aid them in the quest's objective. Sometimes the things they find are useful, and sometimes they are not. Throughout the adventure, the players roll to see if what they found is actually useful for their quest, or is merely interesting, or worse is a dud, a red herring, or a hoax.

Action Moves

Appraise

When you together survey a scene or talk to someone, describe your approach and roll + Trust.

12+ You may ask two questions, or ask one question and gain Momentum.

10+ You may ask one question. Or, you may ask two questions and pick Consequences.

7-9 You may ask one question and pick Consequences. Lose momentum.

Questions

- What should we be on the lookout for?
- What here is useful to us?
- What here is not as it appears?
- How can I get you to _____ ?
- What changed here recently?

Overcome

When you together face imminent threat or immediate danger, describe your approach and what happens to the threat or danger and roll + Trust.

12+ Everything goes as planned, and gain Momentum..

10+ Everything goes as planned.

7-9 Pick an Effect, or everything goes pretty much as planned, but pick Consequences. Either way, lose Momentum.

Effects

- The desired outcome is diminished
- The desired outcome had unintended consequences
- The real threat turned out to be something else

Infiltrate

When you infiltrate a secure location describe your approach and roll + Trust.

12+ Pick four Outcomes.

10+ Pick three Outcomes.

7-9 Pick one Outcome, or pick three Outcomes and take Consequences. Lose Momentum.

Outcomes

- You are close to the target
- You are not separated
- You did not leave evidence
- You do not encounter anyone
- You gain Momentum

Remember the Time...

Mark a Lore to bump a result to the next higher tier for Appraise, Overcome, or Infiltrate.

Journey

When you travel the wilderness together, describe how you help each other to stay safe and roll + Trust.

- 12+ You arrive at your destination, and have time to Share or Rest. You may gain Momentum or take another Share or Rest action.
- 10+ You arrive at your destination, and may lose Momentum to Share or Rest.
- 7-9 You arrive at your destination, but not before you come upon a Distraction selected by the GM. Lose Momentum.

Distractions

- Someone or something stands in your way
- You come upon someone in distress
- You lose something important along the way
- You are ambushed

Approach and Consequences

Trust	Answer 1+ Questions to Describe Approach	Consequences
-1	- How do you step on each other's toes? - How do you work at cross purposes? - How do you try to show off for the other?	(Each pick one) - You are stuck, incapacitated, or Harmed - Someone arrives on the scene - Something important is lost - Another threat emerges
0	- How do you narrowly stay out of each other's way? - How does one of you direct the other? - How does one of you hang back to make room for the other?	- You both end up in a disadvantageous position - Someone is alerted to your presence - Something important is lost - An innocent bystander gets caught in the crossfire - One of you is Harmed
1	- How do you coordinate your actions? - How do you provide cover for the other? - What sacrifice do you make to ensure the other's success?	- You leave evidence of your presence - Both of you lose an Item - Someone is alerted to your presence - You damage important property - Both of you are Harmed
2 / 3	- How do you anticipate each other's actions? - How do you ensure the other's actions have maximum effect? - How do you create an opportunity for the other?	- Both of you are Harmed - Both of you lose an Asset - You suffer a Set Back

Go It Alone

When you work by yourself to overcome a threat or learn something new, lose Momentum (if you have it) or mark Harm (if you don't) and say what you're trying to accomplish, then roll + relevant aspects (max +3).

10+ You accomplish your goal and may clear a Harm if you pick an Effect

7-9 Pick one Effect to accomplish your goal.

Effects

- You make an important discovery about yourself or the partnership; you must Share before you use another Trust move
- You remember another important moment of your shared history; you may mark Harm to swap out one Lore for another
- You doubt your own abilities, and may not Go It Alone again until you use another Trust move

The Right Tool for the Job

When you Go It Alone, mark an item to bump the result to the next higher tier.

Quest Moves

They had no fear of danger from the rear. A well-laid ambushade might surprise them, but not a man or horse in motion. The narrow round wound along in a purposeless fashion.

– The Jewels in the Forest, Swords Against Death, Fritz Leiber

Start of Quest

When you're starting a new Quest, ask the GM:

- What type of quest is this?
- What is the objective of this quest?

Then ask your partner:

- Why does this quest matter to you?
- What do you fear most?

Grab the Goods

When you make a move to pinch, snag, appropriate, score, or otherwise acquire something important to your Quest, describe how you go after it together and roll +Trust. If you have Momentum, roll with advantage.

On any hit, you may add the target item or information to your list of Assets.

10+ You may add Lore if you pick a Plot Twist.

7-9 Pick a Plot Twist.

Plot Twists

When you pick a Plot Twist mark it. You may conclude the quest at any time, but you must conclude it after you've marked your fourth Plot Twist.

- One of you is captured
- A "third wheel" joins your party
- Someone is not who they appear to be
- An object has an unintended side effect
- You are summoned by someone important
- The place is overrun by enemies
- Someone from the present or the past distracts you from the quest

Final Act

When you take on the final obstacle to reach the Quest's objective, describe how everything you've learned prepared you for this moment and roll with questions.

- Do you have more than one Asset?
- Do you have momentum?
- Do you have at least one Plot Twist marked?

12+ You complete the quest. Each picks one heroic act.

9-11 You complete the quest, but something remains unfinished. The GM will tell you what. Each picks one heroic act and one tragic event.

8- The quest comes to an end, but you are not victorious. The GM will tell you what went wrong. Each picks a tragic event.

Heroic Acts

- Overcame fear
- Applied hard-learned lesson
- Adopted new perspective
- Adhered to values
- Gave up a dependency

Tragic Event

- Sustained permanent injury
- Lost signature item
- Sacrificed relationship

Set Back

When your trust is tested, reduce your trust by one level and describe the precipitating incident and how you react to the set back.

To regain Trust, describe how you reconcile, clear two Harm (in total) and either:

- Perform an Action move at the lower trust level. Regardless of outcome, restore Trust to the initial level.
- OR Share but roll -1. On a hit, pick one. On 6-, pick two.
 - Lose Momentum.
 - Erase one Asset.
 - Mark Lore.

Reunite

When you have been apart for any reason for more than a couple scenes and you come back together, describe how you are reunited and add a new Lore to your list based on the reunion or the events leading up to it. You may do this only once per quest.

Downtime Moves

After the characters have attempted to Grab the Goods -- and they're in a safe place -- they may make up to 2 downtime moves.

Rest (Harm)

You may clear 1 marked Harm, or lose Momentum to clear 2.

Repair or Upgrade (Items)

You may repair 1 item (erase 1 mark), or mark Harm to repair 2.

Or, you may mark Harm to add another checkbox to an item.

Share (Trust)

When you spend a quiet moment together, describe or show the conversation and roll. You may take +1 if this is a welcome interaction. Roll with -1 if one of you is skeptical or not in the mood. On a hit, you may increase Trust. On a 10+, you may also each clear one Harm.

If you roll 10+ on a paired move, spend X to gain trust.

Reflect: After you roll at 10+ on any group move, describe how you process it together. Mark Harm and increase trust.

Carouse (Lore)

When you entertain the assembled crowd, describe how you party with them. Clear 1 Lore and roll + marked Lore.

10+ Clear another Lore and Pick 1

7-9 Clear another Lore and Pick 2

- Lose Momentum (if Momentum is not marked, you can't pick this)
- Alert a foe to your presence
- Someone unexpected shows up
- You learn something unexpected about your Quest, the GM will tell you what

Quest Objectives & Waypoints

When the team gets to a new waypoint, roll on the table below corresponding to the quest's type to determine the nature of the new waypoint. A waypoint in the quest is a scene -- a location, encounter, or side quest -- that progresses the team toward the goal.

	Eradication A swarm of creatures or an illness plagues a locale	Extraction An important person needs rescuing	Theft An item needs to be liberated from its current owners
1	A village dealing with the aftermath of the scourge	An outcast cleric in a small village says they know who took the target	Someone who knows the floorplan of the target's location
2	A reclusive sage who knows how to defeat the scourge	A tavern, cafe, or restaurant that was one of the target's old haunts	Someone who can tell you about the location's defenses
3	Residents of a hamlet victimized by the scourge who attack their neighbors	A relative of the target who has an artifact attuned to the target to help locate them	A wizard's apprentice who can help you distinguish the real target from counterfeits
4	The source of the scourge, abandoned or empty or false	A shop that was the last place the target was seen	Thieves Guild arsenal storing special gear to help infiltrate the location
5	An outfitter who swindled a town with a false remedy for the scourge	A network of tunnels leading to the place the target is being held	The outer defenses protecting the inner sanctum where the target is
6	A living survivor of the scourge who might be saved with treatment	An imprisoned mercenary who was on the team that captured the target	A locksmith who can create the special key for a hidden entrance
7	An ancient archive with the secret to protect against the scourge	A creature guarding the target	A creature guarding the target
8	An adventurer thought dead with an artifact that can weaken the scourge	Another group of mercenaries who are going after the target	Someone who knows the intimate details of the target's location

	Salvation A person has been cursed	Escape You two are imprisoned and must retreat to safety	Escort Someone needs transportation across hostile territory
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

	Assassination A single powerful person or creature needs to be eliminated		
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			