

Mail Mouse

This is a tabletop roleplaying game for 1 Games Master (GM) and 1 or more players. It supports play by post metaphorically and otherwise.

In Mail Mouse Tag you play a mouse (or a similar animal) who has given up their trade to become a courier delivering packages to settlements. You're not a brave knight, you're just a postman, but there's still much danger in delivering a parcel.

Each player character is a list of words. They spend their words to defeat obstacles (also made of words).

Making a Character

Your **Tags** describe what sort of person you are and how you overcome obstacles.

During play you'll use a Tag in your description of how you solved a task.

Your starting Tags are a skill, a trait, a nature, and an item.

Example characters:

- Bitter, Cartographer, Mouse, Maps
- Tall, Archivist, Mole, Beetle
- Young, Laborer, Hamster, Sword

You can make up your own Tags or choose from the lists below.

After you've chosen your Tags choose the following: a fur color, a cloak color, your pronoun, your name.

You are equipped with the mail, a cloak, your item, a day's worth of food, and anything related to your skill that you could easily carry.

Names

You can choose a name from the list below or make up your own.

Abram, Aengus, Alaric, Alba, Aldo, Alban, Algomina, Anabel, Ambrose, Anselm, Aquila, Archibald, Argenta, August, Autumn, Aynsle, Baeylie, Baldwin, Balthasar, Barnabas, Bartholomew, Beagan, Beatrice, Beagan, Benedict, Brand, Brynn, Cale, Caley, Cassian, Castellan, Celestina, Chapman, Clement, Clove, Connor, Crispin, Curt, Cyprian, Daewn, Damiana, Dalia, Daye, Dunstan, Edmund, Everard, Euphemia, Faolan, Ferdinand, Finn, Florian, Folker, Frost, Gale, Gamlion, Garnier, Garrow, Gavin, Gervaise, Giles, Gisela, Godfrey, Godric, Grahame, Gratiana, Gregoria, Guardia, Guinevere, Gurney, Gwenllian, Hannidy, Henson, Honora, Hugh, Idalia, Idony, Ingrid, Ivar, Ivo, Ivy, Jasper, Joseff, Josephine, Julyia, Kearra, Kole, Laird, Laria, Laurel, Lavinia, Leopold, Lilly, Loonis, Loralai, Lucian, Maren, Maxim, Meliora, Milo, Millicent, Mirabel, Moira, Neville, Nola, Noelan, Otto, Pacifica, Palmer, Peregrine, Petra, Quentin, Quinn, Regina, Rona, Rosalee, Rudolf, Savia, Sayble, Sigrid, Sebastian, Serra, Seyth, Severin, Siemon, Sloan, Sylvia, Tander, Taryn, Thom, Thora, Thurstan, Tinble, Trevor, Vidar, Viola, Walmond, Winifred, Veira

Character Tags

Traits

Your trait can be an advantage or flaw, preferably both.

Abrasive, Alert, Athletic, Ambitious, Bigpawed, Bitter, Blunt, Bodyguard, Bold, Brave, Brawny, Calm, Clever, Clumsy, Compassionate, Creative, Cunning, Curious, Deep Eared, Defensive, Determined, Dramatic, Driven, Dutiful, Early Riser, Empathetic, Extrovert, Fat, Fearful, Fearless, Fiery, Flamboyant, Flexible, Fragrant, Generous, Graceful, Heroic, Honorable, Innocent, Intuitive, Jaded, Leader, Longtailed, Lost, Mystical, Natural Bearing, Nimble, Nocturnal, Oldfurred, Optimistic, Patient, Perfectionist, Pessimistic, Popular, Quick-Witted, Quiet, Religious, Resourceful, Romantic, Scarred, Scholarly, Selfless, Sensitive, Sharp-Eyed, Sharp-Toothed, Short, Skeptical, Skinny, Sophisticated, Stoic, Stubborn, Suspicious, Superstitious, Tall, Thoughtful, Tough, Weather Sensing, Wise, Wolf Snouted, Young

Skills

Your skill describes what you did before becoming a mail mouse.

Administrator, Alchemist, Apiarist, Archer, Archivist, Armorer, Artist, Astrologer, Bailiff, Baker, Barber, Barrister, Brawler, Boatcrafter, Brewer, Butler, Candlemaker, Carpenter, Cartographer, Chaplain, Clerk, Cook, Con Artist, Councilor, Ditcher, Farmer, Gardener, Glazier, Guard, Haberdasher, Hackneymouse (stables and rides), Harker, Healer, Herbalist, Huckster, Hunter, Janitor, Jester, Jeweler, Insectrist, Teacher, Laborer, Librarian, Marshal, Merchant, Miller, Minstrel, Monk, Noble, Nun, Pathfinder, Physician, Plumber, Poet, Potter, Priest, Prestidigitator, Rider, Ranger, Sailor, Serf, Scientist, Scholar, Scout, Smith, Soldier, Stonemason, Survivalist, Tailor, Weather Watcher, Weaver, Wheelwright, Writer

Natures

Mail Mouse is about small people overcoming giant obstacles (to deliver the mail). If you're not a mouse then you should at least be an animal that suits the theme of the game.

Dormouse, Egyptian Tortoise, Gerbil, Garden Skink, Hamster, Jerboa, Lemming, Leopard Gecko, Mole, Mouse, Mouse Lemur, Pygmy Possum, Shrew, Vole

Flying and water-bound animals limit the range of stories you can explore. Check with your group if it's okay to be one.

Common Pipistrelle Bat, Diamondback Terrapin, Goldfinch, Horned Frog, Mouse-Eared Bat, Natterjack Toad, Robin, Smooth Newt, Spotted Turtle

Items

Your item is a favorite tool, trained beast, or a follower who is less experienced than you. You are always seen with it / them or suitable replacement.

Axe, Armor, Astrolabe, Bee, Beetle, Bench (small), Books (say what subject), Brazier, Bucket, Cards (deck), Caterpillar, Crystal Ball, Divining Rod, Dragonfly, Food (say what type), Fishing Rod, Glue (pot), Grasshopper, Hammer, Harpoon, Herbs, Hook and Line, Horn, Knives, Maps, Marbles, Mirror, Musical Instrument (say what type), Net, Niece / Nephew, Pickaxe, Potions, Rope, Saw, Sack, Scorpion, Shears, Shield, Shovel, Sibling, Sling, Spear, Spider, Staff, Stones, Sword, Telescope, Torch, Trainee, Twine (ball of), Two-Mouse-Pole (like a ten-foot-pole, but smaller), Wasp

Obstacles

An Obstacle is something that's slowing or blocking your progress. During the party's journey delivering the mail, the GM will present various Obstacles for you to overcome.

Like your character, Obstacles are made of Tags. To pass or overcome an Obstacle you use your own Tags to cancel all of the Obstacle's Tags.

One Character Tag cancels one Obstacle Tag.

- First describe how you defeat the obstacle. Include your Tags in the description or tell the GM what Tags are being used.
- Then put a check (x) next to any Tags you use. You cannot use them again until you stop to rest (see Long Rest).

Any number of players can contribute to overcoming an Obstacle. Just cancel as many Tags as you want and leave the rest for others.

Example:

Roland the *Tall, Gardener, Mouse*, carrying *Shears*

Versus

The briar bush that's *Thorny* and *Tangled*.

Roland's player decides to use *Mouse* against *Thorny*. They describe gnawing off the thorns of the bush with Roland's *Mouse* teeth to make passage safer.

The bush still has the *Tangled* Tag. Roland's player cannot use *Mouse* again, but they could easily use *Gardener* or *Shears* to finish off the bush.

Roland uses their *Shears* to cut a hole in the *Tangled* branches so they can get through.

The briar bush is defeated and Roland's player checks their *Mouse* and *Shears* Tags.

Extra Tags

An Extra Tag is like a copy of a Tag that you or an Obstacle already has. Or you can think of it as a Tag with 2 hit points. It describes things that are large, impressive, or just hard to ignore.

You can gain an Extra Tag through character advancement (see Long Rest). You record it as separate Tag, example:

Tall, Gardener, Mouse, Shears, Extra Mouse

An Extra Tag is always a Tag that you or the Obstacle already has.

You cannot have an Extra Extra Tag.

Long Rest

When you have only one Tag left unchecked you are able to request a special scene called a Long Rest.

This describes the party stopping to rest somewhere and discussing the journey so far.

Any player that has checked all their Tags or checked all but one, gets to advance their character. To advance your character you do the following.

- Remove all checks from your Tags.
- The GM and every player that isn't you suggests a new Tag for you. It must be based on your actions whilst playing and it can't be a new Nature. If it's an Item it should be one you've picked up or is near your location.

Their suggestion can be an Extra Tag of a Tag you already have (see Extra Tags).

No repeat suggestions!

- Choose which suggested Tag you like the most. Add that Tag to your character.

If there is only one player the GM can make two suggestions.

If you're playing by post you can take the first suggestion you like, you don't have to wait for everyone else to post theirs.

You can play a Long Rest by suggesting Tags, or you can roleplay a scene where the player characters describe what they think of each other's actions - including their suggestions in what their characters say.

Sacrificing Tags

Sometimes success comes at great cost, leaving the victor worse off than when they started.

To describe such a success you can sacrifice a Tag that your character has. This acts like a permanent check and is not removed after a Long Rest.

Tags can only be sacrificed after a group has played their first Long Rest.

Sacrificing a Tag provides the following benefits:

- A sacrificed Tag cancels two Obstacle Tags.
- Because a sacrificed Tag stays checked after a Long Rest, it takes less time to advance that character.

To uncheck a sacrificed Tag the group must complete a quest to restore it. This should involve one or more Obstacles set by the GM.

You are allowed to leave a sacrificed Tag checked to describe a change in lifestyle, living with your loss.

If you sacrifice all your Tags you give up being a mail mouse. Life on the road has proved too tough for you.

Obstacle Tags

Avoid using similar Tags for a single Obstacle, it makes solving them confusing. Use Extra Tags if you want a bigger Obstacle.

Many

When an Obstacle has the Many Tag, that means there's more than one of it. Example:

Swarm of bees protecting their hive:
Defensive, Many, Extra Many

Terrain

Abandoned, Cold, Bright, Broken, Dark, Deep, Dense, Flooded, Fortified, Fragile, Hot, Icy, Inhabited, Isolated, Maze-like, Muddy, Narrow, Poisonous, Rough, Rotten, Ruined, Slippery, Tall, Time-Limited, Thorny, Tiring, Tangled, Wide, Wobbly, Unstable, Vast

Device / Process

Archaic, Broken, Burning, Complicated, Dogmatic, Fragile, Frozen, Heavy, Incomplete, Large, Oily, Poisonous, Reinforced, Rotten, Rusty, Sharp, Slimy, Slippery, Time-Limited, Tiny, Tiring

NPC / Beast

Aggressive, Bitter, Brave, Calm, Callous, Clever, Cruel, Conflicted, Cunning, Curious, Deep Eared, Defensive, Demanding, Desperate, Determined, Dogmatic, Driven, Drunk, Early Riser, Fast, Large, Lazy, Fearful, Fearless, Hagglng, Hostile, Hungry, Ignorant, Impatient, Injured, Irrational, Jaded, Lost, Natural Bearing, Nocturnal, Paranoid, Pedantic, Prejudiced (say against what), Quick-Witted, Quiet, Sad, Scarred, Sharp-Eyed, Sharp-Toothed, Shy, Skeptical, Stingy, Stinking, Stubborn, Superstitious, Suspicious, Tall, Tired, Tough, Wise, Wolf Snouted, Young

The Mail

The mail the mice carry could be special, here are some ideas:

- An envelope whose address is an unreadable foreign script. (The envelope is for another species and has fallen into the possession of the mice - finding the true recipient will require the assistance of experts.)
- An envelope addressed to *The Grand Marshal* at a small village. (It contains a player's turn for a play by post strategy game. The recipient is the Games Master for this game but they're too embarrassed to collect it in front of their fellow villagers who look down on their hobby).
- A small parcel with a few holes in it. The package is marked "specimen" and "urgent". At inopportune times the parcel goes missing (it contains a flea - it launches itself and the package when they stop to rest, or at other awkward moments).
- A large package carried by a beetle (It contains paintings by a famous artist - the package contents are kept secret in case bandits in the area discover its value.)
- An envelope marked returned to sender - the return address is perilous. (The recipient is an estranged parent or lover who is trying to contact someone. They will want to travel with the players on the return journey.)
- An envelope addressed to an unknown village. When they get there it seems abandoned. (The village was evacuated due to encroaching predators. Neighboring villages can offer clues where to find the addressee.)

Encounters

The mail mice may encounter various challenges on their journey. Not all of them need to be Obstacles. Here are some examples.

- A bird with an injured wing. It might become a traveling companion if the players help them.
Broken, Sad
- A harmless snake defends its breakfast - an egg. (Note: egg eating snakes are very small, chicken eggs are huge compared to most bird eggs.)
Fearful
- Forging a ditch - almost every adventure involves crossing a gap of some sort.
Slippery, Deep
- A mail mouse coming the opposite way. They can exchange information and letters.
- Bandits! Mice that have fallen on hard times or possibly rats looking to bully some smaller kin.
Desperate / Large, Aggressive
- A hut occupied by a hermit. They will either be very glad or very angry to have visitors.
Suspicious
- Ancient ruins - unstable terrain, under which lie secrets of the past.
Abandoned, Unstable
- A network of caves offer a fast yet perilous shortcut.
Dark, Maze-Like
- The weather changes - rain or even hail is huge when you're the size of a mouse.
Cold, Wet
- Forced to cross a lake. There are materials nearby - perhaps lily pads or dry wood that can be gnawed into shape.
Flooded, Deep
- Forced to climb a cliff. There may be a tree nearby or mail mice from previous excursions have left pitons and rope.
Tall, Extra Tall
- Hitching a ride on a large grazing animal like a deer or a sheep.
Tall, Stubborn
- An ant or hornet nest now occupies what was a safe path. They must avoid disturbing it.
Defensive, Many
- Another mouse is lost on the road. Either scared of a predator or injured and in need of

assistance.

Lost, Injured

- A village has expanded and blocked the path - but the occupants are shrews / moles and don't speak the player's language.
Ignorant, Dogmatic
- Mischievous magpies want to steal the mail!
Cruel, Determined
- The path has been washed away by rains and is now a muddy swamp. It's up to the players to invent a way of getting across.
Muddy, Deep
- A predator blocks the path and demands a tribute for safe passage.
Large, Dogmatic
- A lost mail bag is discovered - but it's either up a tree or in a ditch.
Tall / Deep

Playing by Post

Playing by post introduces some challenges that those used to playing in person may not be aware of.

Set a Schedule

Say how long you're going to wait between posts, this will save everyone a lot of frustration.

Even if you're all at your keyboards at the same time, some people will think it's okay to disappear for 5 to 10 minutes at a time without explanation. Get the whole group to agree to a schedule before you play.

Be prepared to change the schedule later on. Enthusiasm for a long PbP game drops off fast as people realize it's going to overlap with their future plans.

Engage Autopilot

Sometimes a player is in the middle of an action or being asked a question and they don't post for longer than the schedule allows. This brings the game to a halt - the story can't continue until this specific player responds.

If it's clear the game has become stuck then the GM should "engage autopilot" for that player's character:

First the GM needs to declare they're going to autopilot the character - so the other players know to leave that character alone until their player posts again. Then they post as little as is needed as that character to unstick the story.

Ghosting

If someone's not in front of you or on camera it's very easy for them to disappear without warning. Sometimes forever. We call this ghosting - they have apparently vanished but may still be there.

Please don't criticize missing players or their characters. A ghosting player may have had a

medical emergency or personal problems they can't discuss.

Start with ground rules for players ghosting. State how long before silent players go on autopilot, and how long before they're removed from the game. Allow exceptions for people who give advance notice.

This helps a game to survive players who leave unexpectedly and lets everyone know there's a plan in place for when they do.

Use Separate Text Channels

Platforms like rolegate.com already have a general chat channel and a proper story channel - so you can differentiate between decision making and actual actions. On social apps like Discord you may want more channels for notes, character information, or art.

People Don't Read

This seems counterintuitive. It's impossible to PbP without reading.

But it's true. In general, people only remember the last sentence you wrote and they won't backtrack to check. It's okay to repeat yourself often. This is especially important in a long form game where people completely forget why they're in a situation.

Formatting

If there's an important feature or item you want others to notice, put in a line break and put that information on its own line. Don't bury important details inside a flowery description.

Player Count

A game with less players is faster to run. When playing in person you can quickly verify if everyone agrees on a course of action. In a slow PbP game this can take a week.

If you're GMing a slow game and you offer a dilemma, you can say you'll take the first suggestion as the players' course of action.

References

Mail Mouse was created using a variety of rules from the RPGs listed below. You should check them out:

Pace RPG by Fred Hicks

<https://www.evilhat.com/pace/>

F.A.T.E. by Fred Hicks and Rob Donoghue

<https://www.evilhat.com/home/fate-core/>

Mouse Guard RPG by Luke Crane & David Petersen

<http://www.mouseguard.net/book/role-playing-game-boxed-set/>

The Fellowship by Vel Mini

<https://liberigothica.itch.io/fellowship-a-tabletop-adventure-game>

Mausritter by Isaac Williams

<https://losing.games/mausritter/>

Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine by Jenna Katerin Moran

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/134196/Chuubos-Marvelous-WishGranting-Engine>

Golden Sky Stories by Ryo Kamiya & Tsugihagi Honpo

<http://starlinepublishing.com/our-games/golden-sky-stories/>

Death Stranding by Kojima Productions

http://www.kojimaproductions.jp/en/death_stranding.html

Rolegate

<https://www.rolegate.com>

Mail Mouse Downloads

<https://st33d.itch.io/mail-mouse>

Mail Mouse Discord

<https://discord.gg/Hfz9zsX>

Version History

v.1.1

Added: A Failure needs to affect a task before it can be removed with pips. Rules for GM NPCs and GM pips. Advancement rules (all at the end of a Story, no in-game busy work).

Removed: Blots (not PbP friendly, we can manage restocking pips with Scenes which Pace RPG doesn't have).

v.1.2

Added: Clarification on successes.

v.1.3

Added: More detail on character creation, Tasks, and Contests.

v.1.4

Added: Difficulty settings. Changed pip review to reward trait and skill. Changed stamps for Belief and Instinct to skill and trait. Added a stamp for donating or solo play. Added note on NPCs that they can donate pips.

Removed: Belief and Instinct (all testers used them to describe their trait or skill - it's simpler to treat it like Aspects in F.A.T.E.).

v 1.5

Added: Changed pip review to be more lenient for rewarding skills. Pips now reset at the beginning of a Story. Deliver the mail stamp now rewards completing an errand - not all Stories are about delivering mail.

v.1.6

Added: Simplified Tasks and Failures further - the 2 success requirement was hard to communicate.

v.1.7

Added: Scene ratings - 1st success now costs the rating of the Scene (helps describe resting and difficult terrain). Donations increase the limit of successes per task. Reformatting.

Removed: Survival mode - Scene ratings let one change difficulty on the fly.

v.1.8

Removed: Scene ratings - too fiddly to explain. Descriptor scores - never used. Pip review - feels like marking homework, makes a play by post game labour intensive and the story history isn't always easy to retrieve. Stamp questions - again, feels like marking homework and tying stamps directly to pip spending seems like it may finally deal with the incentive to spend.

v.1.9

Added: Journey section. Ideas for what post the players are carrying and what Scenes can be played.

v.2.0

Added: Play by Post section. Advice for playing by post. Nature section in character creation. A guide to acceptable alternatives to Mouse.

v.3.0

Added: Tags - resource system changed to words instead of points (like in The Fellowship RPG). Obstacles - renamed Tasks to suit the new paradigm. Play by Post advice - more tips. Names - always useful.

Removed: Pips, Stamps, Tasks, Failures, Contests - Getting players to spend a numerical resource and not hoard it proved impossible. A big course correction was needed.