

Playright - No dice required!

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Introduction

I recently played an adventure that was run using the [Egress system](#) of role playing. And it got me thinking; is it possible to play a game of Playright without dice...

Core concepts

Clichés

A **cliché** is few words that say what a character knows how to do:

Captain of the Ithilien rangers

Over enthusiastic space ranger that's been to infinity and beyond

Self loathing IT professional

Cliché advantage

This is the number next to a **cliché** that indicates how well a character can do what they know how to do:

Captain of the Ithilien Rangers retired (3)

Over enthusiastic space ranger that's been to infinity and beyond (3)

Self loathing IT professional (5)

Cliché specializations

This is an extra bit of description added to a **cliché** that improves the character's chance of doing what they know how to do:

Surly battle dwarf (3)

with a gift for drinking his foes under the table

Cliché rolls

Obviously, there are NO **cliché** rolls when playing without dice. Instead players trade away their character's **cliché** advantage and inspiration points to guide the narrative in a way that favors their character.

Hook

A **hook** is something quirky about your character that makes their life more challenging or interesting. For example:

Can't resist a wager

Needs to have the last word

Never on time for anything

Tale

A **tale** is a few words of background material that gives insight into your character, and helps to highlight their **clichés** and hooks.

Inspiration

These are points awarded to a character by the game master for doing something "inspiring". They can be used to affect the narrative with:

Extra effort

Instead of spending your **cliché** advantage points, spend inspiration points. Or spend some inspiration and some advantage points to guide the narrative.

Heroic effort

Spend 2 points inspiration to reverse or change an action in the narrative.

Inspiration points can also be put towards character improvement:

Amount of inspiration traded	Improvement to character
1 point	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add a new cliché of advantage 1• Add a specialization to a cliché
2 points	Increase an existing cliché advantage from 1 to 2
3 points	Increase an existing cliché advantage from 2 to 3
and so on	

Improvement should happen within the context of the game. For example, a character must train with a master to improve their fighting or culinary skills.

Disadvantage

These are points given by the game master that impairs a character's ability to act. Two main types:

Specific

A particular **cliché's** advantage is reduced by the amount of disadvantage dealt.

General

All **cliché** advantage is reduced by the amount of disadvantage dealt.

Disadvantage can be temporary

The sun in your eyes

or more long lived

The effects of a right cross or falling down a flight of stairs

A comedian's scathing comeback to your heckle

Depending on how it was accumulated, disadvantage can be reduced through medical attention, bed rest, healing potions, or group therapy.

Wrenches

These are pieces of game fiction that adversely affect a character's plans and are thrown by the game master.

Character creation

The game master will set a strength of character or s.o.c. limit. Typically this is 4 points.

Character clichés

For every cliché advantage point the s.o.c increases by 1 point.

Specializations

Each specialization increases the s.o.c by 1 point.

Bonus gear

These are items that are extraordinary in nature. They can have an advantage (and even specializations) associated with them. The long sword

Harmgiver (4)

- that steals souls on contact

would increase a character's s.o.c by 5 points (4 for its advantage plus 1 for its specialization).

Sidekicks

Sidekicks are expressed exactly the same way as any other character; with tales, hooks, and clichés which adds to the s.o.c. of the main character. For example:

A **Tyrannical Halfling Pyromancer** (4)

might have a sidekick

Creepy Imp Familiar (2) with a .44 S&W model 29 (4) bonus gear item.

The s.o.c. of the sidekick is 6 which makes the s.o.c. of the character 10 points!

Wait a minute?

How can you create a character that has a strength of character 10 when you only get 4 points?

Add a tale

A tale reduces the s.o.c. by 1 point.

Add some hooks

Every hook reduces the s.o.c. by 1.

Add a tale and some hooks to your bonus gear

You can do that.

Add a tale and some hooks to your sidekick

You can do that too.

Add a tale and some hooks to your sidekick's bonus gear

You can even do that!

Limits

A typical starting character:

- strength of character limit of 4 points
- has at least 2 clichés
- no clichés advantages greater than 3
- and no more than 1 specialization per cliché

Note that if the s.o.c is less than the limit, the difference can be saved as inspiration points for later use.

An example character

Jack Blaze

Tale

Rather than put his faith in the almighty, Jack has proven time and again that he can win the day with just his trusty man servant and items found along the way.

Hooks

- “Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble...”
- “Follow me I know the way”

Clichés

- **Paladin school dropout** (2)
 - **who's surprisingly good at close quarters combat**
- **That could come in handy** (3)

Bonus gear

- **Lucky rock** (1)
 - **that's really hard to lose**

Sidekicks

Hector

Tale

The only thing more featureless than his personality is his face.

Hooks

- Nocturnal
- It's shiny and I must have it

Clichés

- **A thieving man servant** (1)

Bonus gear

- **Belt of many tools** (1)

Jack's strength of character can be worked out as follows:

On the plus side, it's 6 for clichés and specializations, 2 for bonus gear, 1 for sidekick clichés, and 1 for sidekick bonus gear for a total of 10.

On the minus side, it's 1 for the tale, 2 for the hooks, 1 for the sidekick tale, and 2 for the sidekick hooks for a total of 6. So 10 - 6 give us a strength of character of 4!

Game play

The running dialog

Whether wandering around the countryside or engaging in mortal combat, the running dialog structure is used to let the story unfold. Note that the running dialog is slightly different when playing without dice:

Game master: Describes the current situation.

This is where the GM tells their part of the story. Some descriptions will be more verbose than others. There could be a general description and then individual descriptions for each player character from their point of view. At the end of each description there is an implied or even a literal “What do you do”?

Players: Respond to the description.

This is where the players tell their part of the story. Responses can be as simple as “I dive for cover” or as complex as “I run towards the table and begin a knee slide as I reload my uzi and let loose with a burst as I slide underneath”. They should also be something that the character, based on their clichés, could plausibly do.

Game master: Interprets responses and describes consequences, possibly throwing wrenches.

This is where the GM decides how plausible the character's response is and describes the outcome, which may or may not include throwing a wrench into the character's plans. The more implausible the response, the bigger the wrench. Not every character action deserves a wrench so throw them sparingly.

Players: Possibly use their cliché advantage and / or inspiration points to prevail

Once the GM has described the consequence, with or without a wrench, the player's have a chance to change the outcome:

Not spending any points means that the character will accept the consequences of their actions.

By spending 1 point the player narrates an outcome that is favorable to the character but the GM will assign a consequence in keeping with the game fiction.

By spending 2 points the player can narrate an outcome that is favorable to the character and inline with what they were attempting to do.

Note that if the player narrates an outcome that fits with one of their character's cliché specializations, they only need to spend 1 point to achieve a favorable outcome.

Consequences are NOT chosen at random. They are carefully decided upon by the GM to make sense in the context of the story and respect the game fiction. Here is a list of common consequences (adapted from *Dungeon World*) to help in that endeavor:

1. Use a villain, danger, or location

This is describing what the villain, danger or location does. The Mountain Trolls hurls someone away. It's a long drop to the bottom of the warp core. The Nadazian Nexus drains life energy. If a player's action has left them exposed, add a villain, danger, or location consequence.

2. Reveal an unwelcome truth

An unwelcome truth is a fact the players wish wasn't true. The room is trapped. The helpful goblin is actually a spy. Reveal to the players just how much trouble they're really in.

3. Show signs of an approaching threat

This is a very versatile consequence. “Threat” means anything bad that's on the way. You just show them that something's going to happen unless they do something about it.

4. Deal damage

When you deal damage, choose one source of damage that's threatening a character and apply it. In a knife fight with a lizard man? It stabs you. Triggered a trap? Rocks fall on you. Note that dealing damage is a way to set the stage for throwing a wrench later in the story that fits with the game fiction!

5. Use up their resources

Surviving in a dungeon, or anywhere dangerous, often comes down to supplies. With this consequence, something happens to use up some resources: weapons, armor, healing, ongoing spells. You don't always have to use it up permanently. A sword might just be flung to the other side of the room, not shattered..

6. Turn Their Action Back On Them

Think about the benefits an action might grant a character and turn it around in a negative way. Alternately, grant the same advantage to someone who has it out for the characters. If Ivy has learned of Duke Horst's men approaching from the east, maybe a scout has spotted her, too.

7. Separate them

Separating the characters can mean anything from being pushed apart in the heat of battle to being teleported miles away. Whichever way it happens, it's bound to cause problems

8. Show a downside

This is where the building blocks of a character or even their actions can be turned against them:

Hooks

What happens when someone calls Marty McFly chicken or makes White Goodman bleed his own blood?

Race / Species

Do orcs have a special thirst for elven blood?

Clichés

Is the wild magic of the [Self taught sorcerer](#) (3) disturbing dangerous forces?

Actions

The torch that lights the way also draws attention from eyes in the dark.

9. Offer an opportunity, with or without cost

Show them something they want: riches, power, glory. If you want, you can associate some cost. Remember to lead with the fiction. You don't say, "This area isn't dangerous so you can make camp here, if you're willing to take the time." You make it a solid fictional thing and say, "Helferth's blessings still hang around the shattered altar. It's a nice safe spot, but the chanting from the ritual chamber is getting louder. What do you do?"

10. Put someone in a spot

A spot is someplace where a character needs to make tough choices. Put them, or something they care about, in the path of destruction. The harder the choice, the tougher the spot.

11. Tell them the requirements or consequences

Sure they can do it, but there will be consequences. Maybe they can swim across the moat but they will need some kind of distraction to avoid being devoured by the sharks that are in a starved frenzy

Repeat

This is where the game master describes the new situation and the dialog begins again...

Miscellaneous

Recovering strength of character points.

It should be in keeping with the game fiction. Took a tumble? Medical aid, magical healing, bed rest, etc. Took an insult? A hug or group therapy may be needed.

Using inspiration

If you're out of strength of character points you can, for the same cost, use inspiration points to alter the narrative.

Player vs player

Sometimes the player characters will have a go at each other.

One player will take action against another. Then..

- Other player either accepts the consequences of the action or spends points to narrate a different outcome to that action.
- The player will either accept those consequences or spend points to narrate a yet a different outcome.
- and repeat

..until the action has resolved (usually when players have exhausted all their **cliché** and inspiration points).

Note if single points are spent then the GM will inject consequences.

Villain advantage

The advantage number next to a villain **cliché** can be taken as their strength of character points; thus allowing them to change the narrative to their advantage until they run out of points.

Credits

This would not be possible without the brilliant creations of:

Egress by **Cosmic Orrery Games**

Risus: The anything RPG by S. John Ross

Dungeon World by Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel

And nearly every version of **Dungeons & Dragons**

but mostly 3.5 for making me think, "there must be a better way" when trying to level Craig the Demilich