Fabula

*Fabula* is an interactive narrative card game in which the players fill out the skeleton of a story using characters and props from a fantasy world inspired by *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. The tale’s skeleton is told by a storyteller, while each player competes to be the protagonist.

**Setup**

Everyone at the table should choose an appealing story skeleton from the book included with the game. One person will act as the Storyteller or Narrator, and the others should each choose a cardboard cutout character from the box.

Shuffle the item cards and draw a number equal to three times the number of players, plus two more. Place all these cards in the center of the table, face up. These are the props you will have to work with during the game.

**Three Scenes**

The Storyteller will begin the story, describing the setting and conflict. At three points during the story, he will stop to ask the players for input about how to overcome a specific obstacle. Each player inhabits his or her own personal fairy tale world, trying to argue that they would be the best protagonist for the finished version of the story.

Players take their turns in any order; the first to speak up goes first. Begin your turn by taking one item from those left in the center of the table. Your character needs to find a way to resolve the current situation using that item. The more stars an item has, the more difficult it may be to use, however stars are the tie-breaker at the end of the game, and there is almost always a tie.

After a player gives a solution to the situation, the Storyteller will judge it by the following:

1. Did your story solve the problem at hand?
2. Was the item your chose central to the solution you gave?
3. Did your solution fit well into your story so far, including your past solutions?

If the Storyteller judges your story acceptable, he will give you some number of Quill Tokens (1 for the first scene, 2 for the second, and 3 for the third).

**Epilog**

After all three scenes, the two players with the most Quill Tokens compete in a final task (ties are broken by the total number of stars on a player’s items). Both players must solve the final problem and wrap up the tale using both of the items that remain in the center of the table. Players have only 30 seconds to tell their epilog! The first player to speak up goes first, but the
second player must use both items in a different way than the first. The Storyteller then chooses a winner based on whose epilog was the best.

**Alternate Rules: One World with No Storyteller**

In this alternate version of the game (designed for advanced players), there is no Storyteller and all characters inhabit the same story world.

Everyone begins by choosing a tale skeleton, but the reader has no special authority (and should also play a character). Deal out 4 Quill Tokens to each player. Scenes work like in the original version, but after everyone has explained their solution, players vote with their Quill Tokens (1 token for the first two scenes, 2 for the third). Players cannot give Quill Tokens to themselves.

In addition to the three criteria used in the original version, you should consider how well each person’s story builds on the stories of the other characters. Remember that you all inhabit the same world this time, so try to hook your story into the stories of the other characters.

The Epilog proceeds as in the original, but players vote to determine the winner.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Many interactive narrative games use a Storyteller or Game Master to oversee the narrative. However, in *Fabula*, the role of the Storyteller has been reduced to simply judging a scene acceptable or not. This makes the role of Storyteller more accessible to inexperienced players, but how does it affect the quality and flexibility of the story?

2. Item cards are assigned a static number of stars based on how hard the game designers thought they would be to use. Obviously, items are easier or harder to use in certain situations. How could a human expert or AI system score the item cards dynamically based on the current situation?

3. This game is essentially an exercise in procedural content generation, but the only variance is provided by a small number of tale skeletons and a single deck of item cards. How could you increase the generative capabilities of this game by introducing new elements or mechanics?

4. If you played or observed both version of the game, how much harder was it to integrate your story into the stories of the other characters?