

Amazing Tales

For children old enough to have adventures

[An introduction for grown ups](#)

[A longer guide for grown ups](#)

[1. Pick a kind of story](#)

[2. Make up a hero](#)

[3. Making up a story](#)

[4. Using the dice](#)

[Setting : Tales from the Deep Dark Wood](#)

[Fairies](#)

[Suggested Fairy Skills](#)

[Talking Animals](#)

[Animal Skills](#)

[Making up stories in the Deep Dark Wood](#)

[Imagining the wood](#)

[Story seeds in the Deep Dark Wood](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Versions](#)

An introduction for grown ups

You're going to make up a story with your child. It should take between half an hour and an hour, it's going to be amazing, and neither of you knows how it's going to end. At times you'll roll dice to see what happens next. That's it.

Here's how it works

1. Decide what kind of story it's going to be. This guide includes suggestions for stories in 'The Deep Dark Wood'. But stories about adventures in space, on the wild blue yonder, in days long gone by or superhero city are all possible. Indeed any kind of story is possible.
2. Help your child make up a hero to play
 - a. Ask them what their hero will be called
 - b. Ask them what the hero will look like,
 - c. Ask them to think of four things they are good at and write them down
 - d. Ask them which of those things they are best at - assign a d12 to that skill
 - e. Ask them which of the remaining things they are best at - assign a d10
 - f. Ask them which of the last two things they are best at - assign a d8 and a d6
3. Start telling the story, perhaps using one of the story seeds in this guide. As soon as something happens ask your child 'What do you do?'. Incorporate their answer into whatever happens next. (more guidance on this in a few pages time)
4. If your child wants their hero to do something that might not work, such as climbing a mountain, casting a spell on a dragon or flying a space ship through the asteroid field look at the things they're good at. Pick whichever seems most relevant and ask them to roll the appropriate dice
 - a. If they get a three or more they succeed! Ask them to describe what happens. Then continue the story till the next moment you can ask 'what do you do?'
 - b. If they get a one or a two they fail and things get worse! Describe how things get worse and ask them 'What do you do?'
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until the story ends

The rest of this guide is full of ideas to make inventing stories with your children as easy as possible. There is a suggested setting, ideas for stories, and advice on how to make your stories as amazing as possible.

A longer guide for grown ups

This game will help you make up stories together with your child. There are no stories in this guide, all the stories are in you, and your child. But you will find lots of helpful hints and tips about how to find them and tell them.

Here are the steps for making up a story

- Pick a kind of story
- Make up a hero
- Make up a story
- Use the dice

1. Pick a kind of story

“What kind of thing shall our story be about?”

Talk to your child and let them pick the kind of story they want to make up. For instance, a story about magic and monsters long ago, an adventure in space, or adventures on the pirate seas. If you need inspiration some initial setting notes for the Deep Dark Wood are included at the end of this document.

2. Make up a hero

Name

“What would you like your hero to be called?”

Your child's hero can be called anything they like, but I wouldn't suggest letting your child use their own name. Heroes might get attacked by monsters, have spells cast on them by witches, be blown out of airlocks or made to walk the plank. It's important your child remembers that it's just a story. Picking a different name for the hero helps with that.

Appearance

“And what do they look like?”

Ask your child to describe their hero, ask them what they wear, whether they're tall or short, what kind of hair they have. Listen carefully to the answers as you might want to reference their appearance later in the story. My children often like their heroes to carry things, often a picnic basket but sometimes a magic sword that fires keys at villains. Objects like these are a great setting off point for a story.

Skills

“What are they good at?”

Help your child come up with four things their hero is good at. I often ask this question in more general terms like “What do superheroes do?” When your child answers this question they're

telling you two things. First, they're telling you what they think is important for their hero, and next to that they're telling you what they want to happen in the story.

A child who says their fairy hero is good at being brave, fighting monsters, flying quickly and finding hidden things is expecting a different story to a child who picks being friendly, doing magic, talking to animals and hiding.

When choosing skills try and keep the skill categories broad, and varied. Skills like 'Being brave' or 'Running and jumping' can be used for lots of situations. Skills like 'Row a rowing boat' are more limiting. As your child gets older you can make things more specific.

Once you've got four skills that will work for both of you ask which skill their hero is best at. Assign that the D12, then ask which of the three remaining skills they're next best at - give that the D10. Then ask which of the remaining two they're best at - give that the D8. The last skill gets the D6 - don't describe this as their worst skill. This is something a hero can do - it's awesome!

When I assign dice I physically hand them to the kids, telling them "This is your being brave dice", "This is your fighting monsters dice" and so on.

3. Making up a story

So you have a genre, and a hero. Now all you need is a story. If you're out of practice making up stories don't worry. It's not hard, you could do it when you were three, and your child is going to help. Still, here are some tips...

- Don't over-prepare. A tiny bit of an idea is all you need. The story seeds in this guide are plenty to start with. Pick one and spend a few minutes thinking about it, or invent your own, and off you go.
- Hold your ideas loosely. Your child isn't going to do what you expect, so don't get attached to things that haven't happened yet.
- Ask lots of questions. If you're describing something, ask your child what it might be like. If you make the question specific it will be easier to answer.
 - 'As you get closer the space station comes into view. What shape is it? Where do spaceships land on it?'
 - 'The monster jumps down from the trees behind you. It reaches for you with it's - what do you think - claws or tentacles?'
 - Hidden in the underwater cave is the pirate treasure. There are crates of gold and jewels and one very special thing. What is it?

- Use the skills written on the story sheet to give options.
 - 'The angry hedgehogs are getting closer. Do you - Try to make friends with them? Fly away quickly? Bravely wait to see what they do?'
 - The wizard waves his wand and the curtains come to life and try to wrap you up. Do you use your own magic? Fight them with your sword? Run and jump past them?'
- Build on your child's ideas. Don't take decisions because 'that couldn't happen' or because 'that doesn't fit' or 'because that wouldn't work'. Take the ideas and build on them. Try and avoid responding to anything your child says with a negative. Instead go for a 'Yes, and ...' response.
 - 'The ferocious dragon is going to eat you up'
'I tickle the dragon with a feather'
'Yes, and he laughs so loud the building starts to collapse - what do you do?'
 - 'The goblins lock you in a dungeon'
'I open the door with a key'
'Yes, those goblins never saw you steal it. And now you've got to get past them - how do you do that?'

Story structure

Stories need a beginning, a middle and an end. One approach is to fill these in by

- **Starting with a bang.** Something should happen early. Something that creates a problem and lets you ask the essential question 'what do you do now?' Here's an example.

'All seems quiet on the Interstellar Cruiser HMS Starshine, when the alarms sound. The ship is getting faster and faster and rushing toward an asteroid field. What do you do?'

Perhaps resolving the immediate problem reveals the real challenge. In this case the ship is accelerating because the engines have been sabotaged.

- **Having One thing lead to another.** Complex interlinked narratives aren't what we're looking for here. To solve the problem created at the start, maybe three different things are needed.

'To stop the starship's engines exploding you'll need to find the mechanic, shut down the flux capacitor and destroy the evil robots in the engineering bay'

Doing each of those things might involve a number of challenges, but the key one could be tied to the skills your child selected for their hero. In this case perhaps; 'Being friendly', because the mechanic is hiding and has to be coaxed out, 'inventing things', because the flux capacitor is complicated and 'Shooting my laser gun', because that's what takes care of evil robots.

Of course your child might invent a robot mechanic, shoot the capacitor and make friends with the robots (and let's be honest, that all sounds like more fun), but the key is that there is an obvious, entertaining way forward at every step.

- **End in a satisfying way.** Kids like happy endings, which generally means everything back in it's right place, and back to normal. It also helps if there's a big showdown with the ultimate cause of the problem.

'The robots agree that they should not blow up the ship and decide to help you. But suddenly the airlock bursts open and in comes Mecha Grimclaw, the cyborg inventor. 'You've foiled my plan' he shouts 'but now I'm going to deal with you myself!'

4. Using the dice

The dice that you'll be using are there to help the story along. Heroes don't always get everything their own way. Plus children like rolling dice. When is it the right time to roll a dice?

- If the hero tries something that seems like it might fail
- If failure would be as interesting as success

then it's probably a good time to roll the dice.

Roll the dice related to the most suitable skill. ***If they get a three or more, their hero succeeds.***

For example, Space Explorer Louie is piloting his starship through an asteroid field. His 'Flying Spaceships' dice size is 10. So his player rolls a ten sided dice, and it comes up five - Louie successfully flies his ship through the asteroids!

Children like to describe exactly what happens when their hero succeeds at something. Let them make it as exciting and amazing as they want.

What happens if they fail?

If a child rolls a one or a two, then their hero has failed at whatever it was they were trying to do.

Here's what to do when a failure happens. Move quickly so that instead of dwelling on the failure the child moves straight on to answering the important question - 'what do you do now?'

First, make the situation worse, but don't bring it to an end. So...

- The monster catches you, **but it doesn't** eat you up
- Your jump across the chasm falls short leaving you clinging to a cliff, **but you don't** fall to your death
- You're too scared to go into the tunnel and the wolves are getting closer, **but you don't** run away

Once you've described the failure and escalated the situation ask the child 'What do you do now?'. If they don't have an idea, look at the skills on your child's story sheet and offer them choices based on those.

As long as each failure makes the situation worse, but doesn't end it then there will always, eventually be a happy ending. Meanwhile, things will get more and more dramatic. But just in case things don't start to turn around, here's some extra advice.

What happens if they fail repeatedly?

Sooner or later your child will roll a 1, then another 1, then a 2, then a 1... You may reach a point where escalating the situation some more just isn't feasible. Here are some routes out of this mess

Have something work - you don't have to roll the dice. Yes, that works! This can feel a little forced, but if your child has thought of something very different the impression is it succeeded because it was a good idea - and that's fine.

Shift the context to remove the immediate peril

- The monster throws you in a cauldron to eat later - how will you escape?
- You fall, but there is a lake at the bottom of the chasm - can you swim?
- Something comes out of the tunnel and pulls you in - but what was it?

Introduce a white knight who turns up to rescue the hero. This can feel somewhat unsatisfying, so be sure to give your child a chance to rescue them right back before the end of the story.

Optional

If you don't let a child use the same skill twice in a row during a situation you'll force some extra creativity into the story.

Tips and tricks

Making it Magic

What it looks like

Lots of different kinds of heroes can do magic. The best way to handle this is to ask your child to describe what happens when a spell works. Maybe the witch is turned into a frog, maybe the chair grows wings and flies across the chasm. Maybe there's just a bit of stardust and the broken plates are all back together. This is a great opportunity for using 'Yes, and' story telling techniques. So

"There are glowing lights, and the plates stick back together"

"Yes, and from then on there was a picture on the plates of the helpful fairy who fixed them"

The obvious problem

By its very nature magic can accomplish the impossible. This can be a problem. On a quest to recover the Golden Necklace from the top of Snowy Mountain your precocious child declares 'Monty the Wizard does a spell to bring him the necklace.' - what do you do?

Go with it - maybe getting the necklace is just the start of things. Maybe it was a test to see if Monty was clever enough to try the real quest. Sometimes its good to let bright ideas pay off, just remember that it may not make for a satisfying story this way.

Provide an explanation - the necklace is too far away. The necklace is in a magic box. Whoever stole the necklace has put a spell on it so Monty can't magic it back. As long as there's an explanation, your child will probably be fine with it. Just be sure to give them a chance to succeed at a magic test pretty quickly so they remain convinced that Monty is a brilliant wizard.

Cause a problem - messing about with magic causes all kinds of problems. Maybe the necklace was around the neck of a Yeti, and now Monty's got an angry Yeti who wants to go home to deal with.

Fighting Monsters

"I chop off his head" shouts your child, displaying a bloodthirstiness you hadn't expected. Don't worry, stories are full of this kind of thing. However this might not be something you want as part of a game you play with your child. The good news is, there are plenty of ways to resolve fight scenes that offer more drama and less brutality...

The monsters run away - this is the easiest one. The hero rushes forward swinging his sword, and the bad guys run for their lives. Which means they can come back later.

The bad guys surrender - after a dramatic and satisfying exchange of blows the bad guys surrender and promise to be good.

The monsters are humiliated - cutting off the giant's head is far less amusing than spanking him on the bottom until he cries.

The monsters are captured - pushed into a big hole, locked in a dungeon, thrown into jail - there are lots of ways for heroes to end a fight by capturing their opponents.

The monsters aren't real people - robots, skeletons, giant vegetables propelled by magic. All fair game for a hero's sword.

Will you child accept these substitutes for blood and gore? My experience is that the answer is almost always yes.

Setting : Tales from the Deep Dark Wood

Introduction text

"In the deep dark wood you will find trees that move by themselves, animals that talk and fairies who look after the forest. Who would you like to be in this story, a fairy, or a talking animal?"

Fairies

"Fairies are very small, no bigger than the palm of your hand. They have wings like butterflies or dragonflies and love to play in the sunshine. There are boy fairies, and girl fairies. What is the name of your fairy?"

[Fill in on the story sheet]

"Is your fairy tall or short? What do they wear? What colour hair do they have? Is it long or short? What do their wings look like?"

Do they carry anything with them?"

[Draw the fairy onto the story sheet]

"Fairies can do lots of different things. What is your fairy good at?"

[Pick four of the following, or invent your own, and write onto the story sheet]

Being brave
Being friendly
Doing magic
Talking to animals
Flying quickly
Fighting monsters
Finding hidden things

"Which of these things is your fairy best at?" [write 12 as the dice size]

"What are they next best at?" [write 10 as the dice size]

"Which of the last two are they best at?" [Write 8 as the dice size, and 6 as the dice size for the last one]

Suggested Fairy Skills

These are examples of the kinds of skills a fairy hero might have and the kinds of situations they might be used in. Feel free to invent your own, and keep interpretation of them as flexible as possible.

Being brave

Fairies are small, and often have to be brave. They can be scared of monsters, or the dark, or of being alone.

Being friendly

The deep dark wood is full of all kinds of strange people and creatures who just want to be left to their own business. But a friendly fairy can always find friends to help them.

Doing magic

Some fairies can cast magic spells. Fairy magic can do all kinds of things. Healing hurt creatures, turning monsters to stone or even making things disappear!

Talking to animals

Not all the animals in the Deep Dark Wood can talk to other creatures. But fairies who can do this can always talk with animals. What the animals say might not always make much sense though!

Flying quickly

All fairies can fly, but some can fly quicker than others. Fairies who can fly fast are very hard for monsters to catch.

Fighting monsters

Fairies might be too small to fight big monsters, but spiders, beetles, rats and other nasty creatures sometimes need to be chased away.

Finding hidden things

Fairies are very good at spotting things that big people don't see. This could be clues, or treasure.

Talking Animals

“Talking animals live in the deep dark forest. There are all kinds of talking animals, like foxes, badgers, mice, deer, sparrows and owls. The talking animals like to play with the fairies in the deep dark woods. Talking animals never eat other talking animals.”

[Fill in on the story sheet]

“What kind of animal are you? What colour is your fur or feathers? Is there something about you that looks different - like a pattern in your fur or a different coloured feather?”

[Draw the animal onto the story sheet]

“Animals can do lots of different things, what is your animal good at?”

[Pick four of the following, or invent your own, and write onto the story sheet]

Being brave

Being cute

Smelling things

Flying quickly

Hiding

Climbing

Being fierce

Running and jumping

“Which of these things is your animal best at?” [write 12 as the dice size]

“What are they next best at?” [write 10 as the dice size]

“Which of the last two are they best at?” [Write 8 as the dice size, and 6 as the dice size for the last one]

Animal Skills

These are examples of the kinds of skills an animal hero might have and the kinds of situations they might be used in. Feel free to invent your own, and keep interpretation of them as flexible as possible.

Being brave

Animals often have to be brave. For instance mice are scared of cats and foxes, while foxes are scared of wolves and wolves might be scared on hunters. Dark caves, witches or monsters can be scary too.

Smelling things

Some animals have an amazing sense of smell. They can smell things from far away, and tell which other animals have been somewhere.

Flying quickly

Some animals can fly, and animals that can fly quickly are really good at it. They can loop the loop, race other flying animals or fly through thick forests.

Hiding

Hiding and sneaking is something some animals are great at. Moving so quietly you can't be heard, disappearing from sight when the scary creatures appear or sneaking up on other creatures.

Climbing

The deep dark wood is full of trees, being able to climb them quickly is very helpful. There might be other things to climb too, like cliffs, towers or magic beanstalks.

Being fierce

Some animals can be very fierce, using their teeth, beak or claws to fight other animals, chase away monsters or catch their prey.

Running and jumping

Animals who are good at running and jumping have no trouble getting around the deep dark wood. They can dash through thick forest, jump over fallen logs and holes in the ground.

Making up stories in the Deep Dark Wood

Imagining the wood

To make making up a story easier, think about the answer to some of these questions, or ask your child...

What's your wood like?

Some woods are deep, dark and scary. Some are bright and sunlit. In some woods trouble lurks behind every tree, other woods are happy places where monsters are rare.

Is someone in charge?

It might be that your wood is ruled by a fairy king or queen. Or maybe there's a particular animal who is in charge - a bear or stag, or a very wise mouse. Where does the ruler live, what does it look like, what makes it special?

What else lives in the wood?

The wood could be home to all kinds of amazing creatures. There might be

- Dragons
- Unicorns
- Nymphs
- Witches
- Wizards
- Sprites
- Goblins
- Boggarts

Natural hazards

The wood also contains plenty of natural hazards that could be challenging. For instance

- Swamps
- Poisonous berries
- Deep pools
- Rushing rivers
- Fires
- Falling trees
- Dark caves
- Wells

Sounds in the wood

Birdsong, crackling twigs, rustling leaves, wind in the trees, far away howling, buzzing insects

Smells in the wood

Fresh tree smell, wildflower scent, wet moss, rotting wood, fur,

Sights in the wood

Tall trees, pools of sunlight, hollow trees, abandoned burrows, wild orchids

Tastes in the wood

Sweet berries, crunchy nuts, bitter leaves, fresh water, sticky honey

Feelings in the wood

Clouds of insects, soft moss underfoot, sharp twigs, crumbly old leaves, rough bark

Story seeds in the Deep Dark Wood

Play these straight, combine them, or use the twists to add a bit more fun to the story

1. A wicked witch has kidnapped a baby owl. Can the heroes rescue her?
Twist: The witch is lonely since her cat died and wants an animal to be her friend
2. Beavers have dammed the river and it is flooding! The rabbit warrens will soon be under water.
Twist: The beavers have been tricked into this by a cunning fox who likes to eat rabbits
3. A confused wizard keeps turning animals into other animals. Can he be stopped?
Twist: The wizard cast a spell on his glasses and everything looks wrong to him
4. Wolves have moved into the forest and are hunting the nice animals
Twist: The wolves themselves are fleeing a worse threat - a hungry dragon!
5. Fire is raging through the woods, can the heroes save their homes?
Twist: The fires were started by people who want to turn the woods into fields
6. The fairy king has a new cloak. It is so beautiful all the fairies are fighting over it!
Twist: The cloak was a gift from his wicked uncle who wants to be king
7. A giant hole has appeared in the wood and foul smells are coming out of it.
Twist: The hole is part of a goblin mine.
8. In a storm the heroes are blown far away and must find their way home
Twist: The place they are blown to is a magical kingdom in the clouds where they are trespassers who cannot leave

9. Three hedgehogs arrive, explaining they are people who have been turned into animals. Can the heroes help?

Twist: The three hedgehogs were transformed for stealing, and are no better now than then!

10. The Spider Queen's silk cloak has been stolen. Can the heroes recover it?

Twist: It turns people invisible, how to catch the thief?

Feedback

Thanks for taking the time to try out this game. If you'd like to send feedback, there's a form at

<http://goo.gl/forms/k6K02Xh3oUgm7aEz2>

Versions

Version 1.2

The game now has a name - Amazing Tales

Table of contents and new formatting added

Version 1.1

This playtest document describing a creative roleplaying game to play with children between the ages of 4 and 7. The grown up should read this document before introducing the game to the child.

You'll need four dice - ideally with 12, 10, 8 and 6 sides (d12, d10, d8, d6), a piece of paper, and something to write / draw with. If you don't have lots of polyhedral dice to hand just an ordinary 6 sided dice (d6) for everything.