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Once Upon A Time



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Introduction

Once Upon A Time is a game in which players create a story using cards that show important elements from fairy tales. One player is the storyteller and creates a story using the ingredients on her cards, trying to guide the plot toward her own ending. The other players try to use their cards to interrupt her and become the new storyteller. The object of the game is for the players to enjoy themselves and to tell a good story. The player who uses all the story cards in her hand and guides the plot to her ending wins the game.

Description of Play

The first storyteller starts to tell a story. Whenever she mentions an element on one of her cards she places that card face up on the table. If the storyteller mentions something in her story that is an element on one of the other players' cards, then that player can interrupt her and take over the story. (There are also some special cards that allow players to interrupt the storyteller at other times.) When a player has played all her cards by including them in the story she can play her "Happy Ever After" card and win the game.

The Cards

There are two types of cards in the game: "Once Upon A Time" cards (also called "storytelling cards") and "Happy Ever After" cards (also called "ending cards"). Each player is dealt one Happy Ever After card and several Once Upon A Time cards.

This is a storytelling card:



"Once Upon A Time" Cards

Each storytelling card illustrates one of the people, places, and things that will appear in your story. They are divided into five groups:

Characters — The people and creatures that the story is about (e.g., "Queen" or "Wolf").



Items — The important objects which feature in the story (e.g., "Sword" or "Spell").



Places — Locations that the characters in the story will visit (e.g., "Palace" or "Forest").



Aspects — Ways of describing the characters, places, and objects in the story (e.g., "Happy" or "Disguised").

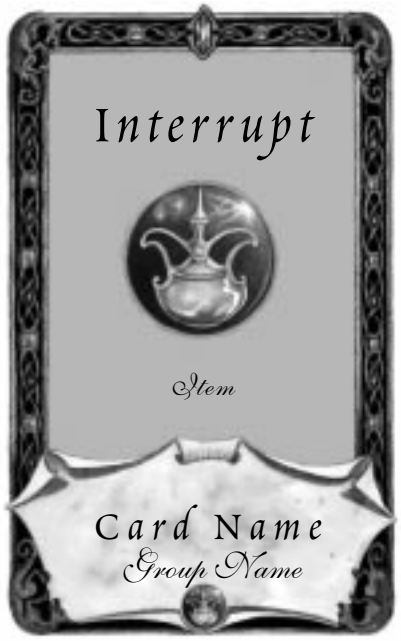


Events — Some of the things that happen to the characters in the story (e.g., "An Argument" or "People Meet").



Each card is clearly marked with name of its group; and also with an icon representing that group.

There are also some special Once Upon A Time cards called "Interrupt" cards.



Group Icon

You can use Interrupt cards as if they were normal storytelling cards: They each contain a story ingredient, and each of them belongs to one of the five groups. You can also use them in a special way: to interrupt the storyteller after she has played her card. This will be explained later on.

"Happy Ever After" Cards

Each "Happy Ever After" card contains a possible ending for a fairy tale. Players each receive only one of these cards, and must do their best to tell the story so it will reach this ending.



Playing the Game

Deal the cards. One Happy Ever After card should be dealt to each player and then the following number of Once Upon A Time cards, depending on how many players there are in the game:

2 players	10 cards each
3 players	8 cards each
4 players	7 cards each
5 players	6 cards each
6 or more players	5 cards each

Decide who will be the first storyteller. This could be the oldest player, the youngest player, or (as is traditional — at least among bearded game designers) the player with the longest beard. Or each player could draw a card from the Once Upon A Time deck, and the player whose card starts with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet (ignoring "A" and "The") goes first. We suggest that the owner of game decides which method to use, and that you stick to the same method for the rest of the evening.

The player who was chosen to be storyteller begins to tell a story. She may tell the story in any way she likes, and is not in any way limited by the cards in her hand. Whenever she mentions something which is shown on one of her cards, she may play that card, placing it face up on the table.

Each card should be mentioned in a separate sentence, and should be of some importance to the story. It is not acceptable to mention things for no reason just so you can play your cards.

Examples

Storyteller: "...'You will never be able to slay the evil King,' she said, 'Because he lives in an indestructible palace at the top of a distant mountain...'"

At this point you could play the "Palace" card (or the "King," or the "Mountain") because the palace is an important part of the story which is being told.

Storyteller: "...So he went off to find the mountain. On his way, he saw lots of villages where there were horses, shepherdesses, stepmothers, and frogs and also many strange things like giants, wolves, and talking giraffes. Finally, he arrived at the mountain..."

The storyteller could not play a "Horse," "Shepherdess," "Stepmother," "Frog," "Giant," "Wolf," or "This Animal Can Talk." Although these things have been mentioned, they are of no importance to the story.

The storyteller can continue to speak until someone interrupts her. It is possible (although extremely difficult) for one storyteller to play all her cards, finish the story, and win the game before anyone manages to interrupt her.

Passing

If the storyteller wishes, she can end her turn at any time by saying "Pass." A player who passes must pick up a card from the Once Upon A Time deck, but may also discard a card from her hand. Play then moves on to the player on her left.

Interrupting

There are two main ways for the other players to interrupt the storyteller.

1: *If the storyteller mentions something in her story which is on a card held by another player, that player can interrupt.*

For example:

Storyteller: "...And so she fell asleep under the great oak tree that grew in the forest..."

At this point, a player with the "Forest" card could play it, interrupt the storyteller, and continue the story herself.

The storyteller does not have to use the exact words that are written on a card in order to be interrupted with it. For example:

Storyteller: "...And the King fell in love with the woodcutter's daughter [plays "Two People Fall in Love card"] and they were married. A year and a day later she gave birth to a baby boy..."

At this point a player who holds the "Prince" or "Child" card can play it and interrupt. A baby is a child and the son of a King is a Prince, even though the storyteller has not used those exact words.

Players may not anticipate things which the storyteller has not yet said:

Storyteller: "...As he tiptoed through the cave, he heard a loud, deep, snoring sound..."

A player could not interrupt with the "Monster" card at this point, because the snoring could be coming from a bear, or a wizard, or even an underground river which sounds like someone snoring.

If it is not immediately clear whether or not an interruption is fair, you should decide by a show of hands from the players not involved in the challenge.

2: *When the storyteller plays a card, she may be interrupted by any player who has an Interrupt card whose group matches that of the card that has just been played.*

For example, the card "Interrupt; Any Object" can be played when the storyteller plays an "object" card. (N.B.: It does not allow a player to interrupt when the storyteller mentions an object in his story. Interrupt cards may only be used to interrupt the storyteller after he has played a card.)

When the storyteller has been interrupted, her

turn ends, and she must pick up an extra card from the top of the Once Upon A Time deck. The player who interrupted her must now continue the story from where she left off. Everything that the new storyteller says must follow on sensibly and consistently from the story that the last storyteller has been telling.

Other Ways the Storyteller Can Change

If the storyteller pauses in her story for more than five seconds, then her turn ends, she must pick up a card, and the player on her left becomes storyteller.

If the storyteller starts to ramble; stops making sense; tries to make something happen which is foolish or which contradicts something that has gone before; then her turn ends, she must pick up a card, and the player on her left becomes storyteller. If it is not immediately obvious when this has happened, you should decide by a show of hands. We find that in practice, most groups shout "No! Silly!" at the top of their voices.

(**Important Note:** The above two rules are intended to encourage people to tell enjoyable and believable stories, and to ensure that the game is as fast-moving as possible. They should not be used as tactics to take the story away from a player who is winning; nor should they be used to harass younger or less articulate players.)

If someone tries to interrupt and the interruption is judged to be incorrect, the failed

interrupter discards the card that she tried to interrupt with, and takes two cards from the Once Upon A Time deck.

If two people interrupt at the same time, then the first one to play her card has made the successful interruption and becomes the new storyteller. In this case, there is no penalty for the person who made the unsuccessful interruption.

Ending

When the storyteller has played all her Once Upon A Time cards, she can then play her Happy Ever After card to end the story. Provided this brings the story to a sensible and satisfying conclusion, then the game and the story are over, and the player who played her ending card has won.

The storyteller may not introduce any new element into the story before playing her Happy Ever After card, although she may add a sentence or two to link her last story card with her ending.

Should the other players judge that the storyteller's ending card does not finish the story satisfactorily or make sense, then that player must draw a new ending card from the Happy Ever After deck and one story card from the Once Upon A Time deck. Play then passes to the person on her left.

(We recommend that you do not enforce this rule too strictly, particularly with inexperienced or younger players: Only if an ending is obviously complete nonsense should it be disallowed.)

Example of Play

Tom, Cliff, Spike, Jessica, Amy, and James are playing a game. They cut the Once Upon A Time deck and find that Cliff is going to start off the story.

Cliff: "Once Upon A Time there was an old woman..."

(Plays "Old Woman" card)

"...Who was very sad. She lived in a very poor country which had an evil king..."

(Plays "King" card)

"...Who taxed the people terribly. All the people wanted someone to come along and get rid of the king, but no one in the kingdom was brave enough to do so. The old woman decided that she would go and find a Hero to help her, so she set off on a long journey..."

(Spike plays the "Journey" card. He becomes the new storyteller. Cliff takes the top card from the Once Upon A Time deck, and play continues)

Spike: "She travelled for many days until she came to a village."

(Plays "Village" card)

"She asked around to see if there was a Hero in the village, but they said that the only hero they knew of lived at the top of the nearby mountain."

(Plays "Mountain" card.)

"The old woman climbed up the mountain and after many tiring hours came to a castle. She knocked on the door..."

(Spike plays "Door" card.)

(Jessica then plays an "Any Item" interrupt card. Since a Door is an Item, this is a correct interrupt. Spike takes the top card from the Once Upon A Time deck and Jessica takes up the story.)

Jessica: "There was no reply to the knock and so the old woman peered in through a nearby window."

(Plays "Window" card.).

"She saw a man sitting at a table..."

(Tom tries to interrupt with the "People Meet" card, but the rest of the players don't think that the two people have actually met, so Tom discards his card and takes the top two from the Once Upon A Time deck and Jessica continues.)

Jessica: "As I was saying, she looked in and saw a man sitting at the table absolutely still. She called through the window to him, but he didn't respond. So she pushed open the window and climbed into the room to see if he was all right. As she jumped down from the window sill, a Frog hopped over from under the table. To her surprise, it spoke to her..."

(Plays "This Animal Can Talk.")

"...And told her that it was the servant of the man at the table and had been turned into a frog by a witch with the same spell which had frozen the man solid. The old woman thought for a while and decided...well, I can't think of what she decided. I pass."

(Play now passes on to Tom who is sitting on the left of Jessica. Jessica discards one of her cards, and picks up a new one from the Once Upon A Time deck.)

Rule Variants

Multiple Endings

In this version you are dealt two Happy Ever After cards at the start of the game either of which you can play to win the game. This is a good variant to use if you are just learning the game, and can also be used for balancing the game if some players are more experienced than the rest: Give the less experienced players two ending cards to aim for.

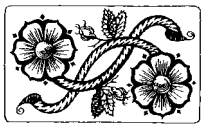
Exchanging Endings

If you are telling the story and pass play on to the player on your left you can discard your ending card, picking a new one from the top of the Ending deck. If you do this you must take two

cards from the top of the story deck instead of the one card you would normally take for passing. You cannot discard an ending card and a Once Upon A Time card at the same time.

Alternative Start to the Game

Start the first hand of the game as normal, but after each game the player with the most cards left in their hand begins as the storyteller for the next game. This gives the players who are less assertive or whose endings are written out early on in a game a chance of controlling the story at the start of the next game.



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Special Thanks: Alex Klesen, Nicole Lindroos Frein, the Carta Mundi gang (especially Luc, Bie & Ilse), & Halloween Concept

ISBN 1-887801-00-6

A French language edition of this game, «Il était une fois...» (ISBN 2-910529-10-X), is published by Halloween Concept. For information write to: Halloween Concept, 11 rue de Marseille, 75010 Paris, France.

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