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1 Introduction



Herold approaches the door cautiously, suspicious of traps. He inspects closely, but being a dumb barbarian, he is unlikely to find anything regardless. Confident the door is not trapped, he raises his hammer and brings it *crashing down* on the wooden impediment. The door is no match for his strength and shatters before his touch. Was he right about there being no traps? ...

At its simplest, Commonsense is a game where you Narrate a Story and ask Questions to resolve uncertainty. Everything else is optional.

As you Narrate, you build the Story. The Story includes details of the setting, “magic requires incantation”, aspects of a character, “Peter is keen-eyed”, events that occurred, “Delilah fell off that cliff”, or actions that characters took, “we docked at Midnight Station”. The Story establishes certainty.

Narrating may also alter the Story and change what is certain, “magic requires intense focus, and most people require incantation to achieve that focus”, “Peter can see the future and hides his ability by pretending to be keen-eyed”, “an *illusion* of Delilah fell off that cliff”.

Narrating can take many forms. You can describe scenes using copious adjectives or briefly establish a detail or two. You can wax poetic or quickly explain the actions of characters. As

1 Introduction

long as you expand the Story, you are Narrating. In practice, you may find yourself switching between techniques as situations demand. Narrating may mean describing events as they occur, but it may also mean pausing to ponder a detail you forgot or debate a rule of the setting.

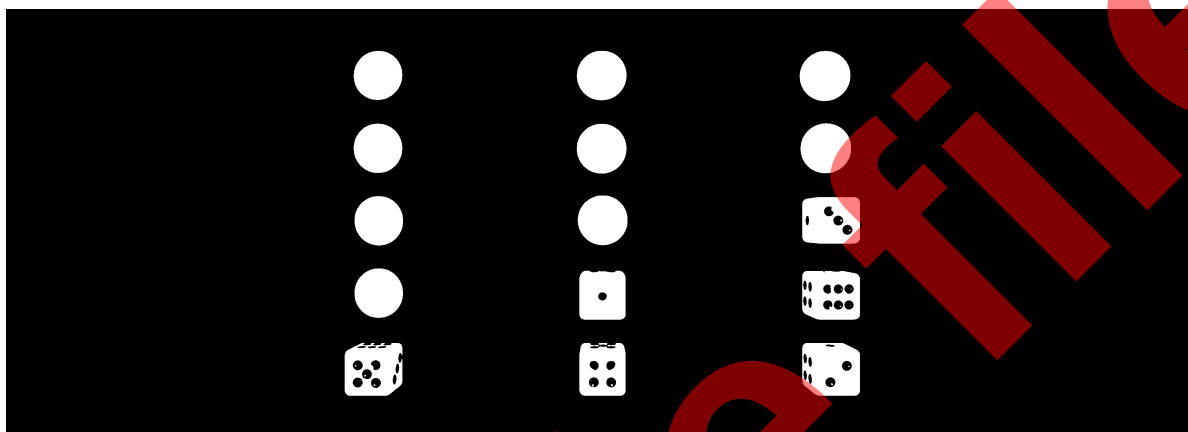
Commonsense can be played with one or more players. With more than one player, every player can Narrate, ask Questions, propose Answers, and suggest Reasons. Players can take turns Narrating or jump in as they see fit. Each player can have a character only they can Narrate or every player can Narrate every character. Do what works for your group.

Questions and Common Questions & Situations provides advice and examples for the core of the game, Questions themselves. For those looking to explore optional elements or different ways of playing:

- Character-Creation provides advice for designing characters, with Life-Events providing a more detailed procedure.
- Scenarios provides a procedure for setting up and balancing a game, and Campaigns provides advice for playing a series of Scenarios.
- Options provides a number of additional smaller options.



2 Questions



When uncertain, ask a Question:

1. Add Answers and Reasons until you cannot easily think of more. Reasons must be certain.
2. If no Answer has any Reasons, continue as if each Answer has one Reason.
3. Remove Answers with no Reasons.
4. If the Question has only one Answer, that Answer is true. Otherwise, continue.
5. For each Answer:
 1. Roll a d6.
 2. Roll a number of additional d6 equal to the difference between the number of Reasons for this Answer and the number of Reasons for the Answer with the most Reasons.
 3. Use the lowest roll as the result.
6. The Answer with the highest result is true. If Answers tie for highest, return to 5 without Answers not tied for highest.

Every Answer to a Question expands the Story. The Answer with the highest result is established as being true. Other Answers are established as being false.

In the above image, each column is an Answer and each circle is a Reason. The first Answer has a result of 5, the second has a result of 1, and the third has a result of 2.

Vaeril knows druidic lore, including details of animals and properties of most herbs.

...

It's Spring. Bees are buzzing and flowers are blooming.

...

Healing herbs are rare. Most are scavenged early.

...

Vaeril's going to look for healing herbs in the forest.

Question: Does she find them before it gets dark?

She finds the herbs	It gets dark first
Vaeril knows druidic lore	Healing herbs are rare
It's Spring	1
3	6

In the above Question, the Answer to find healing herbs (H) has 2 Reasons and the Answer for it getting dark first (D) has 1 Reason. Roll 1d6 for H, because it has the most Reasons. Roll 2d6 for D, because it has 1 Reason less than H and therefore rolls 1 additional d6. If the d6 for H rolls higher than the lowest d6 for D, Vaeril finds the herbs. If the lowest d6 for D rolls higher than the d6 for H, it gets dark before she finds them. If you roll 3 for "She finds the herbs" and 1 and 6 for "It gets dark first", Vaeril finds the herbs.

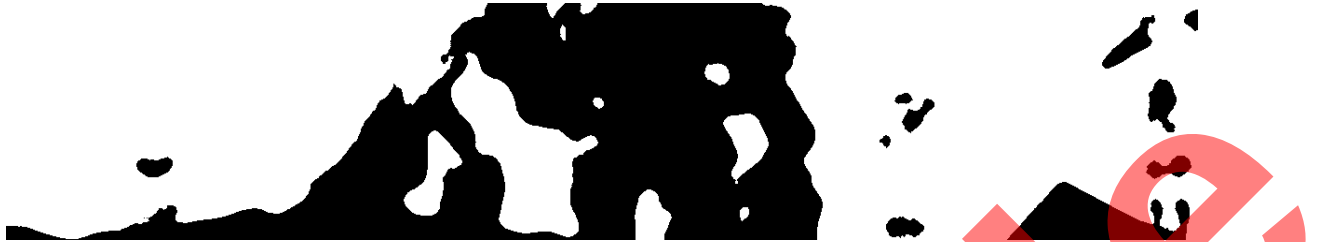
Does Vaeril find healing herbs in the forest (H) before it gets dark (D)? She knows druidic lore (+H) and it's spring (+H), but healing herbs are rare (+D). **H: 4; D: 2,5.**

Vaeril finds healing herbs in the forest (H) because she knows druidic lore (+H) and it's spring (+H), but it may be dark before she finds them (D) because healing herbs are rare (+D). **H: 5; D: 3,5.**

Examples of Questions in this book are presented in a particular format, but there is no wrong way to ask or record a Question, as long as Answers and Reasons are clear.



2.1 Question Validity



Ethan's rifle is well-crafted. It fires true and rarely jams.

...

The robotic walker has a forcefield. It's advanced technology beyond human means, nearly indestructible to humans.

...

Ethan takes aim at the robotic walker, calms his breath, and fires round after round.

Question: Does he stop its advance before it reaches us?

He stops its advance

It reaches us first

Ethan's rifle is well-crafted

The robotic walker has a forcefield

2

4

Nick can teleport. With a moment of focus, he can appear anywhere in his sight.

...

Using a pair of binoculars, Nick eyes the interior of the compound from afar. Then, he triggers his power and teleports in.

Question: Does Nick bypass the guard-post unseen?

Yes

No

Nick can teleport

The guards on post are looking for trespassers

6

1

Reasons should make sense. The forcefield is "nearly indestructible to humans", so the quality of Ethan's rifle is irrelevant. This Reason is invalid and shouldn't be included. Similarly, unless Nick's teleportation makes light or sound that can be detected by the guard post, it doesn't matter how vigilant they are because Nick is never near them.

Keep validity in mind as Reasons are added. New Reasons may invalidate existing Reasons.

2.1.1 Numbers



Keri is an expert sword-fighter. Through countless battles, she has honed her skills.

...

Goblins are weak. They are small creatures, lacking the physique of a typical human.

...

The goblins of Elyria's Steppes are a horde. They have amassed into a dangerous throng of hundreds.

...

Keri stands before the goblins of Elyria's Steppes, resolute and ready for combat.

Question: Does Keri slay the goblins?

Yes

No

Keri is an expert sword-fighter

There are hundreds of goblins

Goblins are weak

3

2

3

This Question has weak Reasons. A single swordswoman is unlikely to beat hundreds of enemies, even if they are weak individually.

Question: What happens first?

Keri slays a few of the goblins

They overrun her

Keri is an expert sword-fighter

There are hundreds of goblins

Goblins are weak

5

1

1

Smaller wins and larger consequences can make Reasons valid when large numbers are involved.

2.1.2 Scale



Dragons have tough scales. The scales cover most of their body and can deflect all but the greatest of blows or most enchanted of weapons.

...

Ancient dragons are massive and mighty, even more so than common dragons. Their sheer mass can crush people and houses alike. Human-sized weapons are likely to miss vital organs, but they are a large target. They have physical strength far beyond most mortals.

...

Tharroskrael is an ancient dragon.

...

Keri charges Tharroskrael while brandishing her sword high. She prepares to fell the wyrm.

Question: What happens next?

Keri slays the dragon

Tharroskrael hits her

Keri is an expert sword fighter

Dragons have tough scales

2

3

This Question has weak Reasons. As with numbers, larger or more powerful adversaries can affect validity.

Question: What happens next?

Keri cuts the dragon's leg	Tharroskrael devours her
Keri is an expert sword-fighter	Dragons have tough scales
Ancient dragons are massive	Ancient dragons are mighty
6	Ancient dragons are massive
5	4

Keri slides under the wyrm, sword against leg, as he slashes wildly. Luckily, the blade finds a gap in the creatures scales and tears flesh. Tharroskrael rears in pain and rage. The wound is relatively minor for a creature of his size, but it may slow him down.

As with numbers, Smaller wins and larger consequences can increase validity.

Keri dashes under the dragon and stabs upward towards his chest.

Question: Does her sword hit its mark?

His chest will be hard to reach, so his size is not an advantage this time.

Her stab succeeds	Tharroskrael devours her
Keri is an expert sword-fighter	Dragons have tough scales
Tharroskrael's leg is hurt	Ancient dragons are mighty
3	Ancient dragons are massive
3	1

Just as Tharroskrael is about to stomp the impudent human, his injured leg buckles, giving Keri the opening she needs. Her sword finds its mark and the wyrm's eyes go wide as it feels fear for the first time in a millennium. The creature is bleeding profusely. The blood flows freely, but he has a lot of it.

Question: Does Tharroskrael succumb to his wound?

Yes	No
He is bleeding profusely	Ancient dragons are massive
2	5

The defeat of a powerful entity should typically be uncertain. When uncertain, ask a Question. Are injuries sufficient for a valid Reason? A dragon probably won't die from a cut leg, but a stab to the chest or slash of the throat may do it. If an adversary is powerful, fatal injuries should be hard to inflict, and lighter injuries can pave the way for more rewarding actions.

2.1.3 Genre

Questions should make sense given the *genre* you are playing in. In a game of hopeless struggles against unknowable forces, it doesn't make sense to knock Cthulhu out with a punch, but in an upbeat game about superheroes, it might. Likewise, in an upbeat game about superheroes, your best friend should probably escape a senseless demise.

2.2 Pausing Questions



If we don't do something soon, Minh may wake up and draw the attention of an Eerie. Vaeril knows herbs that may help, and the nearby woods are full of them.

Question: Will Vaeril find the herbs before Minh wakes up?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Vaeril knows druidic lore Soporific herbs are uncommon

I'm not sure if Spring is a good time for soporific herbs.

Question: Is it the right time for these herbs?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Most herbs grow in Spring

Question Continued: Will Vaeril find the herbs before Minh wakes up?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Vaeril knows druidic lore Soporific herbs are uncommon

Soporific herbs grow in Spring **5**
4 6

While asking a Question, you may feel uncertain about an Answer or Reason. A Question can be paused while other Questions are asked to resolve uncertainty about the original.

If details relevant to a Question were never elaborated, but you feel certain about them, you can briefly pause the Question to Narrate before returning to it.

2.3 Layered Questions



As we ride into Kalimos, we notice a commotion. There appears to be a festival.

Question: What's the festival about?

A historic event	Something religious	A harvest-festival
-------------------------	---------------------	--------------------

2

1

1

Question: What kind of historic event?

The coronation of a ruler	Their nation's anniversary	Celebrating a past military victory
---------------------------	----------------------------	--

2

4

5

Kalimos is celebrating their victory over Kyrax. The streets are packed, banners are flowing, and jubilation is in the air.

If a Question may have many Answers, you can split it into Questions of increasing specificity and think of Answers and Reasons for one small Question at a time.

2.4 Counting Reasons



For simple Questions, you may count Reasons in your head or on your fingers. You can use one hand to count Reasons for one Answer and the other hand for another. If a Question has more than two Answers, you can skip a finger to count multiple Answers on one hand.

For more complex Questions, a variety of tokens can be useful for counting: coins, beads, marbles, stones. Notecards with details of the Story on them are especially useful for counting Reasons.

3 Common Questions & Situations

3.1 Multiple-Choice Questions



A because X. B because Y. C because Z.

Multiple-choice Questions are common and versatile.

Question: Where's the relic?		
A sunken temple in the swamp	The city-catacombs	A ruin in the desert
5	6	3

Question: Why are they here?		
To rescue someone	To shut down the factory	To retrieve something
3	6	4

Multiple-choice Questions with no Reasons can be useful for establishing early details of a setting or story.

3.1.1 Describing Locations



The house was eerily abandoned. Nobody knows why.

...

The town has cult-activity. They are secretive, but not overtly hostile.

...

The door opens with an echoing creak.

Question: What do we see?

A ghost	Just a bunch of dusty furniture
The house was eerily abandoned	Ghosts are good at hiding...
The town has cult-activity	1
4	2

If you arrive at a new location and are uncertain about it, you can flesh it out with Multiple-Choice Questions

3.1.2 Describing NPCs



Khronos Squad is a superhero-group. They deal with powered criminals.

...

Khronos Squad is militaristic. They have a rigid hierarchy and tend to be serious.

...

Khronos Squad tracks down covert villains. They specialize in dealing with villains in hiding or with abilities allowing them to deceive.

...

Kairos Kael leads Khronos Squad. She is the head of their hierarchy and makes most overarching decisions.

...

Kairos Kael is tactical. She prefers to plan for situations and execute those plans with coordination.

...

After weeks of odd-jobs, Rheia finally impressed Khronos Squad and can meet Kairos.

Question: What's Kairos Kael like?

Fiery and passionate	Cold and calculating	Suspicious
Khronos Squad is militaristic	Kairos Kael is tactical	Khronos Squad tracks down covert villains
1	5	3

Kairos Kael is cold and calculating. While not mean or hostile, She believes in the greater good and is unlikely to provide emotional comfort.

You can fill in the blanks of an uncertain NPC with Multiple-Choice Questions. Use what you already know as Reasons, or roll without Reasons if the NPC is a blank slate.

3.2 Binary Questions



A because X. Not A because Y.

Paths are a secret. Few humans know of their existence, and they are unlikely to be believed.

...

“Why are you here? How did you get here? Are you alone?”, the leader fires off. “You wouldn’t believe me, you wouldn’t believe me, and yes”, Milton responds. After some back and forth, he answers honestly.

Question: Does she know about Paths?

An ancestor of hers, or she herself, must have followed a Path to get off Earth.

Yes

No

She is not on Earth

Paths are a secret

2

3

A single binary Question can establish a simple detail, if neither Answer breaks the Story. If Answers aren’t mutually exclusive, and the Story doesn’t stall if no Answer is true, one binary Question for each possibility can resolve them.

3.2.1 Random Events



The building is crumbling. It was **decrepit** before the fighting started, and it is falling apart now.

...

The building has support-pillars. They are probably the only reason the building has not collapsed.

...

The building **shudders** and a rumble reverberates. Our ears ring from the force of the explosion.

Question: Does the floor collapse under us?

Yes

No

An explosive just went off downstairs

The building has support-pillars

The building is crumbling

4

1

3

Consider interesting things that may occur during downtime or whenever you want to spice up the game. Ask Questions about those things occurring.

3.2.2 Declaring You Have Something



The tunnel dims as Milton continues.

Question: Does Milton have a flashlight?

Yes	No
Milton is a tech-enthusiast, so he likes carrying portable gadgets	Milton was not planning to explore when he left home
Milton is an urban-explorer, and a flashlight is good for exploring	4
Milton has an EDC bag, which can easily contain a flashlight	4
5	5

Milton has a portable flashlight. It is perfect for lighting the myriad darkness encountered among The Paths.

Players may not want to meticulously track every item their character is carrying. If an item is on a character sheet, they have it. Otherwise, whether they have it may be uncertain.

3.3 What Next?



The tactical team are trained soldiers. They are alert, accurate, and well-armed.

...

Milton tries to follow the tactical team covertly, unsure how they'll react to an unknown agent.

Question: What happens next?

They notice him	They run into trouble
The tactical team are trained soldiers	Milton is experienced at sneaking

Question: Is there a lot of trouble?

Yes	No
A tactical team was sent	

The factory is teeming with trouble. Going far without serious preparation is dangerous.

Question Continued: What happens next?

They notice him	They run into trouble
The tactical team are trained soldiers	Milton is experienced at sneaking
6	The factory is teeming with trouble
5	4

Milton follows through winding corridors. Echoes of boots on metal reverberate. He tries to keep his distance, but the sound quickly gives him away. Guns turn to point. “Show yourself”, the leader shouts. Milton walks out with his hands up.

Question: How do they respond to him?

They open fire	They question him
----------------	--------------------------

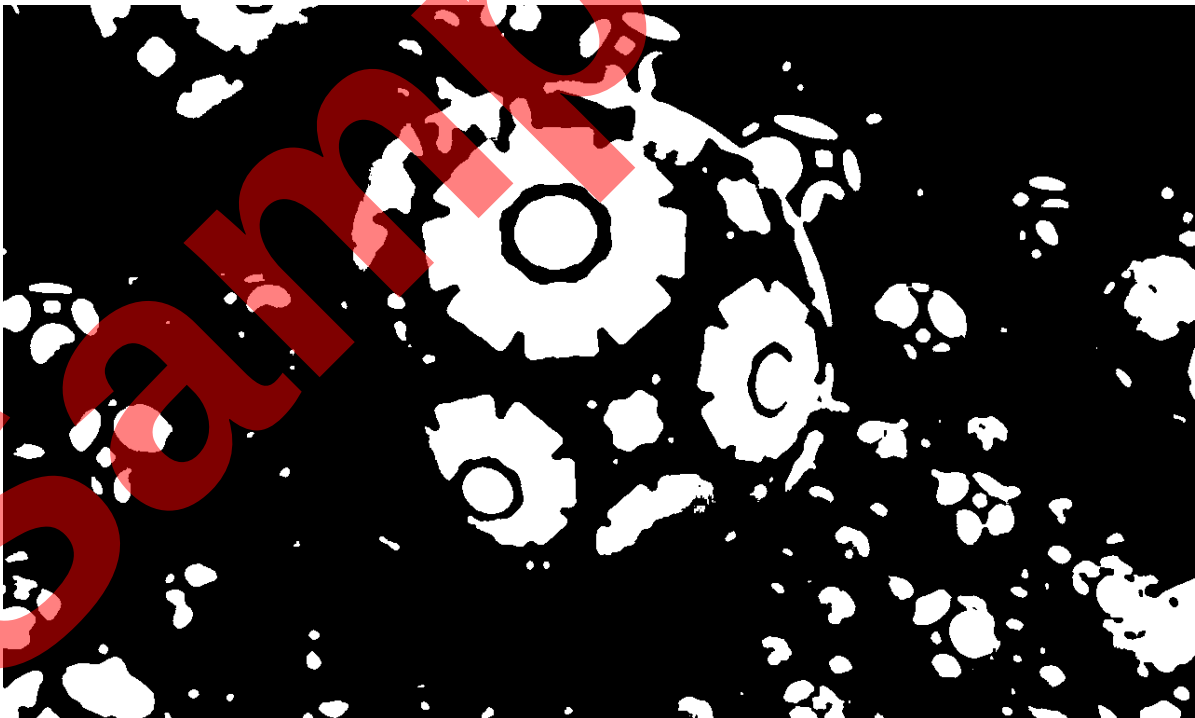
He has no visible weapons

“Why are you here? How did you get here? Are you alone?”, the leader fires off. “You wouldn’t believe me, you wouldn’t believe me, and yes”, Milton responds. After some back and forth, he answers honestly.

Questions about what occurs next can move a Story forward. Consider:

1. What are characters’ goals, and what actions will they take to achieve those goals?
2. What may occur to make characters change goals or actions?
 - May environmental factors make characters change goals or actions?
 - May a character making progress towards their goal make other characters change goals or actions?

Ask a Question with these goals and occurrences as Answers. If you can’t think of a Reason for an Answer, keep it in mind for future rounds of Questions. If you can’t think of a Reason for a goal-Answer, consider a step towards that goal as an Answer.



3.3.1 Combat



Keri is fast on her feet. She uses it to her advantage when in combat and dueling. She can maneuver effectively and strike quickly.

...

The bruiser has strength of 10 men. With their magical enhancement, they can out-muscle any normal humanoid.

...

The nearby house is on fire. It will be ashes in minutes.

...

Keri fights defensively to angle for a better position. The bruiser is trying to overpower her.

Question: What happens next?

Keri puts the sun at her back	The bruiser knock her down	The nearby house collapses
Keri is an expert sword-fighter	The bruiser has the strength of 10 men	The nearby house is on fire
Keri is fast on her feet	3	5
4	5	2

Keri has the sun at her back. Her opponent will be distracted and blinded.

Being in a better position, Keri tries to hamstring the bruiser. They still try to overpower her.

Question: What happens next?

Keri hamstrings	The bruiser knock her down	The nearby house collapses
Keri is an expert sword-fighter	The bruiser has the strength of 10 men	The nearby house is on fire
Keri is fast on her feet	5	1
Keri has the sun at her back	3	4
1	6	5

Keri is down. She will be vulnerable until she takes time to get back up.

Answers and Reasons may not change significantly between rounds. After each round, details detrimental to one or more characters may be established. Between rounds, tactics may change and characters may flee or fight on.

Skeletons are weak. Although magically animated, they lack the musculature to give them the strength of most humanoid, and their bones are frail without muscle and fat to protect.

...

In a whirl of righteous anger, Roshan smashes through the skeletons. They stand no chance against his training, and his Dwarven greatsword effortlessly cleaves their decaying bones.

Question: Was he injured?

Yes	No
There were several skeletons	Roshan was raised to fight
5	Roshan has steel platemail
1	Skeletons are weak
6	6

If a goal-Answer, like the defeat of a character, has no Reasons, it cannot happen. If an injury wouldn't make a character change their goal or actions, it shouldn't be an Answer. However, if an injury is possible on the way to an Answer, ask a Question about it between rounds.

Non-physical conflicts, like social and mental struggles, can be resolved like combat.



3.3.2 Dungeon Delving



The temple is swarming with fish-people. It will be hard to get far without running into them.

...

Fish-people set traps. They are known for having both a talent and a penchant for trapping their places of residence.

...

Roshan cautiously sneaks through the swamp-temple to find the relic.

Question: What happens first?

He finds the relic	He runs into a trap	He is ambushed by fish-people	He finds all routes are blocked
Roshan was raised to avoid danger Roshan can hide in his an extra-reality pocket 2	Fish-people set traps 6 1	They are more familiar with the temple The temple is swarming with fish-people 6	Fish-people set traps The temple is swarming with fish-people 2

Exploring environments with Questions about what occurs next allows for fast play and easy improvisation.

3.3.3 Investigation



Raul and Melissa are professional investigators.

Melissa is good with people. She can get them talking, get them to like her, and get them telling her what she needs to know.

...

We were warned off. If we continue our investigation, people will be coming for us.

...

Raul spends his time at the library looking into the history of the supposedly haunted house, old newspaper clippings and the like. Meanwhile, Melissa asks around to find survivors connected with the incident.

Question: What happens first?

Raul finds something	Melissa finds something	Raul gets jumped	Melissa gets jumped	We hit the deadline
Raul is a professional investigator	Melissa is a professional investigator Melissa is good with people	We were warned off	We were warned off Melissa is wandering around town	We have 2 days left

Question: How hard is the information to find?

Hard

Easy

Nobody found anything useful before

Question Continued: What happens first?

Raul finds something	Melissa finds something	Raul gets jumped	Melissa gets jumped	We hit the deadline
Raul is a professional investigator 3 2	Melissa is a professional investigator Melissa is good with people 6	We were warned off 2 5	We were warned off Melissa is wandering around town 5	We have 2 days left The information is hard to find 1

Since time is a critical factor in this investigation, depending on the Answer, you may want to ask a followup Question:

Question: How much time do we have left?

1 day

2 days

The information is hard to find

Melissa is a professional investigator

3

1

3.3.4 Traveling



People disappeared on the road to Caelfall. We heard a rumor in a tavern. Nobody knows why, but several caravans have been found empty along the road.

...

Our wagon bumps along the packed-dirt road as we head to Caelfall.

Question: What next?

We are lured by will-o'-wisps	We are attacked by bandits	We see a travelling merchant	We arrive
We will pass a swamp People disappeared on the road to Caelfall 2	We look wealthy We lack obvious weapons 1	The road is between two major towns 1 4	

Consider the length of a journey when traveling. If you already encountered an event on a particular trip, consider how much time is left after previous events:

Exhausted from our ordeal, but steadfast, we continue to Caelfall.

Question: How close are we?

The swamp we passed is near Caelfall, so we are close.

What next?

We are attacked by bandits	We arrive
We look wealthy We lack obvious weapons 6	We are close 3 4

3.4 PC-Ending Questions



Ethan is tough as nails. He can fight through pain and stress.

...

Ethan has a bullet-wound in his stomach> The wound is untreated and bleeding badly.

...

Ethan was bitten in the leg. The wound is jagged and likely to become infected.

...

Ethan grits his teeth and tries to fight through his pain and get another shot off.

Question: Does Ethan succumb to his wounds?

Yes	No
Ethan has a bullet-wound in his stomach	Ethan is tough as nails
Ethan was bitten in the leg	2
Ethan has been bleeding profusely for minutes	6
6	3

A PC-ending Question is any Question that may remove a player-character from the game. This may mean death, lost hope, succumbing to madness, or any event that takes a player-character out of the game or out of the control of their player.

Remember the importance of genre when asking PC-ending Questions. In a heroic game, your character may be less likely to fail fatally. In a gritty horror-game, PC-death may be common and expected.

You may choose to play a game where player-characters cannot be taken out. In this case, do not ask PC-ending Questions, unless their player chooses to allow it.

3.5 Buying & Selling



Huebald buys the healing potion with a pouch of coins.

Some sales may be certain. In the above situation, Huebald loses his pouch of coins, or a larger pouch of coins becomes smaller, because he traded it for a healing potion.

Huebald is charismatic. He is good at getting people to like him and do what he wants.

...

Huebald gestures to buy the healing potion and offers a small pouch of coins.

Question: How much do they want?

A small pouch of coins	A medium pouch of coins	A large pouch of coins
Huebald is charismatic	This is the normal price	This is a small town without much competition
This is a small town without many customers	4	6
5	4	2

If an item doesn't have an established price, or if you want to haggle, a sale may be uncertain.