

A Funny Thing Happened

By

Simon Proctor

A game where the journey **is** the destination.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
The first idea : Travelling in a Game.....	3
The second idea : Gaming while travelling.....	4
The merging.....	4
Rules.....	5
Drawing Dice.....	5
Revealing Dice.....	6
Set-up.....	6
Play order.....	6
Basic play.....	7
Interjections.....	7
Challenges.....	7
The challenges.....	8
The draw.....	8
Choosing sides.....	8
The reveal.....	9
Ties.....	9
Ending the Game.....	9
Example of Play.....	9
Variants.....	11
Rewards.....	11
You get what they play.....	11
Second pocket.....	11
Other Dice Types.....	12
All the same type.....	12
Smaller selection of dice and stranger dice.....	13
Using with other games.....	13
Bear in mind.....	13
Suggested Guidelines.....	14
Travelling play.....	14

Introduction

This game is the culmination to two ideas having a head on collision in my brain. Thankfully no one was injured but the resulting fusion of ideas is what you hold in your hands. To understand the concept it's easier to explain each of the core ideas in turn.

The first idea : Travelling in a Game

At certain points in any narrative the protagonists will be at point A and the next major piece of the plot will take part at point B.

At which point you may hear the immortal lines 'The journey was uneventful'. These words have always felt wrong to me, no journey is ever truly uneventful, something will happen. The traveller will if nothing else have some time to think, maybe read a book.

A better phrase is 'Nothing important to the plot happens' but this then reveals the man behind the curtain and unsuspends the disbelief. Of course you could reach for the handy dandy 'Random Encounter Tables' but this again is just a fancy way of saying 'Nothing important to the plot happens'.

Or you could play it out, tell the story of the journey. But whilst this story is real it is, as I may have mentioned, not important to the plot. So the telling of it is less vital. It doesn't require everyone of a regular play group to be there. Or character sheets, or books and it could even be done without the GM. Everyone knows that nothing major will happen, no one will dice, no one will get any new super power (Feat whatever). But maybe some of the characters will get to actually talk and some role-playing might happen.

Another good thing about the use of a journey is it gives the story a beginning and an end. Allowing everyone to focus on the middle.

The second idea : Gaming while travelling

The second idea occurred because at the same time as having the first idea I was thinking about the 7 hours train journey I had ahead. This got me thinking, as I was thinking about travelling and gaming, that it would be nice to have a storytelling game that would be easy to play while travelling. Or in other situations where all the regular paraphernalia of gaming might not be easily used. For instance in a drinking establishment.

With this thought in mind I had a constraint for my journey telling game. It should require as little as possible, finally coming down to the concept of each player needing only a pocket full of dice. Any dice, from the lowly four sided to the twenty sided dice of power. It's all good.

The merging

And that's what you have here, a game about travelling that can be played whilst you are travelling. It has a basic set of rules to determine how the stories are told and then a set of ideas for other ways to play it or use it with other games.

You won't find detailed lists of guns, stat blocks or monsters. But hopefully you will find a nice idea and a few hours of fun.

Rules

I would advise playing a couple of games with the basic rules before adding guidelines, especially ones that change the system.

Any game of **A Funny Thing Happened** follows a basic structure using the following rules. It may also have a number of guidelines, example guidelines are given in the Variants section. Guidelines are rules *for that game only* before each game the guidelines for that game should be agreed upon by all players.

Drawing Dice

When the rules refer to drawing a dice this is a act of pulling a dice out of your pocket and holding it in your hand until you have to reveal it. When a dice is revealed it's score is calculated by adding value based on it's type as show below:

Table 1: Dice Bonus Table:

Dice Size	Bonus
d4	+8
d6	+7
d8	+6
d10	+5
d12	+4
d20	+0

Unless otherwise mentioned a player can always choose to not take a dice and instead hold out an empty hand. When revealed an empty hand has a score of 5 points.

Revealing Dice

It is advised to play d20's onto a level surface where possible.

Generally dice should be revealed by either opening the hand out with the dice in the palm or placing the dice down on an available surface without looking at it. If a dice does not sit properly it counts as an empty hand scoring 5 points.

There is no requirement to roll the dice when revealing them. As suitable surfaces to roll on may not be available while travelling the action of taking them from a pocket without looking is a substitute.

Set-up

Before a game begins the players should agree to any guidelines in play for this game. They should also agree on the characters involved, where they start and their destination(s). Ways for deciding on this can be found in the Variants section. Everyone should also agree on the first Storyteller. If this cannot be agreed upon everyone draws dice to determine the first Storyteller, ties draw again.

A good number of dice for a short game is 3 per other player in the game (so 9 each for a 4 person game).

Each player should have the same number of dice which should be kept in a pocket or other receptacle that they can be drawn from easily without looking. As dice are traded between players during the game they should all either belong to one person or be easily distinguishable. (See the Variants section for other options).

Play order

Play order can't be changed whilst it's being used though.

Order of play is determined as Storyteller first and then clockwise from them at the time it is required. If players change

places during the game then the order of play changes from then on.

Basic play

The current storyteller tells the story. They should follow any guidelines given agreed upon and should give the other players reasonable chance to react to the unfolding plot. Once something has been added to the story it may not be contradicted. The players should ensure the story leads towards the destination, if the storyteller seems to be diverging too much a challenge should be raised.

At any point the Storyteller may decide they cannot continue the story and pass the position of Storyteller to the player on their left.

Interjections

If a player agrees with the flow of the story but feels there are missing elements they may choose to interject. An interjection adds to the flavour of the story without changing the plot, for instance a player may describe a characters clothes or what they are carrying without

Interjections can be a useful way of adding plot elements you wish to use later.

changing the plot. The storyteller may choose to treat an interjection as a challenge if they feel strongly enough. Or they can thank the player and include their idea.

Challenges

Be wary of challenging too often, the other players may find it annoying and side with the Storyteller.

At any point in the story a player may challenge the currently described actions. You may not retroactively challenge the story only what is currently being described. A challenge should be announced by the challenger politely disagreeing with the storyteller. It should

be obvious that the challenger is not interjecting.

Once a challenge has been raised the challenge sequence begins

The challenges

First the challenger describes what they think should happen. At this point others can challenge that and describe what they think should happen. Descriptions should not be longer than a sentence giving a general idea of the direction the challenger wishes to take the story.

Players do not have to raise a challenge if they do not wish to.

The draw

Once all the challengers have given their descriptions of what they think should occur everyone draws a dice, including those who did not challenge. The dice should not yet be revealed but instead held out in the players hand.

Choosing sides

At this point people who didn't challenge get to choose, they can join a side or drop out. A player who drops out puts their dice away without showing what it was, otherwise they indicate which side they are choosing by holding their hand next to the other players on that side.

Players may converse and try to get others to join their team. But you can't mention what type of dice you have drawn. If you do so you must replace it and show an empty hand.

Whilst you cannot tell people what type of dice you've drawn anything else is fair game.

Once each non-challenger has decided the challengers can make a decision.

They can stay in or drop out. If they drop out their whole team drops out.

The reveal

If there is still one or more team left at this point all dice are revealed. The main dice are counted as normal. Helper dice are worth half rounded down, an empty hand counts as 2 points when helping.

The side with the largest total wins, the leader of that side is now the Storyteller. Each member of the losing team has to give each member of the winning team a dice.

The Variants section includes other options for rewards.

If a player does not have enough dice to give one to each winner the Storyteller decides how to split up their dice, with at most one being given to each player on their side.

Ties

If two or more teams tie for first place then in play order each challenger and the Storyteller may decide to either draw a new dice or drop out. They may confer with their team but if they decide to stay in the whole team must stay in. If the new dice tie then a further round of drawing is made until the ties are broken.

Ending the Game

If at any point one of players has all the dice the game ends. Either the Storyteller can finish the story as they wish or the dice can be divided up and a new game restarted with the current point in the story as the starting point.

The Storyteller may have 'won' the game if people so desire.

Alternatively you can play to a time limit, or as a set of smaller games each to a time limit of some form.

Example of Play

John, Malcolm, Gregor and Shevaun are relaxing after their

weekly game. The main story line has wrapped up in Glasgow and next weeks play is due to start in London. They decide to play through the journey using A Funny Thing Happened, Malcom who was GM lays a few guidelines, No major injuries to the characters and no contradicting or trying to link to the main plot line. Everyone agrees and the dice are handed out, John begins telling the tale as Gregor goes for the drinks.

John begins *“So Andy, Bart and Claire have got back to Andy's flat and slump down in the sofas. The investigation leaving them drained.”*

Malcolm interjects *“Bart would get a drink.”* Gregor calls agreement from the kitchen.

John nods *“Of course he did, once they'd relaxed for a bit Andy brought up the subject of the lead. The information that pointed to a cult of some form in London. Claire suggested getting a plane, expensive but the company could afford it. The others agreed and...”*

Gregor returns from the kitchen and chimes in: *“I have to disagree, Bart would want to drive his car.”*

At this point the play order is John, Malcolm, Shevaun and then Gregor.

John looks around, no one else wants to challenge and each reaches into their pockets. John feels around and picks a d6, less chance of a high number but less risk. Gregor pulls out the one d20 he has whilst Malcolm chooses a d6 and Shevaun decides to go with an empty hand.

Once each of them has their dice out Malcolm has first chance to drop out, he takes it wanting to see what happens. Shevaun decides to side with Gregor.

John looks at the options, pass the story to Gregor or risk losing two dice. He decides to risk it, it's early in the game and why not? *“I'm staying in, Bart obviously didn't feel like driving.”* Gregor nods, *“We're still in.”*

The dice are revealed, John's dice shows a 2 adding 7 gives a total of 9. Gregors dice shows a 14 plus 2 from Shevauns empty hand gives a total of 16. John sighs and passes a dice to each of them.

Gregor carries on as Storyteller “*When Claire suggested taking the plane Bart raised the good point that it would limit the options of what they could carry. They other agreed and decided to take his car.*”

The journey continued.

Variants

The basic rules are designed to be simple enough to explain and play with the following rules variants and ideas are here to extend the options available.

Rewards

You get what they play

The standard reward of giving one dice to each member of the winning team can lead to quick games where players lose all their dice due to a number of unlucky challenges.

In order to slow the pace of the game this guideline is that only the dice revealed by the losing team(s) are given to the winning team. The Storyteller gives out the dice to his team mates. Each team member who revealed a dice, not an empty hand, must be given at least one dice if possible.

As there is no requirement to reward players who join with an empty hand players will find it harder to get back into the game if they run out of dice.

Second pocket

If no one has enough dice to share out for the game, or people have their own dice but they cannot easily distinguish between

them you can play using a second pocket. Instead of giving dice to the winning team losing players in a challenge place the dice they drew into a second pocket. Players on the winning team may get one dice from their second pocket, if they have any, and place it with their main dice pool.

Again this will slow the pace of the game slightly but will ensure peoples dice don't get mixed up.

Other Dice Types

The standard rules are based around the idea that most gamers will have a large collection of different dice types to hand. The different type give varied levels of risk adding a level of skill to the game, but if the dice pool is limited or players don't want to do as much addition the following rules can be used.

All the same type

If all the dice being used are all the same type there is no need to add a dice bonus. In this case the value of an empty hand will have to be scaled down to $\frac{1}{4}$ (rounding up) of the dice size as summarised here:

Table 2: Empty Hand Table:

Dice Size	Empty Hand Value
d4	1
d6	2
d8	2
d10	3
d12	3
d20	5

Smaller selection of dice and stranger dice

If the largest dice available is smaller than a d20 you can still use the standard bonus table, but if it is bigger than a d20 (because some people have to use their d30s don't they) or if everyone want to scale the game down the formula to derive a dices bonus is derived below. Note the Empty hand value will have to be modified as well to keep the game balance.

$$\text{Dice Bonus} = (\text{Largest Dice Size} / 2) - (\text{Dice Size} / 2)$$

For those who are interested the dice bonus will ensure the all the dice used have the same expected value meaning on average no dice is better than any other.

Using with other games

One of the intentions of writing A Funny Thing Happened was that as well as being a game in itself it could also be used as a method of bringing more story telling to games. There are a few things to bear in mind when doing this for both Games Masters and Players and a few suggestions of guidelines to use.

Bear in mind

It is most important that the Games Master sticks to whatever guidelines have been set as well as the other players.

It is important to bear in mind that the normal dynamic of Games Master and Player does not exist whilst telling the story of the journey. Players do not control their characters action as the normally would and Games Masters do not control the rest of the world. If a Player feels the Storyteller is describing actions his character would not take he can challenge and similarly if the Games Master feels the story is wildly diverging from what he expected he too can challenge.

Suggested Guidelines

No major injuries or death : It is suggested that everyone agrees none of the PC's can be injured or die. This rule may also be extended to their travelling companions if any.

No major additions or alterations of the main game plot : This is intended as an exercise to help everyone focus on storytelling. If the players are chasing an evil villain he should not step in front of their coach. Nor should the stumble into a full fledged alien invasion.

Character protection bonus : At least for the first few times you use the system you may wish to give players a +10 bonus (or double the empty hand bonus if it has been modified) if they are challenging actions their character is taking. This will help to reduce the urge to abuse the position of Storyteller.

Rewards : The Games Master may wish to define the rewards available to the players. Options include, a reward for the winner and smaller ones for the other players. Rewards based on the number of dice the players are in possession of at the end of the game are a possibility as well.

Travelling play

If the game is played whilst travelling you may wish to incorporate guidelines based on your journey. Possibly splitting the game by train station on a train journey. Other thoughts include giving a +5 bonus (or whatever the empty hand bonus is) to a players next challenge each time they are the first spot something during the journey such as a flock of sheep. What to look out for and whether such bonuses stack or not is up to you.

I would recommend not letting the driver of a car play the game. But possibly let them decide the guidelines and setting.