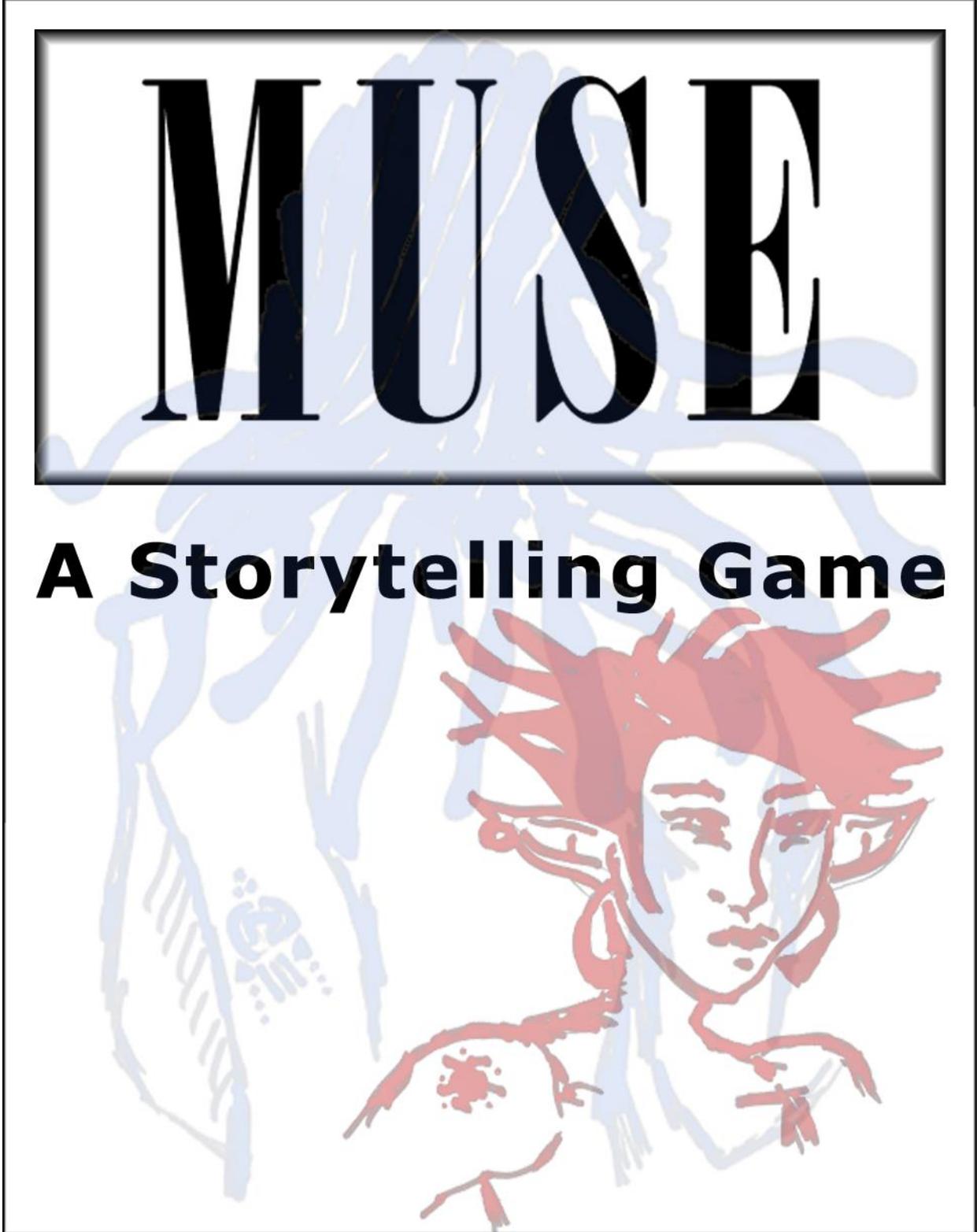


# MUSE

## A Storytelling Game



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**A Storytelling Game**

**Written by Jonathan Benn**

**Designed by Jonathan Benn and Paul Taliesin**

**2017 FREE EDITION (REVISION 2)**

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## Introduction

Muse is a storytelling game where players collaborate and compete with each other to tell an enjoyable story. Before starting, players will brainstorm a *Story Sheet* upon which the story will be based. Players will generate *Questions* that will be answered as the story unfolds. Next, players will take turns narrating the story, with play passing from one player to the next in clockwise order. No-one knows in advance how the Questions will be answered, so the story's twists and turns are an exciting mystery to everyone. The game ends when the story's Crisis Question is answered in a final *Showdown*. The winners get to tell the story's *Epilogue*.

Muse lets you tell any kind of story, across all of time, space, fiction and non-fiction. If you like stories, and you like hanging out with friends, then you'll probably like Muse. This game has quite a few interesting features that I hope will make it appealing to you. Here are a few of the most important:

1. **Muse is pick-up and go:** Like with any board game or card game, there is no special preparation required before you can start playing Muse. You can easily let new players join a game session in progress, or leave if they need to be elsewhere.

2. **Muse plays quickly:** A typical game of Muse will last about 4 hours. Perfect for anyone with a busy schedule!
3. **Muse has no idle time:** When you're playing, you're either telling the story or listening to it. Every player is *always* participating.

For those of you well-versed in gaming, Muse is in some ways like a Role-Playing Game (RPG) except that it differs on several important points:

1. There is no single Game Master (GM) or referee, instead all of the players take turns assuming this role. Hence, no-one is singled out as having to do more work and everyone participates equally.
2. Player Characters (PCs) and Non-Player Characters (NPCs) are shared amongst the players rather than each character being exclusively held by a single player or GM. So if one person can't show up one day, it doesn't mean that you can't play.
3. The central focus of the game is not to play a role, but instead to tell an interesting story. This is why Muse is best described as a Storytelling Game (STG).

## Setup

Muse is very easy to set up and play as it has very few requirements. All you need to play is:

- 2-6 players (including yourself)
- 1 standard 54-card deck of playing cards, with the Jokers removed
- 30+ tokens (*e.g.* pennies, poker chips, flat glass beads, etc.)
- Pen & paper
- Healthy imaginations

To start off, **deal out a hand of 3 cards to each player**. Keep those cards hidden from the prying eyes of your fellow players!

**Give 1 token to each player**. You'll be needing these, they're important.

During the game, hands and Answer Sheets (you'll learn more about Answer Sheets soon enough) are limited in size depending on how many players are playing the game, as follows:

- For 2 players: maximum 8 cards.
- For 3 players: maximum 7 cards.
- For 4 players: maximum 6 cards.
- For 5-6 players: maximum 5 cards.

If you ever have too many cards in your hand (let's face it, this is pretty likely to happen) then discard the extra cards of your choice at the end of your turn, or immediately if it's not your turn. In case you're wondering, if you're currently the Narrator (the one telling the story) then you're it—it's your turn.

# Story Seed

Now the cool stuff starts. Ask yourselves the question, "What's this story going to be about?"

The Story Seed is the nugget of gold around which your story will grow, like some sort of super-crystal that grows on gold. The Story Seed will give you inspiration when you're trying to think of what happens next, it will help limit the options so you don't feel paralyzed with indecision, and it will help stop the story from getting too wacky (unless that's what you want, in which case sentient space lemmings are a good choice).

When creating a Story Seed, one of these three options ought to do the trick:

1. Use an **existing story** (fiction or non-fiction). This could be a "What if?" scenario where you ask yourselves what might have happened in a story if a critical event had gone differently. It could also continue an unfinished story, or delve into a part of the story's world that has never been explored.
2. Use an **original story** as a seed. Maybe something really cool you dreamed of after eating too much cake and falling into a sugar coma. Or part of the novel you're working on.
3. Establish a **genre and tone** as a Story Seed. The *genre* is the category of story, which helps define the story style and substance in a very general way. The *tone* is the general mood or emotion of the story.

Here are some Story Seed examples:

## Sample existing Story Seeds:

How did the Galifreyans get wiped out and why was The Doctor the only survivor of his species (lifted from the recent Dr. Who television series)?

What if aliens with year 2000-era technology had invaded the Earth during World War II (from Harry Turtledove's Worldwar series)?

What new challenges does the Bowman Star-Child (2001: A Space Odyssey) encounter after he ascends to quasi-godhood?

## Sample original Story Seeds:

A defector struggles to flee East Berlin as sinister necromancers raise an army of undead below the city.

In a fantasy world where dwarves are downtrodden and discriminated against, a lone dwarf threatens to expose the secretive cult that's responsible.

A gruff mercenary is a remote mining planet's only hope after it is assaulted by an army of mind-controlling cacti.

**Sample genres:** science-fiction, fantasy, cyberpunk, pulp, historical, alternate history, romantic, survival, horror, comedy, action, disaster, exploration, space opera, fairy tale, steampunk, etc.

**Sample tones:** upbeat, dark, sinister, joyful, fearful, funny, mature, childish, light-hearted, hateful, loving, serious, angry, sad, jealous, vengeful, silly, etc.

Ideally, you should all be able to agree on a Story Seed together. If not, well, do you *really* want to be playing Muse together today? Consider playing outside instead. It's good for you!

Assuming you're still reading this and haven't run outside to play Chase the Squirrel, this next part is where things get really neat. You'll start fleshing out some of the basic elements of your story.

# Brainstorming

Once you've got your Story Seed, you're going to want to develop the starting point for your story. The best way to do this is with a brainstorm. Brainstorms work like this:

**Warm Up:** pick a quick 5 minute warm-up activity for everyone to participate in. Good warm-ups get people moving, drawing and laughing. For example: try having everyone make a drawing of the Story Seed, play a quick rock-paper-scissors tournament, throw a ball around, play Simon Says, do jumping jacks, etc.

**Ideation:** set aside a certain amount of time, 15 minutes is reasonable. Spend the whole amount of time trying to come up with good ideas for past events, characters, scenes, goals, relationships, and conflicts. Follow these critical brainstorm rules:

1. Write your idea down and announce it to everyone

2. Never criticize an idea, all ideas are good!
3. Build on the ideas of others

Remember, nothing kills a good brainstorm like criticism. There will be a time for criticism later. For now, everyone needs to feel comfortable to come up with their best ideas. A good technique is to start the brainstorm with the stupidest idea you can think of (and I mean monumentally stupid), and then ask everyone to say it's a great idea. From then on even dumb or weird ideas will seem awesome by comparison.

One of the greatest strengths of brainstorming is how you can build on top of the ideas of others. Sometimes, even an idea that seemed bad at first becomes an amazing idea after someone else adds something to it.

Once time is up then it's time to fill out the Story Sheet!

## Fill Out the Story Sheet

Ok, grab a sheet of paper and pen and start writing stuff down. It's idea selection time! Using the Story Seed and brainstorm for inspiration, all of the players together are now going to create and fill out something called the Story Sheet. It's worth mentioning that any ideas that don't make it from the brainstorm into the Story Sheet should not be considered canon. In other words, they're only potential ideas that could be introduced later.

If you don't want to use regular lined paper, you can find a Story Sheet starter at <http://www.benn.ca/muse/> and print it out.

First, you need to come up with each of the following:

- 3 characters
- 2-3 scenes

**When to Write Things Down:** While filling in the Story Sheet, in general, write an idea down if at least 2 players like it. If someone strongly objects to the idea then don't write it down. If you're really stuck and can't think of anything then move on to the next category (there are more to come) and come back later.

## Characters and Scenes

Here's what I mean by characters and scenes:

**Character:** a major character in the story. The story will mainly be about these people. The main characters don't all have to be good. In fact, it's best if the characters are at odds with each other.

For *Star Wars* some major characters might include: Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Princess Leia, Han Solo, Emperor Palpatine, etc.

For *The Lord of the Rings* major characters would be Frodo Baggins, Galadriel, Arwen, Samwise Gamgee, Gandalf, Sauron, Gollum, Eowyn, and so on.

**Here are some more random ideas:** One-Eyed Jack, a mercenary that has a bullet replacing one eye; Orville, an innocent farmhand; The Masked Crusader, a super-hero with negligible powers but lots of ego, etc.

**Scene:** an interesting place where the story can happen. These should be small areas where action can occur, like a scene in a play. They shouldn't be something huge like a country or a mansion (or a galaxy, now you're just being ridiculous).

For *Alice in Wonderland* some scenes might include the queen's croquet ground, the Mad Hatter's tea party table or the courtroom.

For *Star Trek* some cool scenes might be the Enterprise Bridge, Quark's Bar & Restaurant or a forest clearing on a mysterious and previously unexplored planet.

**Some more scenes for thought:** a bar located at the intersection between all parallel worlds, a small ancient-Egyptian village on the verge of starvation, a safe-house in war-torn Georgia, etc.

Remember to come up with and write down 3 characters and 2 to 3 scenes.

When you write down a character, try to give a little description about the character so that you know a little something about him, her or it. For example, "Gertrude, a lovable scamp from the wrong side of the tracks" is better than just "Gertrude."

**Important:** Make sure to leave at least two blank lines below each character for the *goals* and *relationships* you'll be writing down in the next section of the rules.

Like with characters, add a bit of description for scenes too. For instance, "Castle Vanith, a dark and foreboding castle surrounded by crows" is more interesting than just "Castle Vanith."

## Goals and Relationships

Ok, now that you've got some characters and scenes to put them in, it's time to figure out how the characters relate to each other and their world. In the movie-making business, actors are always asking, "What's my motivation?" Well, Muse characters ask the same question, they just don't necessarily earn the same salary. Also like with real life, for Muse characters *who* they know is often more important than *what* they know. So who *do* they know?

Once again, use the Story Seed and brainstorm as inspiration. For each character, in those two blank lines below their name and description write down their *goal* and their *relationship*.

A **goal** is a character's strong desire. The character really wants to arrive at this place, or do this thing. Goals are *transformative*, so that they will leave characters changed after they've reached their goal. Goals are *journeys*, so that when characters reach their goal they're not where they started from (figuratively at the very least).

So in a nutshell, "Staying inside the Mall and waiting out the zombie invasion." is a lame goal. Even though it might spark a bit of drama when the zombies break in, it's an

ultimately unsatisfying goal because the character isn't going anywhere and isn't learning anything. Many of us have day jobs that go nowhere, do we really want to see this in a *cool* story?

On the other hand, a goal like, "Escape the mall and reach the helipad." is a much more interesting goal. It's a journey from point A to point B. If the character reaches the helipad maybe he or she will be different—be missing an eye or brain, for instance, or have learned the meaning of friendship and that shots to the head work best against zombies.

A purely transformative goal like, "Win the Nobel Prize of Biology." can be a valid goal as well. Theoretically, a character could reach this goal without ever leaving the lab. However, it's nonetheless an achievement that will leave the character a different person. Richer both in intellect and in the wallet. Perhaps a little insane and friendless too.

If you can, try to make at least one of the goals put two main characters in direct opposition with each other. This will make for a more interesting story.

A **relationship** is a conflict or close bond between this character and another character or group. This relationship could be with another major character, but it doesn't *have* to be. That having been said, it's best if all of the main characters are interconnected, if not because of their relationships then at least because of their goals. Good stories are about a community of people, and a community of characters are connected to one another.

**Example relationships include:** being a family member of another character, wanting another character dead, being on the

run from the police, being friends with a street gang, being in love with another character, feeling unrequited love for another character, hating another character, being a member of the army's elite Alpha Squad, having a deal with the Mayor to build a condo development in a character's neighbourhood, etc.

Ok, so now as a team you've all figured out a goal and a relationship for each major character in the story (or you're on your way to doing that and are currently stumped)—now what?

## Threats

It's time to brainstorm 1 or 2 *threats* that fit in with your Story Seed.

A **threat** is a current or near future event that *puts the main characters at risk*. Threats are a critical part of the story you're about to tell together because they force the main characters into *action*.

Just because Joe the Janitor's goal is to escape the Mall and reach the helipad, that doesn't mean he has to do it *now*. He could wait around a bit and eat canned beans for a few weeks. That is, unless he's being threatened by the fact that "The zombies are about to break down the front door to the mall." Now he's got to do something. Fix that barricade. Run to the roof. Something, anything!

Threats don't have to put the characters' lives directly at risk either. They could threaten a

goal. For example, if Scott wants to become the first explorer to reach the South Pole, he might feel a bit more pressure if he discovers that "There's a rival team from Norway, closer to the Pole, that wants to be the first to reach the South Pole." Now the action is heating up! If Scott wants to reach the South Pole first, he's going to need to act fast.

Threats can also imperil a relationship. Let's say that Lucy Luckless is hopelessly in love with Prince Charming, who barely acknowledges her existence. She can pine over him until kingdom come (well... until not kingdom come), but why would she have to act *now*? If she had the threat "Prince Charming will be wed to Princess Penelope in two days." that's an immediate threat that Lucy needs to deal with—now!

# Questions

Alright, you've made it to this point. You have a bright, shiny, and hopefully legible Story Sheet written up full of characters, goals, relationships, scenes and threats. Easy so far, right? Well here's where I throw you for a loop. We're going to deal with *Questions* now. Questions are a special mechanic that Muse uses. At first you might find them a bit tricky to understand, but don't worry, after you've gone through some examples then Questions should make perfect sense.

You may be wondering, "Hey, why do we have Questions and what are they good for?" Questions have a bunch of really important roles in Muse:

1. Questions tell you where the story is going to be focusing. Since a Question impacts a main character, it puts that character in the spotlight.
2. Questions add some mystery to the game. No-one can know in advance how the Question will turn out, so it leaves everyone in suspense (I'll explain how Questions are answered later on).
3. Questions move the plot forward. Since they help characters advance toward their goals, Questions move the story along and bring it to its eventual ending.

So, what is a Question?

A **Question** is quite literally a question about whether character X can successfully do action Y. Questions either advance a main character toward their goal, challenge the character in achieving their goal, or actually accomplish that goal outright. Always start your Question with the word, "Will," as in, "Will character X accomplish

task Y?" Usually you'll want the action character to be a main character (one of the ones you brainstormed on the Story Sheet), but any character is fine so long as the action impacts a main character. The important thing is that there's action and adversity—that with every Question something is always at stake for a main character.

For example, some Questions that accomplish goals could be: Will Joe reach the helipad? Will Scott be the first to reach the South Pole? Will Lucy marry Prince Charming?

Something to note about Questions that fully accomplish a character's goals is that they tend to make the story shorter. If you only use these you'll have quite a quick game. You could instead choose to break up the above questions into pieces, allowing the characters to progress slowly toward their goal, adding challenges along the way to their goal, or creating *side-quests* related to their goal. For example:

Will Joe kill the Zombie King? Will Joe fall in love with Patty? Will Joe be badly wounded? Will Joe become a symptomless carrier of zombie-disease? Will the zombies kill Patty (whom Joe is very fond of)?

Will Scott be able to climb the nearby mountain (thus saving time)? Will Scott find plant fossils that help prove Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection? Will Scott kill the captain of the Norwegian competition? Will Scott die on the return trip? Will Evans (Scott's friend) recover from his frostbite?

Will Lucy manage to get rich? Will Lucy get the Prince to fall in love with her? Will Lucy ruin Princess Penelope's reputation? Will

Lucy avoid being blackmailed by Barry Boil-Face? Will Lucy get blamed for Princess Penelope's rash? Will Princess Penelope steal Lucy's priceless heirloom?

As the story evolves, each Question will end up being answered with either a Yes or a No. A Yes means the character accomplishes the action, a No means that the character does not accomplish the action and something else happens instead.

**The catch:** ah yes, there's always a catch isn't there? When you write down Questions, make sure that they don't contradict each other. It should be possible for each Question to come true—or to not come true—and for that to make sense and be meaningful.

For example, the Question "Will Scott die before he reaches the South Pole?" is not compatible with the Question "Will Scott be the first to reach the South Pole?" Think about it... if Scott dies before reaching the South Pole, then he can never *really* arrive there, right? I'm assuming here that one needs to be alive to arrive somewhere in any meaningful sense. So the first Question potentially makes the second impossible. You could fix the first Question by changing it to, for example, "Will Scott die on the return trip?" This is better because now both Questions can come true or not, or some mix of both can happen. Scott can reach the South Pole first and then die on the way back to the ship, or he can fail to reach the Pole at all and survive the return trip, etc.

As a second example, let's take the Question, "Will Joe reach the helipad?" This

can't be combined with a Question like, "Will the zombies destroy the helicopter?" If the zombies destroy the helicopter, then Joe's trip to the helipad doesn't mean anything. Similarly, if Joe takes off in the helicopter then there's no way the zombies can destroy it now. If Joe never reaches the helipad then it doesn't really matter if the zombies destroy the helicopter.

**The second catch:** there isn't always a second catch, but there is one this time. Try to make sure that your Questions always include an element of conflict or adversity. The character should have to struggle against himself or herself, or against another party, or against the environment. In other words, the Question should not be so trivial that it poses no challenge to the main character(s).

For example, these Questions suck: Will Joe kill zombies with a shotgun? Will Scott drink the bottle of gin in his hand? Will Lucy purchase the nice dress (that is easily within her budget)? These Questions suck for lots of different reasons, but in general it's because they're not a challenge. What difference does it make which kind of weapon Joe uses to kill zombies? Unless a particular weapon is required, that's not important. If a particular weapon *is* required then the Question, "Will Joe acquire the Experimental Laser Gun?" becomes much more interesting. As for Scott and Lucy, well, unless there's a mob trying to stop them and that gin or dress is going to save the day then those Questions are boring. They don't move the characters toward their goal, there's no challenge, and we don't even learn anything new about the characters' personalities.

## Crisis Question and Subplot Question

Let's get back to the Story Sheet brainstorming and the gaping emptiness at the bottom of your Story Sheet. As a group, you and the other players need to come up with 1 Crisis Question and 1 Subplot Question. What are they?

The **Crisis Question** is *the* central question of the story. Select one of the main characters to be the *protagonist*: the leading character of the story. The Crisis Question then hinges around the protagonist totally obtaining their goal against opposition. Once the Crisis Question gets answered the game is over.

A **Subplot Question** is really just a regular Question, but we're calling it "Subplot" to

differentiate it from "Crisis." For the first regular Question you brainstorm, pick something that moves a main character toward their goal without actually accomplishing that goal. It can be for the protagonist or for a different main character.

Once you've finished writing down those two Questions, believe it or not, your Story Sheet is complete! If this is your first time, it might have taken quite some time to read these rules, invent everything and write the ideas down. However, with practice the Story Sheet should take about 30 minutes to write, leaving plenty of time in your busy schedule to actually tell the totally awesome story that is going to spring from that page and from your imaginations.

## Example Story Sheets

Here are some handy examples of Story Sheets, already pre-filled. They come from actual play sessions, imagined by *real* people! *Not* the talking cat that is whispering in my ear as I write this (no, I told you not to write that)!

### Example Story Sheet 1: The Good Dragon

---

In this story sheet the initial Subplot Question actually has two characters trying to accomplish something. This is ok! The idea that questions should be phrased as "Will Character X do Y" is a rule of thumb and not an absolute order.

- **Story Seed:** in a fantasy world, a good dragon has been cursed by a sorcerer to look like an evil dragon. The dragon must clear its name before some band of adventurers slays it!
- **Character:** Aurora, a good Gold Dragon. A female young adult cursed to look like an evil Red Dragon. She has a clutch of eggs to protect.
  - **Goal:** to hatch all of her eggs.
  - **Relationship:** Borialis, her mate who is searching for her in her golden form.
- **Character:** Frederick the fringe warlock.
  - **Goal:** Needs a dragon egg to stop the Blight that is ravaging the lands around Longford (which is a city near Aurora's lair).
  - **Relationship:** Frederick was the one that cursed Aurora.
- **Character:** Jasmine, a female dragon-slayer that pretends to be a man named Samuel. She has slain all of the evil dragons in the land except for Aurora.
  - **Goal:** to find her soul mate.
  - **Relationship:** the bartender Lisa from Longford.
- **Scene:** A mountain pass, it is treacherous and the only way to reach the mysterious Valley of the Rising Sun.
- **Scene:** Frederick's hut, with a laboratory in the basement, located at the edge of Longford.
- **Scene:** The Longford town square, which has a fountain, statue, tavern and gallows.
- **Threat:** A Blight is destroying all of Longford's crops and the city is near starvation.
- **Crisis Question:** Will Aurora hatch all of her eggs?
- **Subplot Question 1:** Will Frederick and Jasmine find the source of the Blight?

## Example Story Sheet 2: The Mummy's Curse

---

In this Story Sheet one of the characters has two relationships. Here the players exercised the optional rule to add extra story elements, which is a fine idea once you're used to the standard game rules.

- **Story Seed:** It is a time of locusts and famine in an ancient desert kingdom. An impoverished village is desperate to make its once-per-decade offering of wealth to the nearby pyramid—an offering that stops an ancient evil trapped within from being released. Inside the pyramid, an ancient mummy rests and bides its time.
- **Character:** The Mummy, a mummified panther that was the Pharaoh's trusted companion and that was supposed to guard him in the land of the dead.
  - **Goal:** To be freed from the pyramid and kill all of the village's first-born children.
  - **Relationship:** Hates Hatep and his family, because it's their fault that he's been trapped in the pyramid for so long.
- **Character:** Hatep, the village chief and priest. A hard but just man.
  - **Goal:** To make the sacrifice of wealth before the pyramid and save the village.
  - **Relationship:** His only son Om, the heir as village chief, who is not responsible and prefers having fun.
- **Character:** Mouse, a young orphan of indeterminate gender that lives in the village.
  - **Goal:** To recover a family heirloom that proves that she is a part of the Engineer Caste.
  - **Relationship:** Bullied by Om, Hatep's son.
  - **Relationship:** Friends with a mysterious band of desert nomads, who give her food when they pass by town for trade, but who may be involved in occasional tomb pillaging.
- **Scene:** the village of Abara, located near the cursed pyramid. Where Hatep and Mouse live.
- **Scene:** the Pharaoh's burial chamber inside the pyramid.
- **Threat:** The once-a-decade celestial conjunction that releases the mummy is going to occur in less than a week, the sacrifice of wealth must be made then... or else.
- **Crisis Question:** Will the Mummy's curse be released?
- **Subplot Question 1:** Will Mouse recover her family heirloom?

### **Example Story Sheet 3: Time to Take out the Trash!**

---

In this example, take note of how the Crisis Question indirectly deals with Mayor Ascension's goal. If she gets driven from office, then she won't be able to accomplish her goal.

- **Story Seed:** there is a garbage-pickup strike going on in the city of Napoli, because the Mafia is waging a war of influence against the municipal government. The government hires mercenaries to break the strike.
- **Character:** Don Refusio, a mob boss whose public job is that he owns a junkyard.
  - **Goal:** To derail the city's recycling initiatives, which cut out the Mafia's corruption.
  - **Relationship:** Mayor Ascension's half-brother (they share a father).
- **Character:** Mayor Ascension, the city of Napoli's long-standing mayor, and also its first female mayor.
  - **Goal:** To make Napoli the most green, environmentally conscious city in Italy.
  - **Relationship:** Thinks that Gaspard is a brute (calls him "The Bastard").
- **Character:** Gaspard Lachasse, the mercenary captain of "Les Bleus."
  - **Goal:** To build a reputation that he's a man that gets things done.
  - **Relationship:** He finds Mayor Ascension very attractive—he likes women with power.
- **Scene:** A Church with doves on its eaves, surrounded by piles of garbage.
- **Scene:** Don Refusio's junkyard, which is surprisingly well-guarded and surrounded by a chain-link fence.
- **Scene:** City Hall, a beautiful old stone building.
- **Threat:** The garbage strike, organized by Don Refusio, has been going on for far too long. Garbage is piling up everywhere in the city and it's becoming a health hazard.
- **Threat:** A journalist has discovered the family link between Mayor Ascension and Don Refusio.
- **Crisis Question:** Will Mayor Ascension be driven from office?
- **Subplot Question 1:** Will Mayor Ascension legally expropriate (take ownership of) Don Refusio's junkyard?

## **Do You Like This Story?**

While it may seem silly, it's a good idea at this stage in the game for everyone to sit back and ask each other the question, "Do you like this story idea?" Hopefully the answer is a chorus of yesses. However, in some cases some story elements might have made certain players uncomfortable, or players might have better ideas for some parts.

This is totally ok! At this stage, modify the Story Sheet elements in whatever way is necessary to make everyone reasonably happy. Once all the players are satisfied, you can move on (if not everyone is happy then playing Chase the Squirrel outside is still an option).

## Answer Sheets

Each Question naturally can be answered by Yes or No. We're going to represent these Answers physically in the game with sheets of paper. You'll need 6 pieces of paper, each about the size of a playing card or a bit bigger. The writing on the papers should be:

1. Crisis Yes
2. Crisis No
3. Yes 1
4. No 1
5. Yes 2
6. No 2

To create the Answer Sheets, the nicest way is to look up the pre-made sheet at <http://www.benn.ca/muse/> and just print it out and cut it up. However, you may have to or prefer to create them yourself. Cutting up or tearing up a sheet of regular paper into 6 pieces can work, as can using 6 index cards, which are conveniently a bit bigger than a typical playing card.

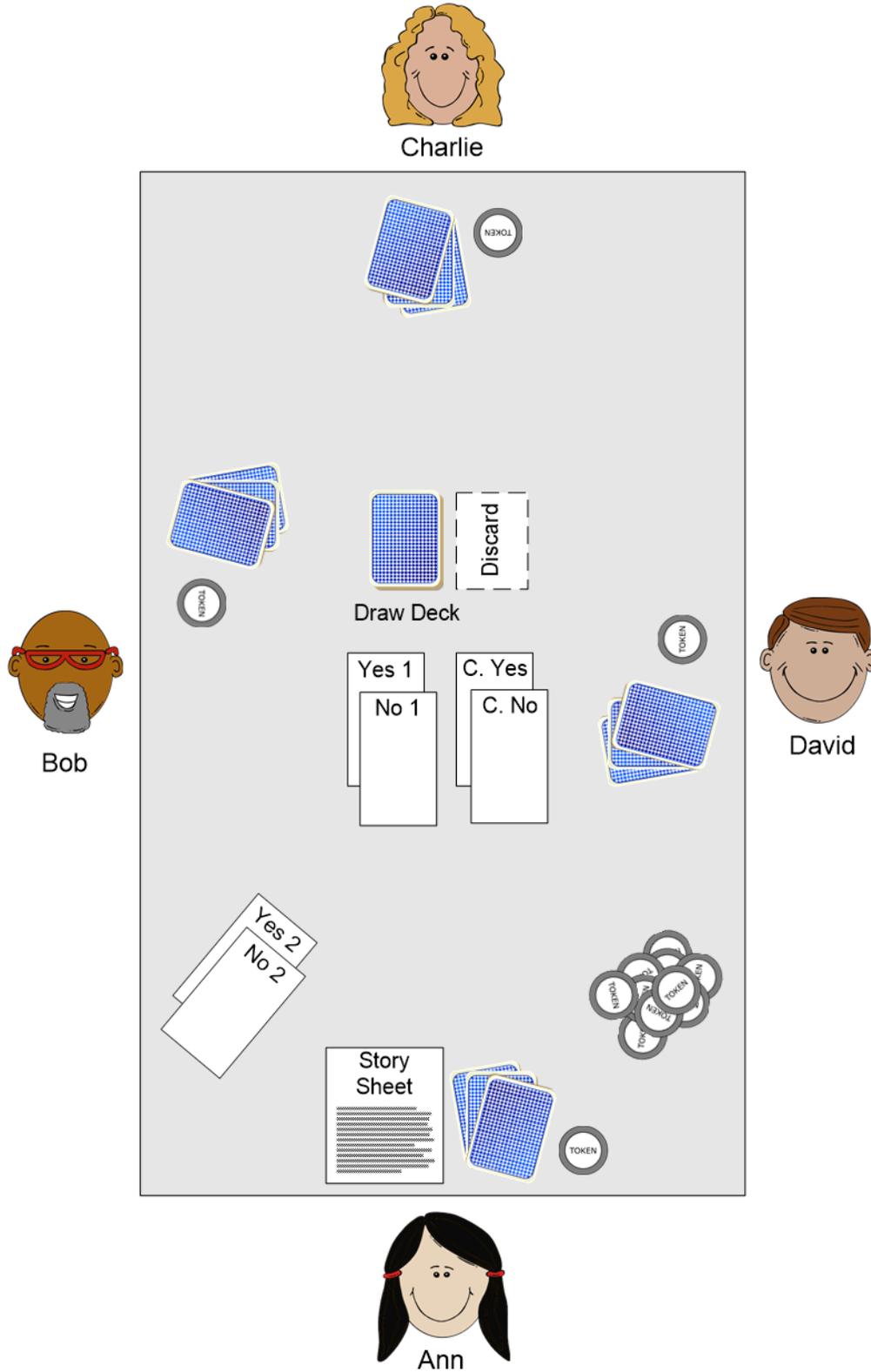
## Final Setup

Now for the last finishing touches before you start playing in earnest:

1. Each player should have 3 face-down cards and 1 token in front of themselves. Keep in mind that you will need to discard if you ever have too many cards in hand when it's not your turn.
2. Place the remainder of the deck of cards face-down in the middle of the table. This is the draw deck. Next to it will be the face-up discard pile. Put aside the pile of remaining tokens.
3. Take the first four Answer Sheets (Crisis Yes, Crisis No, Yes 1 and No 1) and place them in the middle of the table as well, near the draw deck. Leave the Yes 2 and No 2 Answer Sheets on the side of the table, unused for the moment, along with the excess tokens and your autographed photo of Elvis (photo is optional).
4. The Story Sheet is usually moved in front of whoever is currently Narrator (the person telling the story at the moment), along with its all-important accompanying pen.
5. If you're not using the official Muse Story Sheet then draw a small box to the left of every character, goal, relationship, scene and threat. This box is where you will add a checkmark when the Narrator describes that element in detail (this will be covered in detail when we talk about narration).

Here is an awesome diagram of this whole setup, assuming that Ann, Bob, Charlie and

David are playing a game together, and that Ann is the first Narrator:



The Answer Sheets *Crisis Yes* and *Crisis No* correspond to the Crisis Question. During the game you will be adding *tokens* to these Answer Sheets. There is no limit to how many tokens can be placed on a crisis Answer Sheet.

The Answer Sheets *Yes I* and *No I* correspond to the first Subplot Question. During the game you'll be adding *cards* to these Answer Sheets. Remember that whatever your hand card limit is for this

game that limit also applies to these Answer Sheets with cards on them.

If you're clever you may have noticed that the number of available Answer Sheets means that there are a maximum of 3 Questions in play at any given time: 1 Crisis Question and 2 Subplot Questions. You probably have also noticed that only 1 Subplot Question exists at the beginning of play. The second and subsequent Subplot Questions will be created as the game is played.

## Tell the Story

Now all of that fiddly setup stuff is out of the way and it's time to tell the story! This is the fun part. It's super easy as everyone is great at telling stories, right? Telling stories is as natural as breathing... well, ok, not always. In fact, you may find this part a bit intimidating, especially if you're the first Narrator. Speaking of which:

**Randomly determine who will be the first Narrator.** I don't care how. Draw straws, highest card, oldest player, youngest player, smelliest player, etc. Whatever works for you!

Now, Narrator, it's your job to get this story rolling. You may be nervously sweating at this point. You may feel a bit of writer's block. But don't worry. There are tons of tools at your disposal to help you. The Story Sheet is your friend. That's why you just spent the last 30 minutes writing it after all! Use the Story Sheet for inspiration.

Furthermore, remember that the *whole story* and especially *where the story is going* is **not**, and I repeat, **not** your problem. As Narrator, you only need to focus on whatever narrow part of the story you feel inspired to tell at the moment. Believe me, *where the story is going* is going to sort itself out like magic as you play. And you might be surprised and delighted at what happens! Expect the unexpected as your fellow players pour naked imagination out onto the table.

Ok, so just **what is narration**? As Narrator, you literally just start telling the story, like a novelist would do, except you're telling it to your friends around the table. Look at the Story Sheet for something that you find interesting, and then start talking about it.

As Narrator, you can describe the scene, you can take the voice of any character in the story (and not just a main character) and speak for that character. You can have a conversation with yourself by taking on multiple characters at once. You can make characters do actions. You can decide whether characters succeed at the actions or fall flat on their faces. You can change the world. Time can pass (forward or backward). Cities can fall. Wars can be waged. You can do pretty much whatever you wish with the story, within certain reasonable limits that we'll be getting into soon.

In general, you will use the present tense when telling the story. In other words, the story is happening *now* as you tell it. *E.g.* "Jack *hears* the crash of a breaking window!" rather than, "Jack *heard* the crash of a breaking window."

Here are some narration examples:

Let's say that in the current story, Orville Wright is a famous explorer taking his submarine down to the bottom of the sea. Here's something you might narrate: "Orville Wright, famed explorer and skilled submarine pilot, prepares to bring his one-man craft deeper than it has ever gone before. As he descends beyond his small submarine's diving limit the hull begins to screech metallicly. A rivet violently bursts from its place and ricochets around the small cabin—narrowly avoiding Orville's head before coming to rest near his foot. Up ahead, Orville can see what appears to be the half-destroyed ruins of a building jutting out from the bottom of the ocean..." Notice how the Narrator added details about what was going on, like the diving limit and the rivet, and came up with the idea of there being

buildings at the bottom of the ocean. As Narrator you can invent new things about the world the characters are living in, so long as it fits in (more on this soon).

In a different story, Mr. Zorn is the finance minister of a fictional developed country named Janada. You could narrate something like this: "There's a knock at the door, and Zorn gets up from his desk to answer. 'Yes, hello?' he says to the short, round-spectacled clerk beyond the threshold. 'Mr. Zorn?' the clerk asks, to which Zorn nods. Suddenly, with machine precision, the clerk pulls out a 9mm pistol and levels it at Zorn. Zorn dives to the floor as bullets start flying, passing so close to him that he can feel their heat." See how here the Narrator made the clerk an assassin, but decided that Zorn survived the initial shooting unscathed.

In yet another story, Gloria and Emily are two harpies having an argument over who will get to eat the hapless hero Jed they just captured. "'Skwawk!' Gloria cries, 'I found the manling, he's mine to eat. Not yours!' Emily is not pleased to hear this. She ruffles

her feathers and replies, 'Dear sister, surely you wouldn't think to be so selfish?' Meanwhile, Jed has been working at the ropes tying his hands and has just gotten free. 'I hate to be impolite, ladies...!' he chimes in, 'but I think you'll have to find a new dinner guest!' Jed runs for his life." Notice here how the Narrator has had a conversation between three different characters, and decided that Jed was able to free himself from the ropes tying his hands.

Don't feel too intimidated if you pause a bit or have a few moments of umming or awing. It can be especially tough to get rolling at the very beginning, but as you get used to the game and the story it will become increasingly easier. Narration is easiest if you keep your narrations short and to the point.

Hopefully I've given you a pretty good idea of what being Narrator is like. Narrating is just like anything you'd see on TV, watch in a movie or read in a book, except that *you* are telling the story.

# Taming the Chaos

You may have noticed that the Narrator has tremendous creative control over the story. Practically infinite creative control! This is kind of crazy, and if a Narrator is in a mischievous mood they can wreak total havoc on the story and ruin everyone else's fun. In the interest of keeping the story fun for everyone, and of helping to build up and maintain good suspense and pacing, Narrators should follow these rules while telling the story:

**1. Respect the Story Seed:** the Story Seed defines the *physics* for the story's world. Is magic real? Do zombies exist? Is there gravity? Is there modern technology or are we in the Stone Age? Are we on Earth or some other planet far away? Narrations should fit into the physical reality implied by the Story Seed. The Story Seed also helps to define a tone for the story. If the Seed is very serious, then don't narrate very wacky things into the story. Similarly, if the Story Seed is silly, don't start throwing horror violence into the story.

For example, if the Story Seed is about Doctor Who, the TV show about a time-travelling alien, then feel free to narrate stories taking place anywhere across time and space. Doctor Who episodes are usually somewhat scary, but sometimes silly too. The Doctor will have amazing technology at his fingertips, but fantasy-style magic doesn't exist.

If the Story Seed is a light-hearted romance set on modern-day Earth then narrations should only include things that could happen on Earth nowadays. Colony ships leaving the Earth for Alpha Centauri would be a no-no. The same goes for giant vacuum cleaners splashing into the Hoover Dam's water reservoir (yes, I've seen this in a real

game). Also, the general tone should be gentler since this is a romantic comedy. In general, characters shouldn't be committing violence, and the story will revolve more around romantic hijinks, mistaken identity, broken hearts and that sort of thing.

**2. You can only add new story information:** as Narrators take turns telling the story, the things they say become the truth about the world. The Story Seed and Story Sheet are the starting point of the story, and subsequently each Narrator weaves another layer of fact on top of the Story Seed, Story Sheet and each previous narration.

**Caveat:** Keep in mind that things you came up with during the brainstorm but didn't transfer to the Story Sheet should not necessarily be considered fact until they are narrated into the story.

Avoid contradicting previous Narrators' decisions. For example, if Catherine's eyes were green during Ann's turn as Narrator, then during Bob's turn he can't suddenly decide that Catherine has blue eyes. If someone narrated buildings at the bottom of the ocean, those buildings can't simply disappear.

It's important to note that a later narration *can* show that previous information we thought to be true is actually false. For example, if someone was murdered and Mr. Plum was seen running from the scene, it's perfectly valid for a later Narrator to reveal that it was actually Mrs. Green that committed the murder from a second-story window. For the example of the buildings at the bottom of the ocean, Orville Wright might realize later that they were only large rock formations that looked like buildings.

If you find, as you narrate, that something on the Story Sheet or something that was previously narrated is just not working out or not making sense, a special rule called a *Time Out* will allow all of the players, together, to decide to change things so that they make more sense.

**3. Keep It Simple, Silly:** the KISS principle in this case means that you just need to narrate the *obvious* next step in the story. Your narration doesn't need to be especially wacky, creative or amazing. Your collective story will be amazing, because it's something you and your friends are creating together, and the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. Don't feel pressured to figure out all the details of that secret government conspiracy all by yourself. You are playing with other people, after all. Together, you will come up with all the details of the story. For your turn as Narrator, coming up with the obvious next step is perfect.

**4. Code of Conduct:** you can negotiate this with your fellow players, but in general every Narrator should follow these rules:

- Never say, "And it was all a dream..." (or something along those lines) in order to cancel out some of the story and replace it with something new.

- Don't include any of the *players* in the story. This can very quickly make the player feel singled-out and extremely uncomfortable.
- Avoid excessive profanity, graphic violence and graphic sexuality, unless all of the players unanimously agree that some or all of these are okay for today.

**5. You can't narrate the Answer to a Question:** for example, if the Question is "Will Joe reach the helipad?" then you can't narrate, "Joe fights past many zombies and reaches the helipad." since that answers the Question with a *Yes*. Similarly, you can't narrate, "Joe gets caught by a horde of zombies and is torn to bits." because that's answering the Question with a *No*. There is a specific event called a Showdown that allows you to answer Questions.

If this all seems like a lot of stuff to remember, don't worry too much. It will all become second nature very quickly since the rules fit so well with the natural act of storytelling. What's more, any time you accidentally break one of these rules your fellow players will be happy to call a *Time Out* to resolve the issue. So just narrate and have fun, and if you accidentally go too far then the other players are there as a safety net to help you stay within the bounds of the story's reality.

## Your First Narration

Alright, so you're the first Narrator and it's your turn to narrate. Now what? Here's a step-by-step primer on what to do:

1. The first thing you'll want to do is look over the Story Sheet to find something that interests you there. It could be any element there other than a Question or the Story Seed, so this includes: characters, goals, relationships, scenes or threats. Now just start describing that element in greater detail. Make it more real by telling us more about it (what some authors call *colour*). Draw a card and put a checkmark in the box next to the element that you just described in more detail.
2. Now narrate a bit of action that moves the story forward and makes the Subplot Question more or less likely to be answered with a Yes or a No. If you pushed the Question toward Yes then place any card from your hand face-down on the Yes Answer Sheet and bring the sheet in front of you. On the contrary, if you pushed the Question toward No do the same with the No Answer Sheet instead.
3. Your turn is over and Narration now passes clockwise to the next player.

That's the basic idea! Now the next players repeat what you did, each picking a new unchecked element to add detail to, checking off the element, drawing a card, and then adding a card to an Answer Sheet and pulling the sheet in front of them.

Here's an example: let's say that Ann, Bob, Charlie and David are playing Muse (and seated in that clockwise order). It's Ann's turn to start as Narrator. The friends are

playing a Muse game set in a future when robots do all the menial labour for humans, but the robots are starting to rebel.

The first thing Ann does on her turn is look over the Story Sheet. One of the main characters is Rossum, the creator of the robots. She finds him interesting and decides to narrate about him. "Okay," Ann says, "so Rossum is sitting in his study. He lives in the top floor penthouse of an 80-floor building—and has the whole floor to himself. Everything in his decor is either black or white. Rossum is wearing a black tuxedo and sitting alone in front of a Chess board with a game in progress. He moves a pawn forward, and says, 'I believe that's checkmate.'"

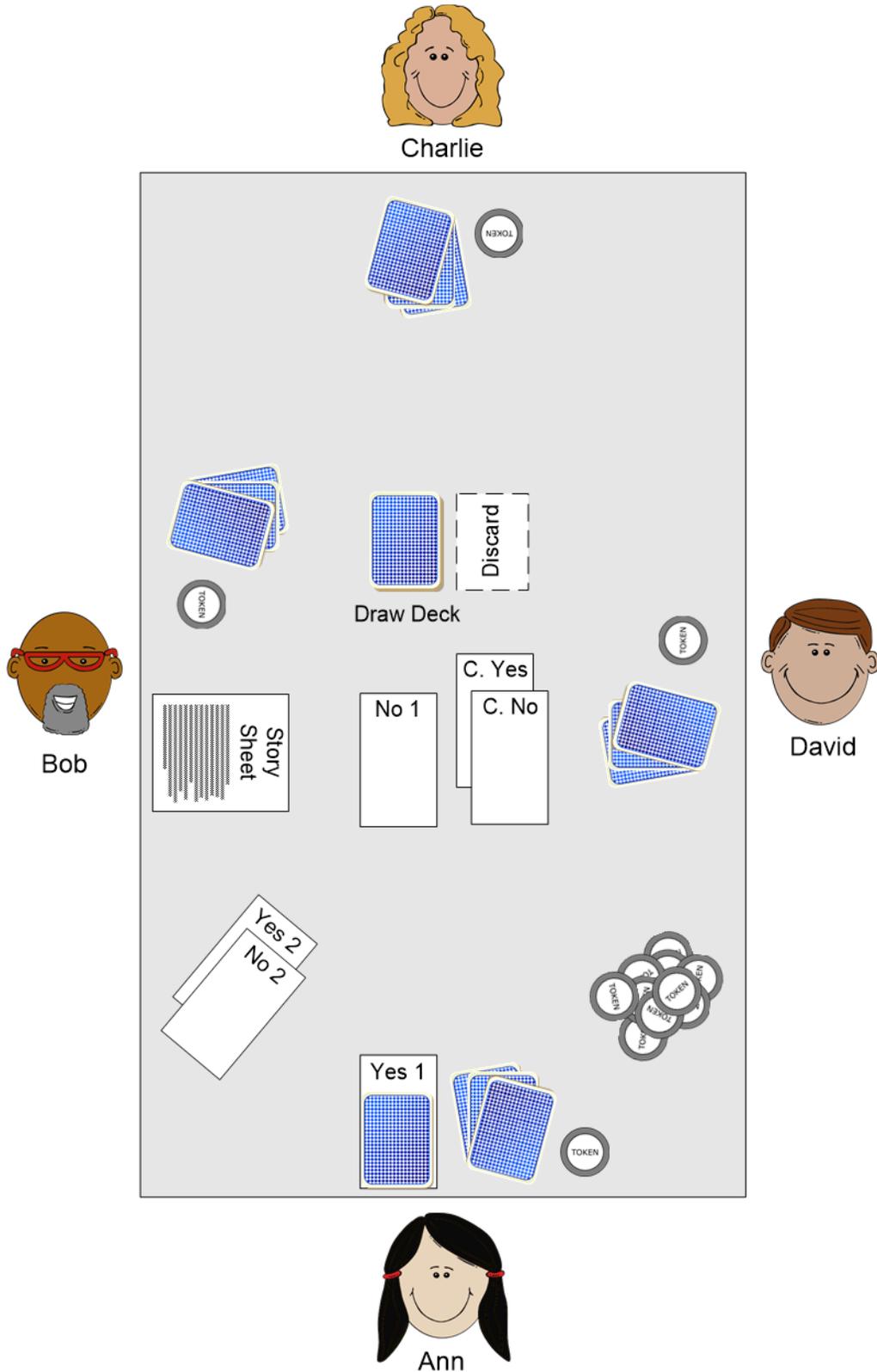
Ann hasn't explained who Rossum is playing against, for example, but she has done a good job of describing Rossum so that the other players can imagine a picture of him and understand him a bit better. Ann draws 1 card and checks off Rossum on the Story Sheet.

Next Ann wants to move the story forward by Supporting an Answer. One of the Subplot Questions is, "Will the robots slay their creator?" She begins narrating again, "While Rossum is playing Chess, unseen and unnoticed behind him, one of his robots is standing in the corner of the room. The robot is watching him, and using its wireless network connection it relays Rossum's current location to the robot rebellion."

Ann takes a card from her hand and places it on the Yes 1 Answer Sheet. She just made it more likely that the robots will slay Rossum, their creator. Ann brings the Yes 1 sheet in front of her to show that she owns that Answer now. Her turn ends, and it becomes

Bob's turn. He grabs the Story Sheet and brings it in front of himself.

Here's a diagram of what play looks like now:



## The Narrator's Turn

Alright, now that you have the basic idea of how Muse works in practice, here is more detail on what the Narrator can do during his or her turn:

Narration boils down to adding description, colour, and imagination to the story, followed by Supporting an Answer or starting a Showdown.

You may be wondering *how much* you should narrate. There's no hard rule here, but it's generally easier for you and more fun for everyone if you keep your narratives relatively brief. When describing a story element the equivalent of a paragraph or two in a book is fine. For Supporting an Answer an extra paragraph of text is fine.

Remember the KISS principle and focus on the next obvious step in the story. If you're going on for too long then your fellow players will let you know (hopefully not with rotten tomatoes, that would be in poor taste). If you're not feeling super inspired at the moment then you can be more brief or even skip the rest of your turn.

During your turn as the Narrator you can do the following:

**1. Draw 1 card** if you deserve one, **maximum 1 card per turn:**

During your narration, draw 1 card if you added colour/description to an unchecked element from the Story Sheet. Add a checkmark to the element now. If more than one element was described then pick one of them arbitrarily.

For example, Ann is currently narrating. She looks at the Story Sheet and sees Joe the Janitor is unchecked, and decides to start

narrating some description for Joe. "Ok, Joe is this really tall guy, with a grizzled half-shaven face, brown hair and brown eyes. He has pockets under his eyes, like he hasn't slept in a long time, and this weary look on his face that says he doesn't care about himself, you, or anything." Ann checks off Joe the Janitor and then draws a card. She continues her turn...

**Only after ALL unchecked elements have been checked off on the Story Sheet:** If a Listener thinks that what you just narrated was really awesome then they can *give* you the top card from the draw deck (without sneaking a peak at it). When players are still getting used to this rule, as Narrator you may need to politely ask if you may draw a card.

For example, let's say that Bob is the current Narrator in a different story. The game has been going for a little while and now all of the characters, goals, relationships, scenes and threats on the Story Sheet have been checked off. Now Bob has to please his fellow players to earn a card during his Narration. Bob begins narrating about a concert, "So at the concert there are tons of people, the music is really loud and the grass has been smashed into mud. The band that's playing is called the Ungrateful Dead—" At this point David starts laughing at Bob's not-so-clever pun. Still, David likes a bad pun and draws a card and hands it to Bob.

If you have no cards left in your hand then draw 1 card.

Remember that if you end up with too many cards in your hand then as Narrator you discard the extra cards of your choice *after* your turn ends.

**2. Support an Answer** by narrating something that pushes the story toward answering a Question with *Yes* or *No*.

If it's a Subplot Question, play a card face-down from your hand onto the appropriate Answer Sheet and bring the sheet in front of you.

If it's the Crisis Question then play a token onto the Answer Sheet and bring the sheet in front of you.

Supporting an Answer **ends your turn**. The next Narrator is the player on your left.

There will be a detailed example of Supporting an Answer in the next section.

**3.** The last thing you can do as Narrator is **Start a Showdown** by picking a Question that you would like to see answered. This *ends your turn* immediately, and then the Showdown begins!

Before you can start a Showdown for a Question, each of the chosen Question's Answer Sheets must be owned by a player and have at least 2 cards on it.

You can't call a Showdown for the Crisis Question until later in the game (after you collectively decide to allow it during a Time Out).

Make sure that the story so far has brought this Question to a cliff-hanger point. If the Question is, "Will Clint kill Sam during the Poker game?" then it doesn't make sense to Start a Showdown while Clint and Sam are still sitting at the table calmly playing cards. However, if Clint has caught Sam cheating, thrown the table over and drawn a gun on him, now it's a good time for a Showdown!

Showdowns are described in detail soon.

**4.** As Narrator, you always have the option to **End Your Turn** early. Maybe you're not feeling inspired, or you've said everything you wanted to say and don't want to Support an Answer or Start a Showdown. Hey, it's ok. If you choose this option your turn ends and play passes on to the next player in clockwise order.

## Supporting an Answer

I will now show you a detailed example of Supporting an Answer. Let's say that Ann, Bob, Charlie and David are playing a game of Muse together, and they're still sitting in clockwise order (they really *love* sitting in alphabetical order). Let's say that they're playing a game based on Alice in Wonderland. Their Subplot Question is "Will Alice beat the Queen of Hearts at croquet?" and their Crisis Question is "Will Alice escape Wonderland?"

I randomly choose Ann to start as Narrator. She narrates some colour into the story, draws a card, and then says, "As Alice brings back her croquet mallet, which happens to be a flamingo, the flamingo pinches her with its beak and distracts her." This makes it less likely that Alice will win, so Ann puts a card face-down on the No 1 sheet and brings the sheet in front of her. Here's what the game looks like now:



Charlie

The central gray area contains the following items:

- Top center: A stack of blue checkered cards and a circular token labeled "TOKEN".
- Left side: A stack of blue checkered cards and a circular token labeled "TOKEN".
- Center: A "Draw Deck" consisting of a stack of blue checkered cards and a dashed box labeled "Discard".
- Bottom center: A "Story Sheet" with a barcode and the text "Story Sheet".
- Right side: A stack of blue checkered cards and a circular token labeled "TOKEN".
- Bottom left: Two cards labeled "Yes 2" and "No 2".
- Bottom center: A card labeled "No 1" next to a stack of blue checkered cards and a circular token labeled "TOKEN".
- Bottom right: A pile of circular tokens labeled "TOKEN".



Bob



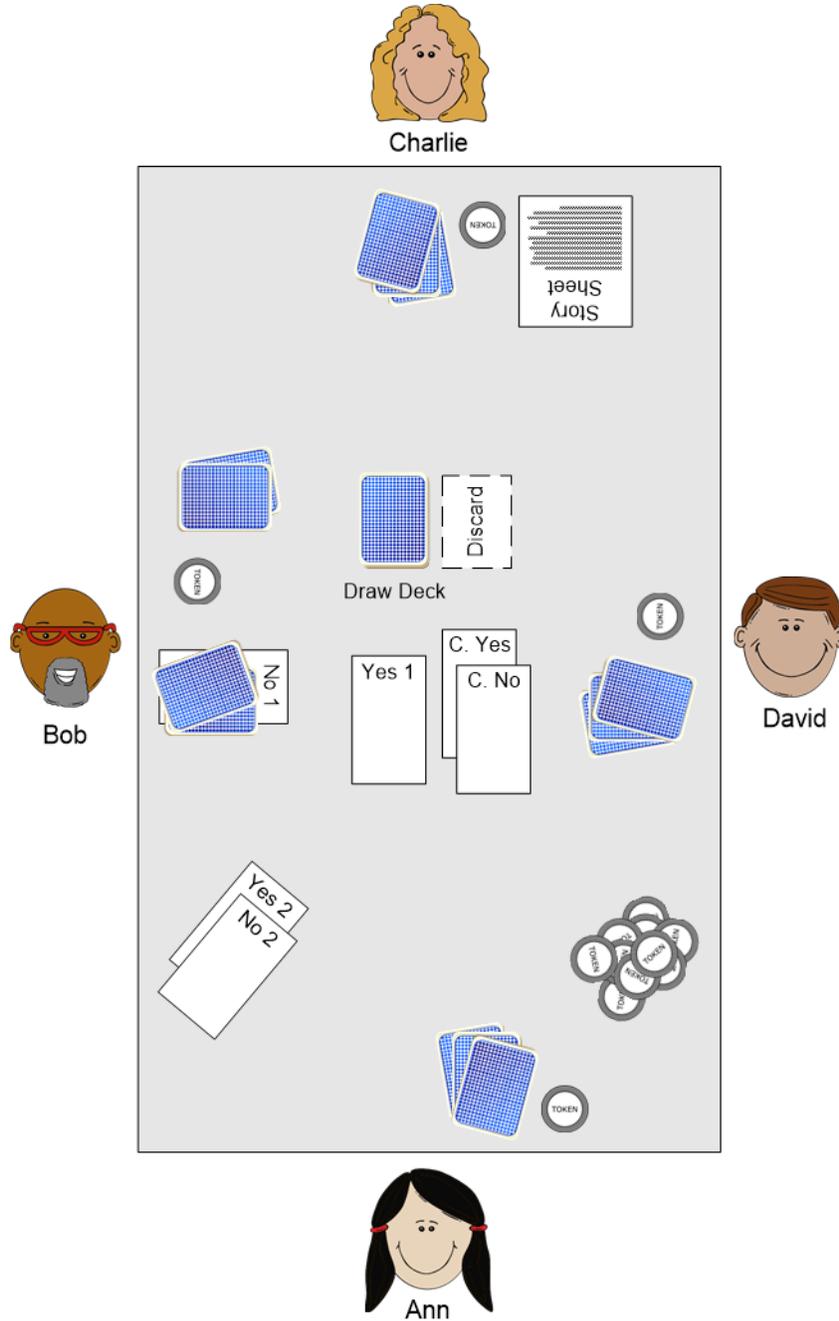
David



Ann

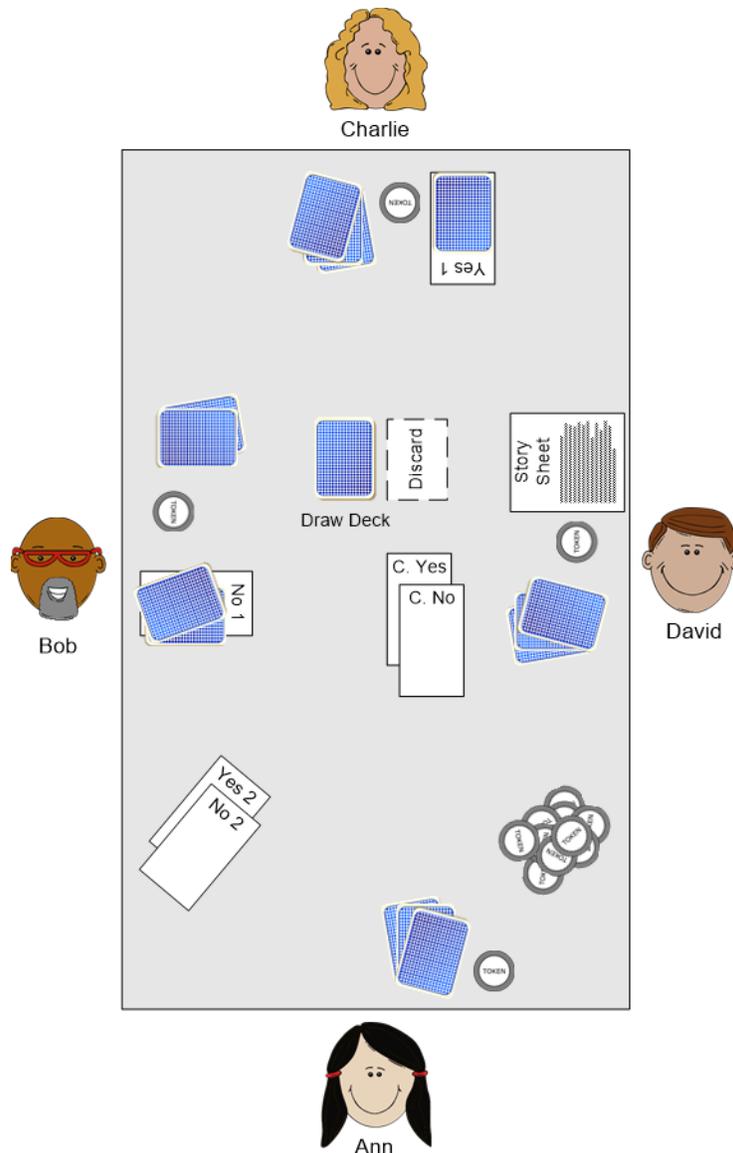
Play passes on to Bob. He narrates, "The Queen snickers and whacks the ball with her mallet. The ball, which happens to be a hedgehog, rolls around and changes directions frequently to make it through four hoops. The Queen nods approvingly. *Someone* isn't getting his head chopped off

today." Bob puts a card face down on the No 1 sheet (which is in front of Ann!) and brings the sheet in front of himself, taking Ann's card with the sheet. Ann gives Bob a dirty look. Here's how the game has changed:



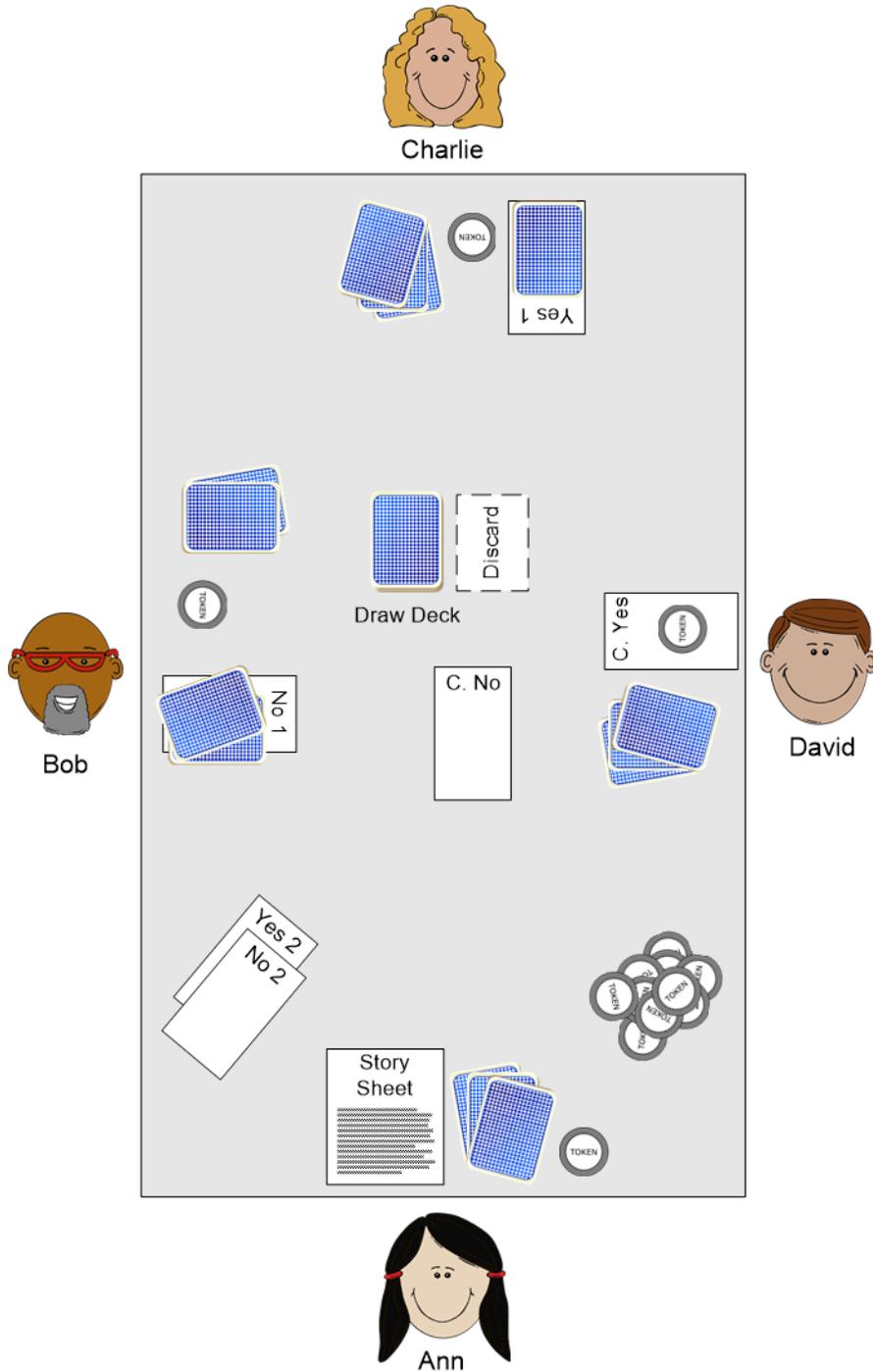
Next up is Charlie. She says, "The Queen stands proudly in her royal regalia. She is wearing a white and red patterned shirt embroidered with the letter 'Q' along with a long red scarf that comes down on either side of her body. A tiny golden crown sits atop her gigantic head. The Queen's minions cover on either side of her." Having narrated some colour for the Queen of Hearts, Charlie draws a card and checks off The Queen of Hearts on the Story Sheet. She continues her narration, "Ok, so it's Alice's turn again in the croquet match. She whacks

the Flamingo against a rock a few times until it's senseless and straight as a rod. Before it can come to, she hits the hedgehog so hard that he bounces around the yard like a Ping-Pong ball and flies through five out of the six hoops. The Queen's face turns red and steam starts coming out of her ears." Charlie takes a card from her hand and places it face down on the Yes 1 sheet (since now it's more likely that Alice will win the croquet match), and brings that sheet in front of herself.



Finally, David's turn comes around. He says, "Fuming, the Queen angrily calls for a break. As she stalks off, Alice turns to the White Rabbit and asks him, 'You won't let the Queen cut off my head if I win, will you?' The Rabbit looks a bit nervous, but he

perks up bravely and replies, 'Why no my lady, I would help you escape.'" David takes his token, and places it on the Crisis Yes sheet (since now it's more likely that Alice will escape Wonderland) and brings that in front of himself.



Ann's turn comes back again and she continues the story...

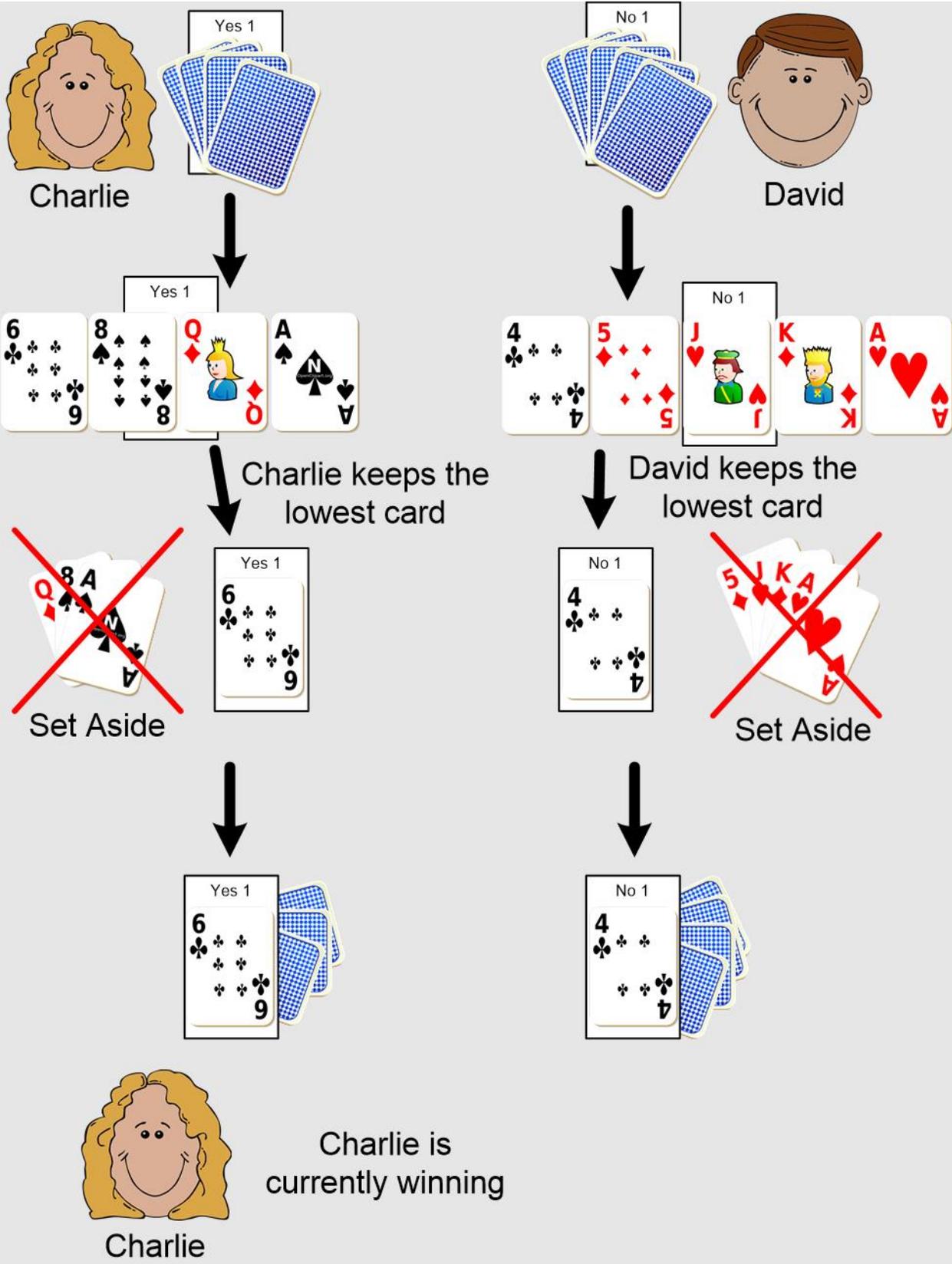
## Showdowns

In Muse, Showdowns are important events during which the players duke it out to see who gets to narrate the answer to a Question. After a Narrator Starts a Showdown for a particular Question there will be a card contest for that Question. The owner of the Yes Answer Sheet will face off against the owner of the No Answer Sheet, using the cards on the Answer Sheets and in their hands. It's kind of like an Old West shootout only without the guns. The card contest is mainly between the two owners of the Question's two Answer Sheets, however, the other players will be able to use their hands of cards to Support one side or the other to help it win. There is usually some back and forth in the contest, so whoever is initially winning is not necessarily the final winner. The final winner of the card contest will have the privilege of answering the Question and narrating the outcome. Everyone that

participates in the Showdown gets some sort of reward.

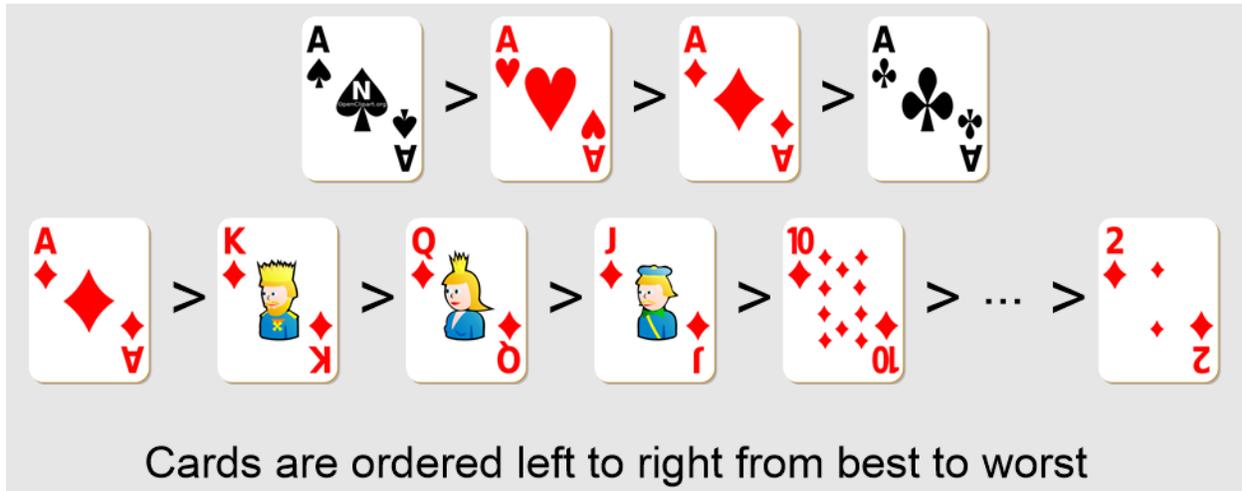
- To begin the Showdown flip over the cards placed on each of the Question's Answer Sheets.
- Each side keeps its lowest card, and sets aside the rest. Place the unused cards face-down under the Answer Sheet.
- Whichever player has the highest ranking card on their Answer Sheet is *currently* winning the Showdown. Don't get cocky! This will probably change very quickly.

Here's an example. Let's say that at the start of a Showdown for Question 1 Charlie owns the Yes side while David owns the No side. Here's how things might turn out:



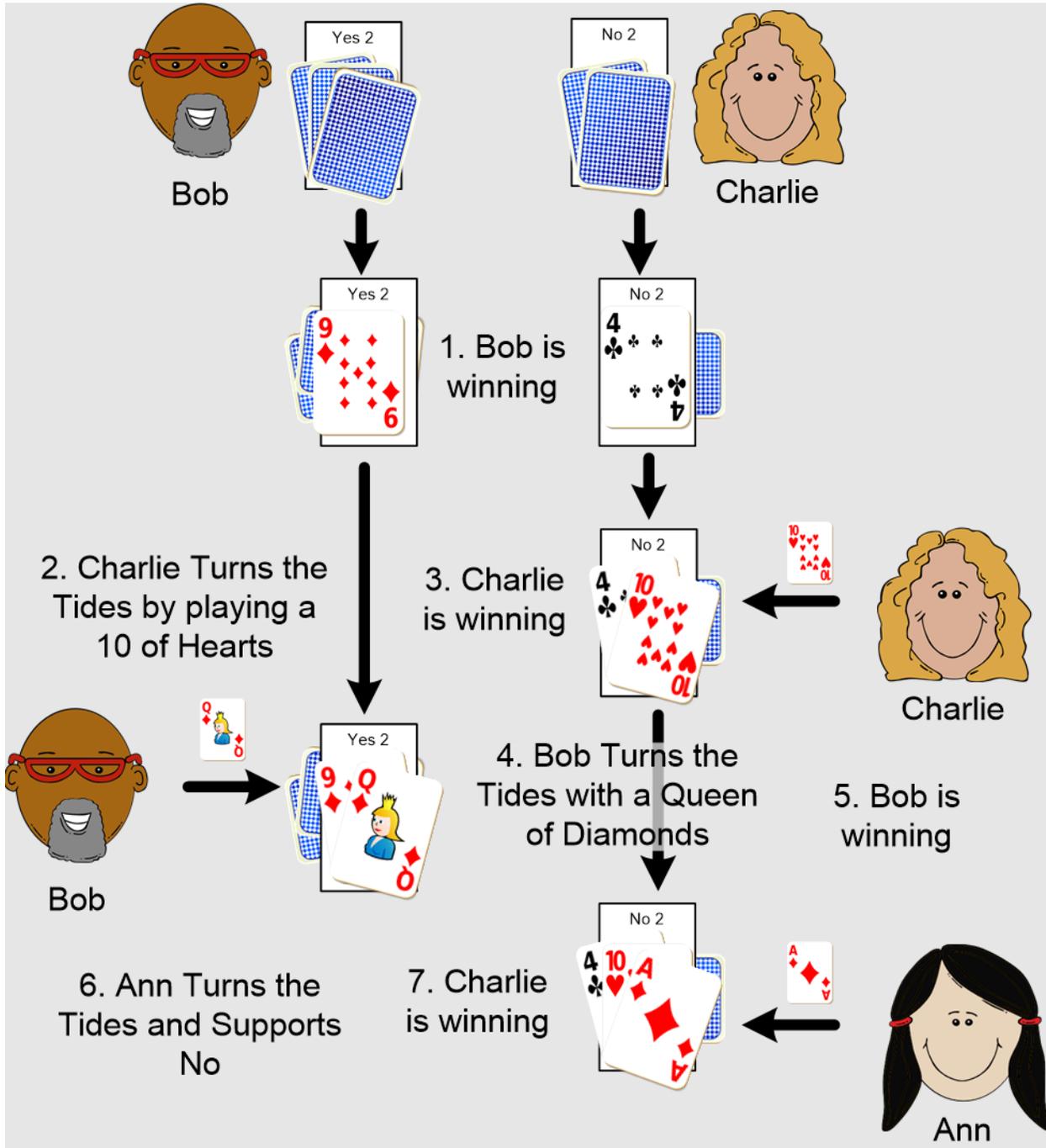
If there's ever a tie between two cards of the same rank (e.g. a 9 of Hearts and a 9 of Clubs), then use the suit to break the tie. The suits have the same order of importance as

in Bridge, from best to worst: Spades, Hearts, Diamonds and Clubs. Ties are impossible!



Any player (except the one currently winning) may **Turn the Tides** by placing a card on the losing side. The card placed *must* be of higher value than the card(s) on the other side. If you Turn the Tides but were

not one of the owners of the Answer Sheet, you are now a Supporter for that side. You may only Support one side at a time per Showdown. This diagram shows an example:



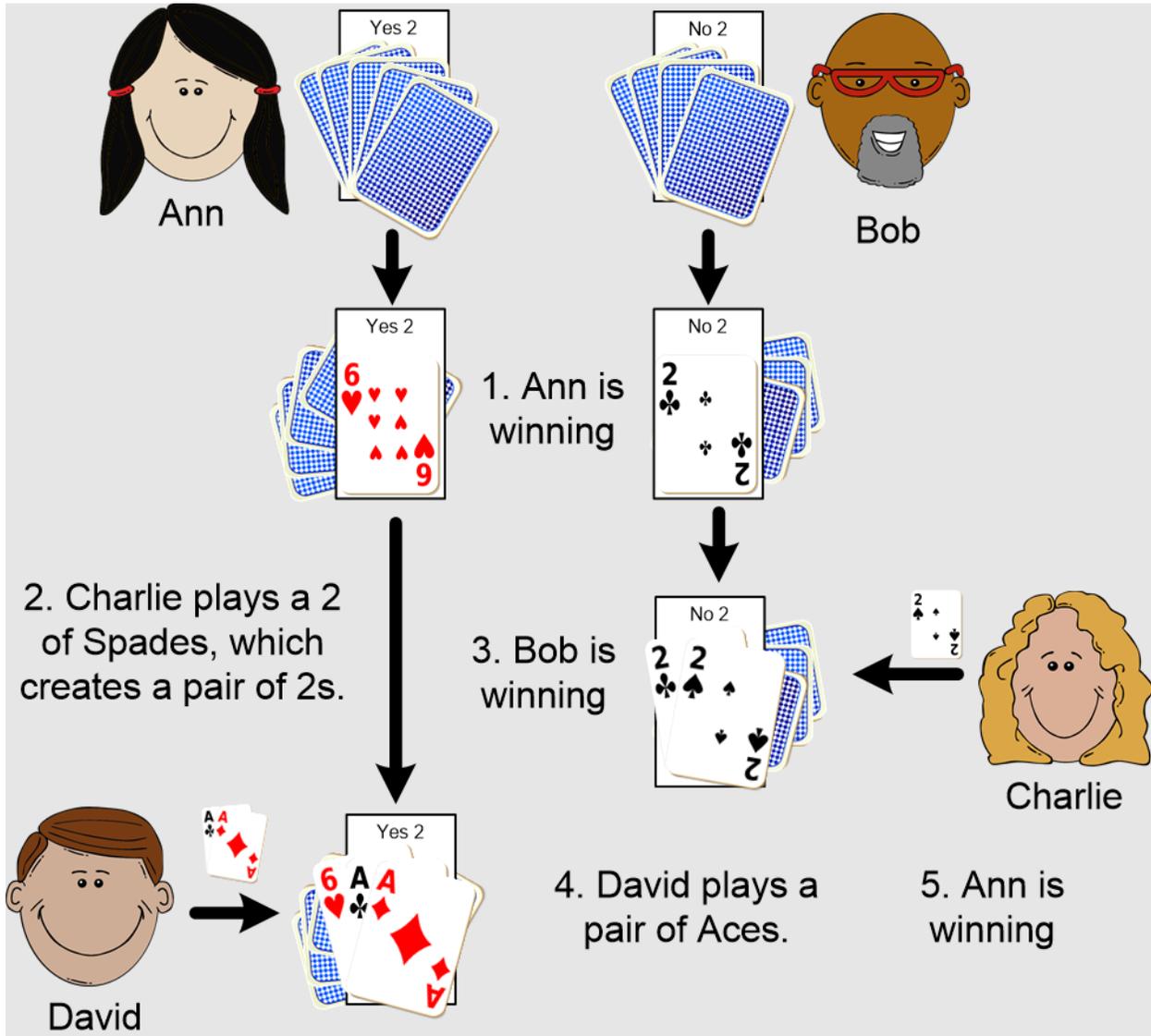
A *pair* of cards beats any single card, *three-of-a-kind* beat any pair, and *four-of-a-kind* beat three-of-a-kind. Within each category (single card, pair, three-of-a-kind and four-

of-a-kind) the category with the highest ranking cards wins. In the case of two pairs with the same rank, the pair with the highest suit wins. Again, ties are impossible.

Cards are ordered left to right from best to worst

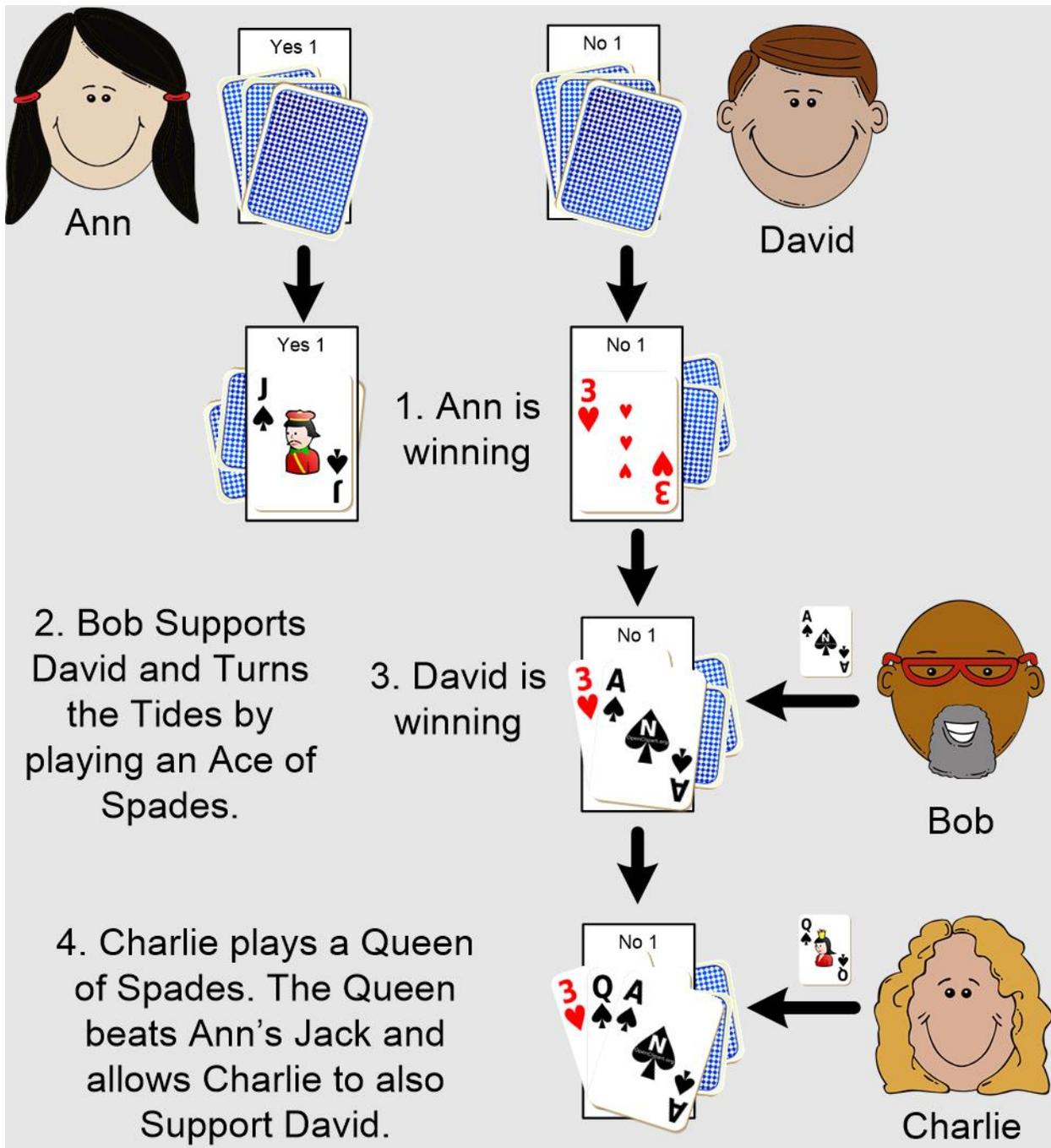
When Turning the Tides, you may play multiple cards of the same rank. Furthermore, any cards you play will combine with other cards of the same rank

already present to produce an even better combination. The following example should clarify it all. In this example, Charlie Supports Bob and David Supports Ann:



When Turning the Tides, multiple players may do so at the same time before the other side responds. This makes it easy for Supporters to get in on the action, which in turn allows the Supporters to share in the rewards later on. Everyone Turning the

Tides must still respect the rule that any card(s) played must beat what is currently on the other side, however, players don't need to beat what has been played on *their own* side. For example:



Once nobody can or wants to Turn the Tides any more, then the winner is declared to be whoever has the best cards on their side.

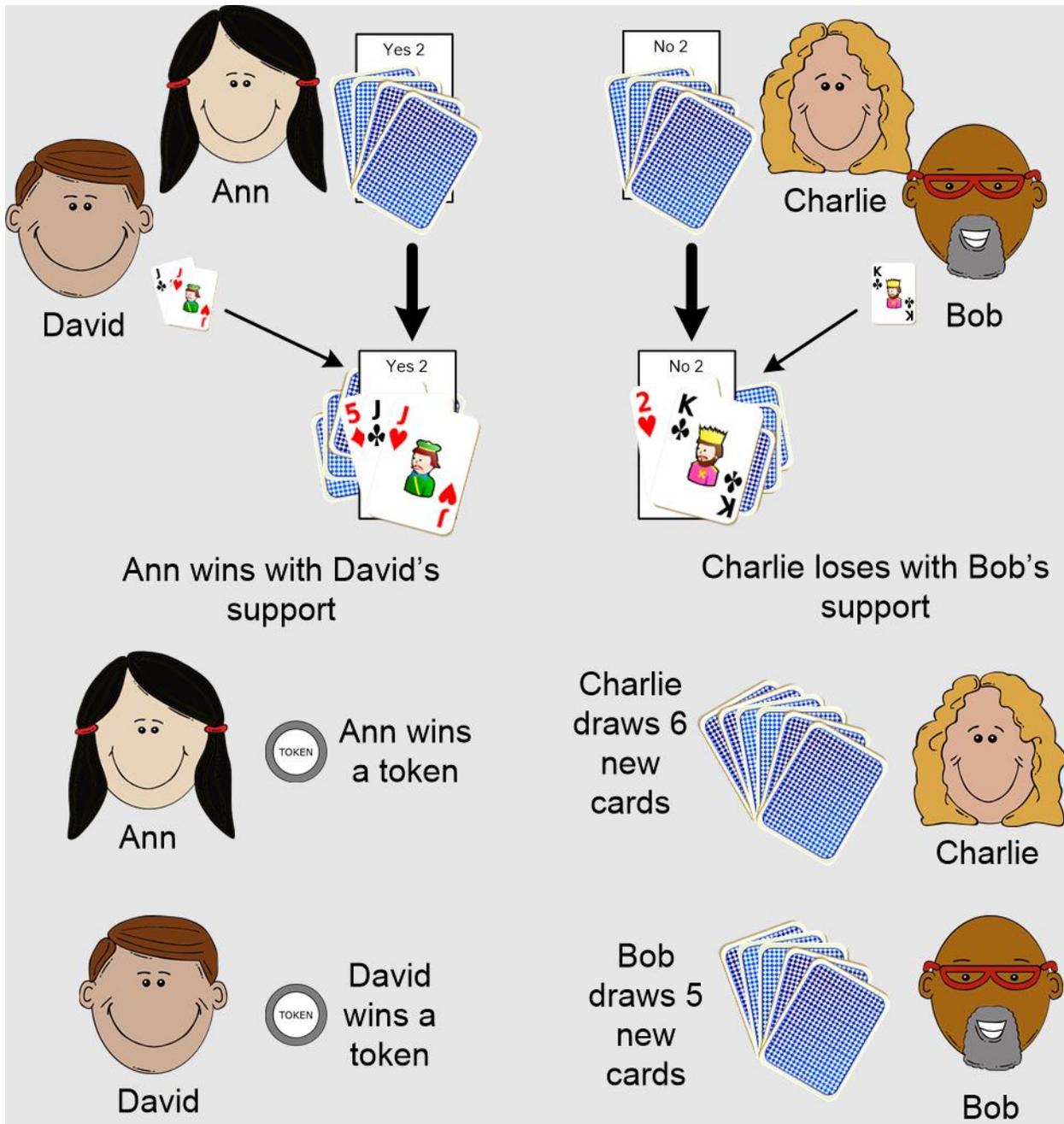
**The Showdown winner** and all Supporters for the winning side draw 1 token each. Use your precious tokens wisely—this is the only way you can acquire new ones!

**The Showdown loser** and all Supporters get cards as a consolation prize. Count up the number of cards that were used in the Showdown, including everything used to Turn the Tides and all the cards that were set aside at the beginning of the Showdown. Now discard all those cards, and draw an equal number of new cards face-down. Divide those cards evenly among the losing players, with the losing side owner getting

any remaining cards if they don't divide perfectly evenly. Keep in mind that since it's not your turn you must immediately discard any surplus cards (but at least you get to choose which cards to discard).

In the example below 11 cards are played in the Showdown. 11 divided by 2 equals 5, with a remainder of 1. Each player gets 5 cards and the losing side owner (in this case Charlie) gets the extra remaining card, for a total of 6 cards.

For a Showdown of 11 cards where 3 players were sharing the pot, 11 divided by 3 equals 3 with a remainder of 2. Thus each player would get 3 cards and the losing side owner would get the remaining 2 cards for a total of 5.



The Showdown winner becomes the new Narrator, and gets to narrate what happens. If he or she held the Yes side, then the narration tells how the Question comes true. Otherwise, the narration explains something else happening.

*E.g.* Ann and Charlie are having a Showdown over the Question, "Will Alice beat the Queen of Hearts at croquet?" Ann

holds the Yes Answer Sheet, while Charlie owns the No Answer Sheet.

Let's say that Ann wins, and now should narrate the Yes side. She could say something like, "With the Queen of Hearts standing right behind her, Alice eyes the flamingo she's using as a mallet. It knows better than to try messing with her now. Alice bops the ball through the last hoop and

wins the game. The Queen screams, 'Off with her head!!!!' All the other cards run for their lives."

If Charlie were to win instead, she'd narrate for the No side. She could narrate, for example, "Alice finds herself feeling very nervous with the Queen of Hearts staring daggers at her. At the last moment, as she swings her mallet, she stumbles and misses the hoop. Moments later the Queen triumphantly wins the game. 'Well played,

for a little girl.' the Queen says, smiling beatifically. Alice shakes her head, a single tear falling from her cheek."

After the Showdown, discard all of the used-up cards and place the used Answer Sheets to the side of the table.

Phew! So that's how Showdowns work. They may seem a little complicated at first, but after you've tried a few it will feel very natural and go very quickly.

## Listeners

Ok, we've talked a whole lot about the Narrator, but what about those passive people that are listening to this wonderful-tale-in-the-weaving? Let's go out on a limb here and call them the Listeners, with a capital 'L' because I *Like* capital letters.

In Muse, we generally expect Listeners to listen to and enjoy the story. That's it! However, every once in a while you may have a hankering to be Narrator *right now* rather than having to wait until your turn comes around in clockwise order.

- Maybe you've got a really great idea that you want to add in right now.
- Perhaps you have a better idea than what the Narrator is saying and you'd like your idea to be in the story instead.
- Also, the Narrator may be trying to Support an Answer or Start a Showdown when you don't want that.

These are all great reasons to interrupt the Narrator!

Listeners can **Jump In** by declaring, "I jump in!" and placing 1 or more cards from their

hand face-down on the table in front of themselves. This is that Listener's *bid*.

If other Listeners want to Jump In they should do so now by placing a new bid in front of themselves that has more cards than the previous bid.

The Narrator has the option of matching the currently highest bid with an equal number of cards.

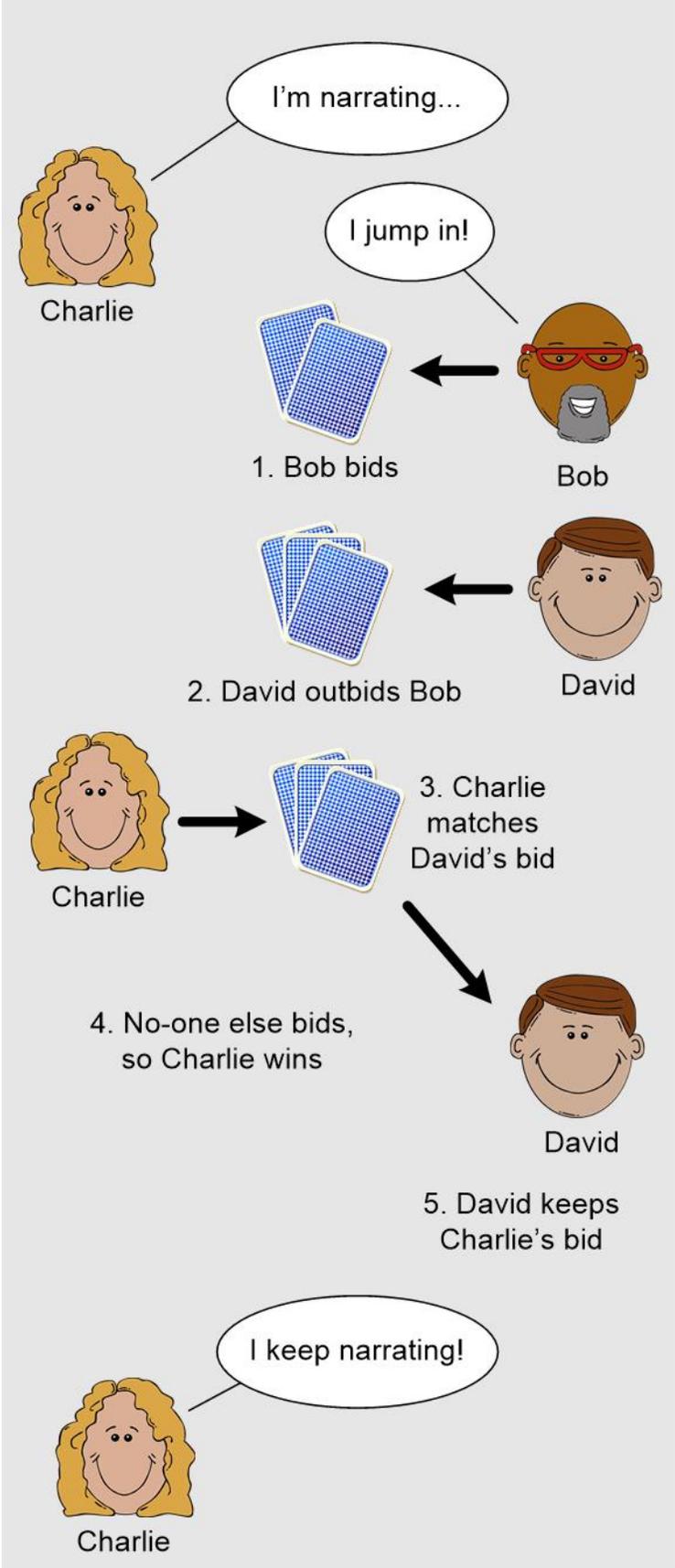
Bidding continues until players can't or don't want to bid any higher.

If the Narrator successfully matches the highest bid then the Narrator wins.

If the Narrator wins then he or she may continue telling the story as if nothing had happened. However, winning Narrators must give the highest-bidding Listener all of the cards that the Narrator bid.

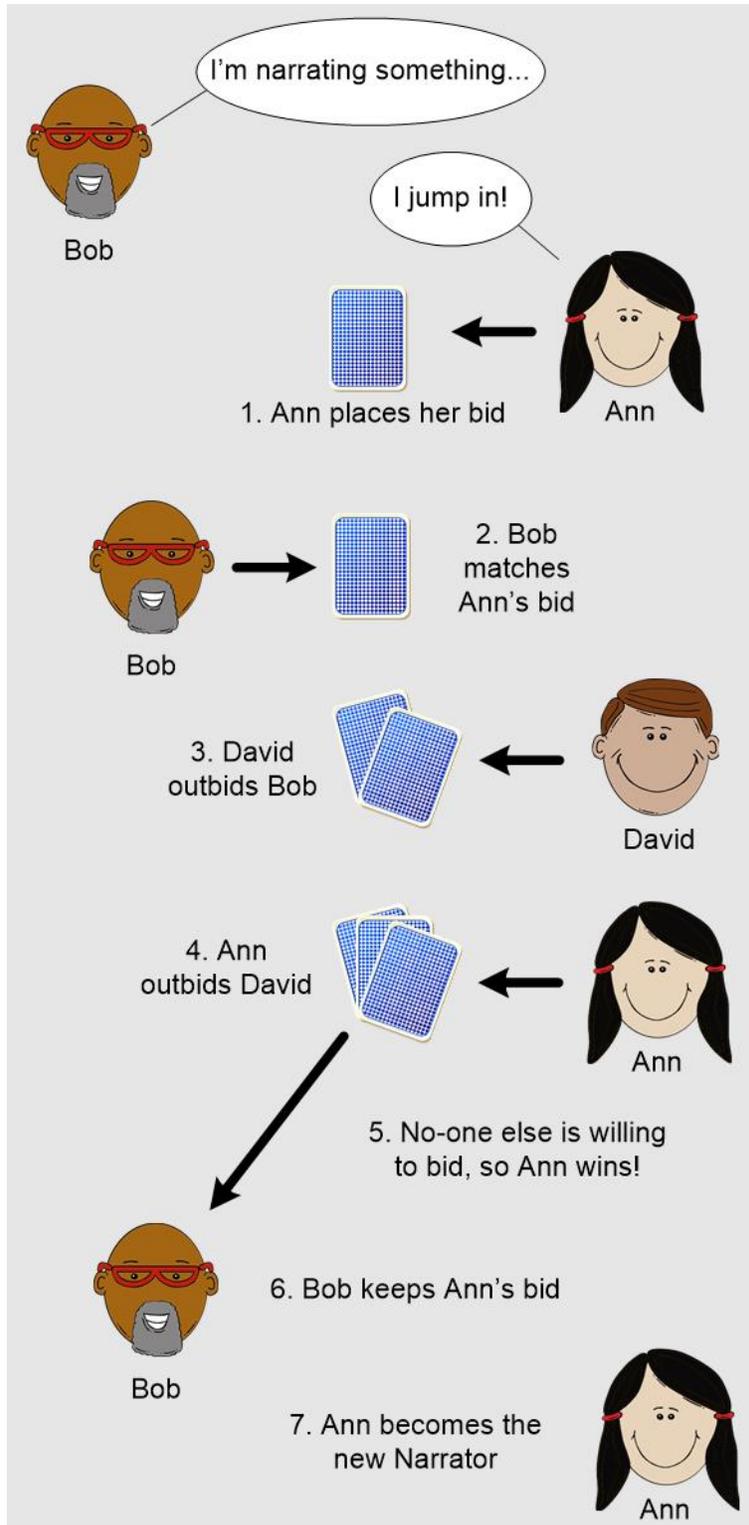
Remember that if it's not your turn and your hand is too big you must discard any surplus cards immediately.

Any Listeners that had lower bids simply take back their cards.



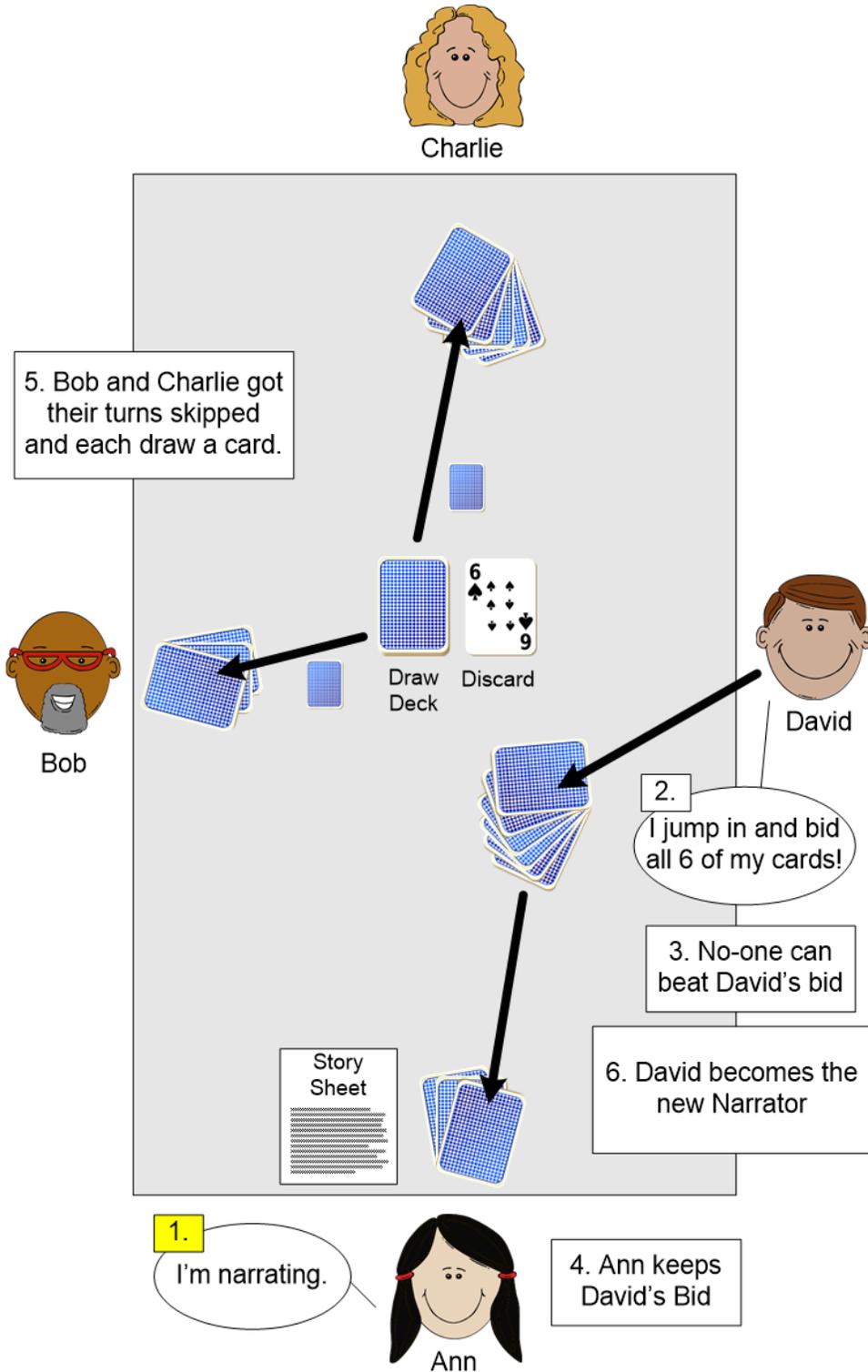
If the Narrator can't match the highest bid then the highest-bidding Listener wins the contest!

If a Listener wins, that Listener gives their entire bid to the old Narrator and immediately becomes the new Narrator.



After a Listener wins, if anyone was in-between the old Narrator and the new Narrator then they got their turn skipped!

That sucks, so they get to **draw 1 bonus card** to make up for it.



**Jumping In to Erase:** Optionally, new Narrators can erase the last few sentences that the previous Narrator told, thus allowing themselves to replace what was being said with something different and (hopefully) even more entertaining.

For example, let's say that Ann is Narrator. She's narrating about Finance Minister Zorn and his encounter with a clerk/assassin. She narrates, "...Zorn dives to the floor as bullets start flying, they pass so close to him that he can feel their heat. He opens the drawer to his desk and draws out a pistol of his own as the assassin riddles him with bullets."

Charlie doesn't like this idea so much. She decides to Jump In with 1 card, which Ann accepts. It becomes Charlie's turn, and Bob (who was in-between them and got skipped) draws 1 card. Charlie says, "Ok, I erase what you last said, Ann. Here's what happens instead: Zorn dives to the floor and avoids the first salvo of bullets from the assassin. Next he pushes his rolling chair into his

assailant—hard. The assassin's gun goes flying, shattering the window. Zorn and he throw themselves to the floor and start wrestling for the gun. A shot is fired, and blood starts to pool on the ground..."

**Jumping In to Interrupt:** Optionally, new Narrators can Jump In to prevent the previous Narrator from Supporting an Answer or Starting a Showdown.

*E.g.* David is Narrator, and he wants to Support an Answer for Bob's No 2 Answer Sheet. Bob doesn't like this since he's planning on triggering a Showdown for Question 2 and wants to remain owner, so he says, "I jump in!" Bob bids 1 card. David matches his bid with 1 card. Bob puts down 2 cards, which David accepts. David takes the 2 cards, and Ann—who got skipped—draws 1 card. It's now Bob's turn, and he says, "I Start a Showdown for Question 2." It cost Bob 2 cards but he got to remain the owner of Question 2 (that way he narrates if he wins).

## Time Outs

Ok, we've established the individual things that Narrators and Listeners can do. Well, there is one more thing that *any player* can do at *any time* during storytelling, and that's call for a Time Out.

**Time Outs** are a *really* important part of Muse. *Don't* forget about them. They are usually a short interruption in the story that lets people get over road bumps and then continue. They're often going to involve some negotiation as you all figure out how to move on in the story. There are lots of good reasons to call a Time Out, such as:

- To pause for a moment to digest the story.
- To go grab some food.
- To use the washroom.
- To clear up confusion ("Huh? I thought Joe the Janitor was on the roof? Why's he in the basement all of a sudden?").
- To clarify the story ("This is five minutes ago, when Joe was rooting around in the basement looking for stuff he could use on the roof.").
- To erase bad things from the story, *e.g.* for when you realize 20 minutes after the fact that maybe having made Finance Minister Zorn's assassin an android was a *bad* idea.
- To change the Story Sheet, for when you find that the Crisis Question isn't working for you, or that you'd like to revise a character or scene (or anything else) to better fit how the story is evolving.
- To provide guidelines on how to proceed (inevitably some players will know the rules better than others, you can use Time Outs to offer hints or encouragement).

- To ask the Narrator to delay Starting a Showdown because the Question hasn't reached the right level of tension yet.
- To ask players why they're Jumping In.

Time Outs can also be used to trigger these specific game mechanics:

### To **Raise a Question:**

This works just like during Story Sheet generation. Assuming that there aren't already 2 Subplot Questions in play, you can suggest a new Subplot Question. If at least 1 other player likes the Question and nobody strongly objects then add it to the Story Sheet (in whichever slot is empty: 1 or 2) and then move the appropriate Answer Sheets into the center of the table.

When's the right time to add a new Question? Basically, any time you're interested in focusing the story on a particular character doing something cool. If you're asking, "Will Joe reach the Mall's roof?" you're basically asking for there to be a detailed blow-by-blow accounting of Joe's struggle to reach the Mall's roof. Zombies will be jumping out of doorways, doors will be stuck, stairs will be full of rubble, and so on. New Questions can also help move the story focus to a new character, or a new kind of action (*e.g.* from survival to romance). If you're asking, "Will Joe kiss Patty?" then you're probably moving the story toward some flirtation between Joe and Patty. Since you can have two Subplot Questions at a time, giving each Question a different kind of action can really help the story feel more layered and complete.

In terms of story pacing, it's usually best to mix it up between Questions that progress a character toward their goal and Questions that accomplish that goal. Aside from the Crisis Question, the first Questions you write should generally just progress the characters toward their goals. As the story unfolds, move on to writing Questions that get the characters their goals outright. This way the story moves at a nice accelerating pace toward the ending.

**To Bring on the Climax:**

Suggest this once the story seems to be at its peak of excitement (ahem, the climax) to bring it to its exciting conclusion. You may also need to call for this if you need to end the game really soon. If the other players

agree with you that it's time then from now on the Crisis Question is fair game—now the Narrator can Start a Showdown for it.

In the future, if a Narrator wants to Start a Showdown for the Crisis Question and you still have tokens left in your hand then seriously consider Jumping In if you can!

**To Disallow New Questions:**

Suggest this if you'd like the story to start drawing to a close sooner rather than later, but the climax is not quite there yet. If the other players agree with you then from now on no-one can Raise a Question anymore, and once the last Subplot Question is answered it automatically Brings on the Climax.

## Epilogue

The game ends when the Crisis Question gets answered.

The Crisis Question Showdown works very similarly to a Subplot Question Showdown.

Each Answer Sheet must have at least 2 tokens and be owned by a player.

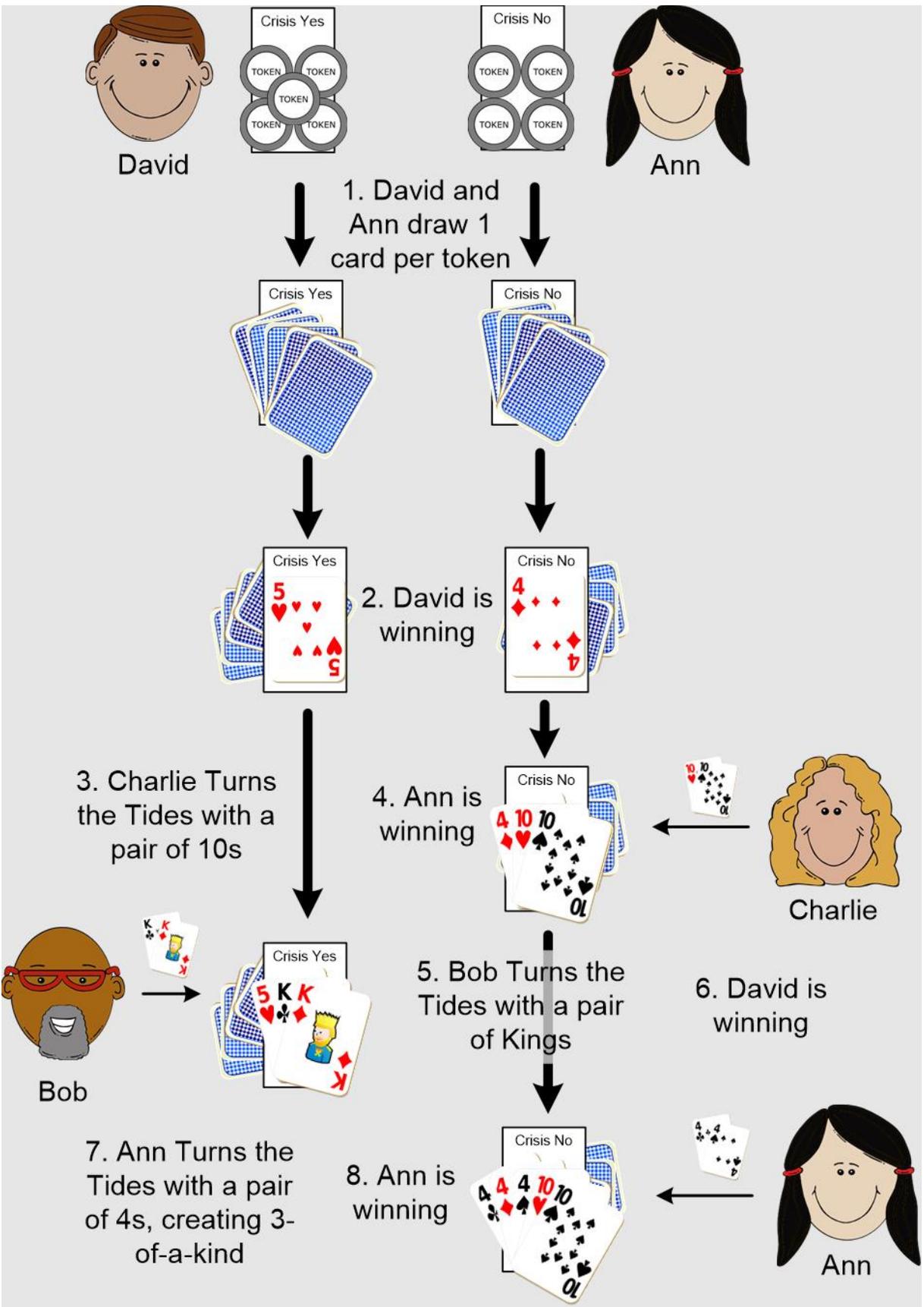
Make sure that in the story the Crisis Question is at a cliff-hanger. *E.g.* if the Crisis Question is, "Will the Mummy's curse be released?" then it's great if the stars are now aligned and we're right at the deadline

for the town to appease the gods and avoid having that curse released.

When the Showdown begins, for each token on a Crisis Answer Sheet draw one card for that side. Remove the tokens and set them aside.

For each side, discard down to the lowest card. Place the remaining card on the Crisis Answer Sheet.

Tides can be Turned and players can Support as usual. Your cards are useless after this Showdown, so go for broke!



Another important difference is what happens for the Showdown winners and losers!

- The Crisis Showdown losers get no material reward. Instead, they get to listen to the Epilogue.
- The owner of the winning Crisis Answer gets to tell the Epilogue, in other words, the end of the story. The Epilogue should answer the Crisis Question and fit with whether or not the winning Answer was a Yes or No.
- Next, in clockwise order from the winning Crisis Answer Sheet owner each player that supported the winner gets to tell an additional piece of the Epilogue.

In the example diagram above, if no-one can Turn the Tides again then Ann wins. Her Supporter was Charlie. Ann will now narrate the Epilogue, with Charlie being able to narrate a little extra afterward.

Assuming that this is the ending to the tale of the garbage strike in Napoli, Ann narrates, "Gaspard and Don Refusio are facing off in the alley next to the Church, each pointing a gun at the other. Don Refusio fires first, but after the gunshot Gaspard is left standing unharmed. The Don looks at his gun with anger and surprise.

'That's right,' Gaspard says, 'I took the liberty of replacing your bullets with blanks during my escape.' Gaspard twirls his moustache with his free hand. 'Now, I believe, it is time to take out the trash.' Gaspard fires once into Don Refusio's heart."

Next, Charlie continues the narration, "Later, Gaspard and Mayor Ascension are surveying the crime scene next to the Church. Police are bustling about the scene and a crowd is watching from beyond the police line. 'So you wouldn't know anything about this murder, would you Gaspard?' Ascension asks Gaspard. The mercenary shrugs and says, 'Would you *really* want to know if I did?' The Mayor shakes her head. 'Mayor,' Gaspard continues, taking a whiff of the malodorous air, 'I do believe this is the beginning of a very stinky friendship.'"

A few other things to keep in mind for the Epilogue:

- You can't Jump In during an Epilogue.
- Keep your Epilogue Narration reasonably brief.
- If there are any unresolved Subplot Questions still on the table you can answer them during the Epilogue or leave them as mysterious loose ends...

## Rules Q&A

In this section I'll answer some common questions regarding some of the more unusual things that can happen during a game of Muse (What? Muse? Unusual?

Nah...). For anything not covered here, a Time Out and a bit of reasonable discussion should solve any issue.

### Running Out of Cards and Tokens

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**The draw deck ran out of cards, what do I do now?** Shuffle the face-up discarded cards and flip them face-down to make a new draw deck. Muse is cleverly designed so you will always have enough cards to go around.

**What happens if there are no tokens left and someone wins a Showdown?** Find more tokens—you can use any small, dry, inedible object as a token. Edible objects are frowned upon, as they tend to disappear at a rate proportional to how yummy they are...

### Drawing Cards and Tokens

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**If you have a full hand of cards and you draw another card during your turn, do you discard it immediately or can you use the extra card to Support an Answer?** You can use the extra card to Support an Answer because you only discard the extra card *after* your turn ends.

logic, think of your kept narration as a second turn in a row.

**Do you draw a card if your turn gets skipped after someone Jumped In?** Yes.

**If you Support an Answer with your last card, do you draw another one before ending your turn?** Yes, if you haven't already drawn a card that turn.

**Do you draw a card if your turn gets skipped after a Showdown?** No.

**If you spend all of your cards to Jump In, do you automatically draw a new card during your narration (thus allowing you to Support an Answer)?** Yes, although you may not draw any additional cards that turn, as usual.

**I'm confused, what are all of the situations in which you get cards?**

**If someone tries to Jump In during your narration and you spend all of your cards keeping your narration, do you then draw a card because you have an empty hand?** Yes. **Even if you already drew a card this turn?** Yes. If this bothers your sense of

1. As Narrator, draw 1 card when you check off a story element on the Story Sheet.
2. As Narrator, once all story elements have been checked off, when another player likes your narration and gives you 1 card.
3. As Narrator, draw 1 card when you have no cards left in your hand.
4. After a Showdown, the losing side owner and all Supporters draw and split a number of cards equal to the total number of cards that were played during the Showdown.

5. After a Jump In, the winning player gives all cards bid to the player with the second-best bid.
6. As Listener, draw 1 card when your turn gets skipped by someone Jumping In.

For the first 3 cases, above, the Narrator can only take advantage of one of these per turn.

**When do you draw a new token?** This only happens after a Showdown. The winning side owner and all Supporters each draw 1 token.

## **Answer Sheets and Supporting Answers**

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**What happens if a player that already owns the No Answer wants to support the Yes Answer to the same Question (or vice versa)?** The player may support the new Answer, but must swap ownership of the old Answer with the new one. Players may not own both Answers to a Question at the same time.

**Does the maximum number of cards on an Answer apply to the Crisis Question?** No, there is no maximum number of tokens that can be placed on a Crisis Answer.

**What do I do if an Answer Sheet has the maximum number of cards on it, and I**

**want to Support that Answer?** You may still Support the Answer in your story, however, you may not place a card on the Answer Sheet nor may you take the Answer Sheet away from the current owner. The first player to max out the number of cards on an Answer Sheet keeps it until the Showdown.

**I already own an Answer to a Question, and I've just narrated something supporting it again. Do I have to place one of my cards on it?** No, you can just elect to end your turn instead of Supporting an Answer that you already own.

## **Jumping In**

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**What if two players try to bid for a Jump In at the same time?** The player placing more cards puts down their bid. If both players are trying to place the same number of cards then choose randomly who gets to bid. Some sort of random quantum effect is ideal, but rock-paper-scissors is rumoured to work.

**Can you just keep Jumping In during a Narrator's turn to suck away all of their cards?** No. During any particular Narrator's turn all of the Listeners may collectively

Jump In only once! Once someone tries Jumping In every other interested Listener must Jump In at the *same time*. If the Narrator keeps the narration then it is kept for the rest of the turn. At that point, call a Time Out if the Narrator is going on forever.

**Can you Jump In again right after someone else successfully Jumps In and takes the narration?** No, wait until their turn ends before you Jump In. Call a Time Out if the new Narrator is taking too long.

## Showdowns

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**Can you Jump In right after the Narrator has just won the Showdown and is answering the Question?** No, this is very impolite. Wait until the Question has been answered before you Jump In. Use a Time Out to negotiate if the Narrator is taking an unreasonably long time.

**Can I Support an Answer and then immediately Start a Showdown for that Question?** No, because Supporting an Answer ends your turn. However, you *can* do this in a roundabout way. First, Support an Answer. Second, during the next Narrator's turn Jump In and (hopefully) win. Third, Start a Showdown.

**What happens if one of the Crisis Answers has no tokens when the final Showdown is called on the Crisis Question?** This can't happen. Before you can call a Showdown each Answer must have at least 2 cards/tokens on it.

**Help! During the Crisis Showdown there aren't enough cards available to match all of the tokens on the Crisis Answer Sheets. What do we do?** Shuffle all of the cards in the discard pile and on the Subplot Questions into the draw deck. You will now have enough cards, or else reality will implode.

**We Disallowed New Questions, but now all of the Subplot Questions have been answered, nobody has any tokens left and the Crisis Question is not really at a dramatic cliff-hanger. What do we do now?** Don't panic! You can call a Time Out and, if everyone agrees, just give a new token to each player. Now you can start adding some more drama to that Crisis Question and bring it to the cliff-hanger you need to Start a Showdown with style!

## Adding or Removing Players

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**What if a new player wants to join the game?** If you don't mind calling a Time Out to explain the story so far then, by all means, let new players join in. Just deal them 3 cards and a token! You may also need to revise the hand & Answer Sheet card maximum based on the new number of players.

**What do we do if a player needs to leave but everyone else really wants to keep playing?** It's ok to let a player leave. That player simply discards all of his or her cards and tokens and returns any Answer Sheets to the middle of the table. It's a bummer but that's life. Fortunately, Muse generally plays quickly enough that if all the players reserve a 4-hour slot they should be able to play through a full story without any trouble.

## Strategy Q&A

You may be wondering how to play Muse to maximize your chances of winning. Sure, you might be expecting me to say something flowery like, "Just enjoy the game and everything will sort itself out." Well, let's face it, most people want to win. Here are a few explanations on how to put the odds in your favour:

**When I Support an Answer, Jump In, or discard, which cards should I get rid of first?** Remove the lowest card that doesn't destroy a card combination. If you must break up a combination then eliminate the lowest card of your worst combo. For example, let's say your hand contains 2C, 2S, 6H, 9D, KC and KD. The best card for you to get rid of first would be the 6 of Hearts because it's your lowest single card. After that you'd remove the 9 of Diamonds, then the 2 of Clubs, 2 of Spades, King of Clubs and last the King of Diamonds.

**When I Support an Answer, which side should I support?** Supporting the side with the fewest cards gives you the highest chance of winning the Showdown. Supporting the side with 1 less card than the maximum guarantees that you will still own that side in the Showdown.

**Should I add a card to an Answer I already own?** In general, no. It's only strategically advisable if the added card would bring the Answer Sheet to its maximum number of cards so that no one else can take it away from you.

**I want to Jump In, what should be my opening bid?** Generally, bid with 1 card unless you have a good reason. Often, the Narrator will accept and you've just lost the minimum number of cards. However, if you can see that another player wants to Jump In you can bid the same number of cards as they have in their hand to prevent them from Jumping In. This can allow you to win even though, for example, you both have 3 cards—since the other player won't be able to outbid you.

**When should I use my tokens?** If you have more than one token then use one whenever necessary to keep hold of a Crisis Answer Sheet. If you only have one token left but don't own a Crisis Answer Sheet then try to hold onto the token until after Bringing on the Climax.

## Optional Rules

Here are a few optional rules you can try out once you understand the basic rules well:

**Narration during Showdowns:** normally Showdowns are one of the only places in Muse where talking is not necessary. However, some players prefer it if every time someone Turns the Tides they also have to add a sentence or two to the story pushing it in the direction of the supported Answer Sheet. Make sure to keep this addition very brief because no-one can Jump In during a Showdown.

**Setting the Crisis Question During Play:** you may find that you're always calling a Time Out midway through the game to modify the Crisis Question (or perhaps even modifying it multiple times!) as you get a feel for where the story is going and what sort of finale would be fun. You may prefer to delay creating the Crisis Question.

Instead, at the start of the game create *two* Subplot Questions but no Crisis Question. Later on in the game you can call a Time Out to create a new Crisis Question, or upgrade an existing Subplot Question into the Crisis Question (in which case discard all of the cards on the Answer Sheets and replace them with tokens).

**Modifying the Story Sheet:** the Story Sheet is designed to have the right mix of story elements to create a fun narrative. However, if you'd like to add more story elements (*e.g.* characters, goals, relationships, etc.) then by all means feel free. Keep in mind that as you add more story elements you will be making the game session longer and the story a little more complex. This is particularly true for adding extra main characters.

## Last Words

Thanks for reading all the way to the end! I hope that you get the chance to play Muse with some friends, and that you enjoy playing it as much as I do. Please feel free to visit the official game website at <http://www.benn.ca/muse/> to leave me feedback. Do you have any questions? Let me know how *you* play the game. What kind of cool stories have you and your friends come up with? Would you like to show me your Story Sheet? Have you come up with any neat alternate rules?

Wishing you some happy gaming,

—Jonathan Benn