

Told in Whispers



**A Cooperative Storytelling Tabletop
Roleplaying Game**

By

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Told in Whispers

Designed by Joseph Simmons

Inspired by “Lovecraftesque”,
by Joshua Fox and Becky Annison
and “Powered by the Apocalypse”
by Meguey and Vincent Baker

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For My Lovely Bride, K

What is this?

“Told in Whispers” is a tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG), where the group works together to craft a story. Unlike most such games, though, you will be controlling a single character together, while also creating the world in which they exist, and any friends or foes they might encounter therein. There is no GameMaster like you’ll find in most other TTRPGs, instead the group as a whole works cooperatively to serve in that role, together.



Roleplaying?

Did you ever play “Cops & Robbers” as a child? Run around pretending you were someone else, going off on fabulous adventures with your friends? It’s like that, but with dice and a few rules to keep everything tidy.



Storytelling?

“Told in Whispers” is a TTRPG designed around the concept of cooperative storytelling. Each player takes turns controlling the Shared Character, while the other players take the role of other people they might encounter, monsters they may have to survive, and so forth. In the end, the goal is to work together to craft a horror story through cooperative play.



How to Play

All you need is a group of friends, between two and six hopefully, some tokens, and at least one twenty-sided die (d20). You will work together to create a Shared Character (SC), build the world they inhabit, and craft a story of terror and horror. You'll also likely have a blast in the process.

Just follow the Steps...



The Steps

1. Every player rolls a D20, and the one who rolls highest (tie-breaker rolls if there is a tie) gets to name and describe the group's shared character.
2. Another roll off, with the eventual highest roll allowing that player to decide where and when the adventure occurs. NOTE: Whatever unspeakable horror awaits in the story will be introduced through suggestions and complications during play.
3. A third set of rolls determines who starts the game. They describe a starting scene involving the Shared Character, until another player offers a Complication. The Controlling Player then rolls a D20 against the Current Target Number. Control of the SC moves to the next player (counter-clockwise).
4. When control of the SC moves to another player, said player continues the tale, describing what happened as a result of the previous player's roll. They then continue the story, until another player offers an Complication, which is rolled against as in Step 3. Play then moves to the next player counter-clockwise from the last. Rinse and Repeat.

Scenes

A Scene is basically a Player turn, where they describe what is going on, until something Dramatic (a Complication) occurs. This should take no longer than 5-10 minutes each. If there are other non-player characters (NPCs) described in that scene, other Players can step in and roleplay those NPCs, as needed. Those Players can raise their hand to request to roleplay a given NPC for that scene, or the Controlling Player can ask another player to roleplay one of their NPCs.



Complications

When something happens that would lead to a dramatic action, that is a Complication. Everything from someone stepping in front of the car the SC is driving, to a monster crawling out from under their bed, is something that requires the Shared Character to do something that might have consequences if they fail. NOTE: Complications are meant to be a natural dramatic moment that fits within the story the group is telling together. So other players can overrule stupid complications by majority group vote.



Violence

Usually, there will inevitably be a Complication that involves some measure of violence. The monster will eventually attack, and that is about as complicated as it gets! Unlike other Tabletop Roleplaying Games, though, we only make one roll for the entire combat scene. Whether or not the Controlling Player succeeds or fails doesn't matter, the next player in line describes what happens in that action scene, culminating in the SC either being wounded/killed, or escaping somehow. That player then continues the tale as in Step 4, as described previously.



Current Target Number

The initial CTN starts play at 10, and you must roll equal to or higher than the CTN to succeed on whatever action you have to take. On a successful roll, the CTN rises one point, and on a failure it lowers by one point. The CTN can never rise higher than a 19, nor lower than a 2. I suggest keeping track of the CTN with tokens like beads, pebbles, or human bones.



Endgame

When or if the CTN lowers to 3, or it seems dramatically appropriate for the SC to die (majority group vote), then that can be described by the next Controlling Player. On a roll of a Natural 20, when the CTN is at least a 17, then on a majority group vote the following Controlling Player may describe how the SC has escaped from or otherwise beaten whatever terror has been hunting them.

In scenes like these, the entire group is encouraged to get involved, and add flourishes to the scene to really make the adventure end on an enjoyable note (for good or ill).



Bad Vibes

Gameplay is intended to be lighthearted and fun, and certainly not competitive in any way. Players are working together to tell a story, that's it. If the Shared Character dies, it dies. If it lives, it lives. If for some reason the gameplay turns sour, or one or more players seem to be upset or causing other players to be upset, then everyone should take a break. Remember, it's just a game, there's nothing personal here, nor should there be. Take your personal grudges elsewhere.



Too soon?

Oh, no! The SC died!

So, what happens when the d20 just doesn't work in the group's favor, or the story just naturally leads to an 'early exit' for the SC? Well, you can continue the story with a new protagonist SC (repeat Step 1, or use an NPC already introduced in previous play), or just start all over and create a whole new story.



The Play's The Thing

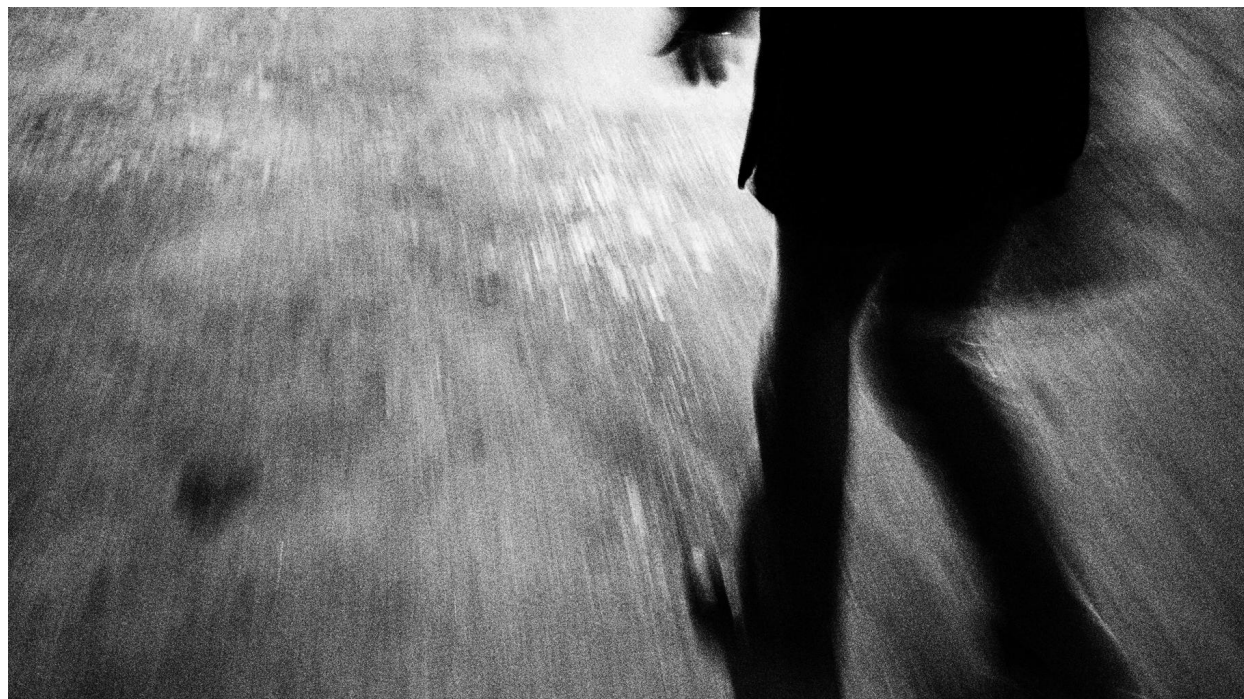
So, what exactly is the goal of this game? To tell a tale, in this case, one of horror. That's it, nothing more. No experience points are earned, no gold, jewels, or treasure collected. Just a story told of a single protagonist, facing down some unrelenting horror, by a group of friends. The dice rolls are simply there to add a small amount of structure, and give the game a feeling of heightening stakes.

The end result is meant to feel like friends telling scary stories around a campfire, only with more group interaction. If that's not your bag, try "Call of Cthulhu" instead.



Solo Play

Can this game be played solo? It is a question asked of most TTRPGs anymore, and in this case, the answer is a qualified “Yes”. It isn’t designed for solo play, but with the right oracles and solo tools, you could certainly make it work. But the gameplay wouldn’t really be the same, as this is designed to be a collaborative game. You could use some oracle tools to come up with complication prompts, but again, it wouldn’t have the same flow as group collaborative storytelling. But hey, you do you.



I want a GM!

There will inevitably be someone who looks at this game and thinks it needs to be more like a standard TTRPG, by using a single player taking the role of a GameMaster to build the world, control the NPCs, and otherwise lead the adventure. You can play this game, or any game however you like, but in this case you won't really be playing "Told in Whispers". You can do standard horror roleplaying in literally hundreds of other TTRPGs, but this is a GM-less game. Adding in a GM takes away the cooperative storytelling that is the core of TiW. Go play something else instead.

