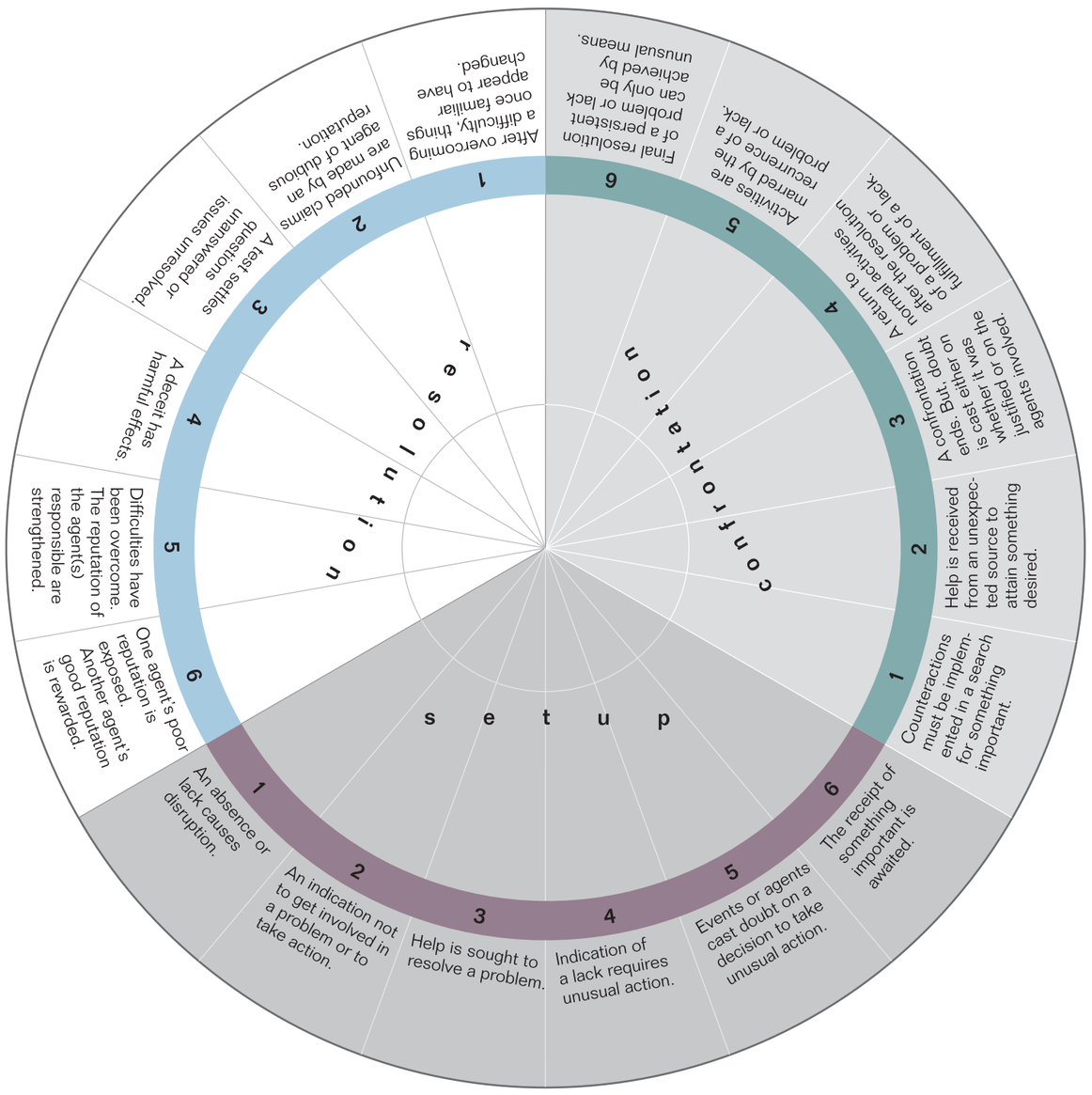
storienteer.info

Storienteer, from orienteer *verb*

- '(**orient oneself**) [to a story] find one's position in relation to unfamiliar surroundings.'
  (Oxford English Dictionary)

Dial-a-plot is a resource for composing design stories. It is part of a suite of storienteering resources that can be combined with existing design methods and tools to help navigate the often difficult process of design storytelling. It introduces the element of chance (the dice throw) and the challenge of (re) telling a story to fit a set of novel propositions.



1. dial-a-plot

Dial-a-plot works by helping designers structure the contextual information on which stories are based according to plot functions[1] and the "three-act structure"[2]. These help to organize the story's plotline into a *beginning* (setup), *middle* (confrontation), and *end* (resolution).

§ Have research about the subject of the story on hand[3].

§ Throw three dice. Match the numbers on the dice to numbers in each zone of the dial.

2. plot cards

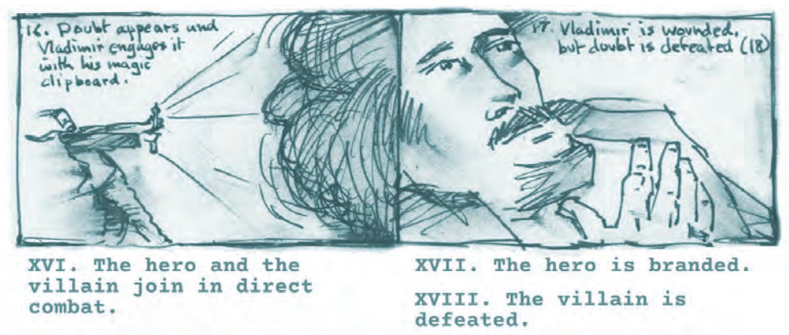
To make story composition easier, the plot functions are inscribed on cards that can be moved around.

§ From the pack of plot cards, pick-out the selected plot functions.

..the backstory on dial-a-plot

Vladimir Propp was a Soviet scholar and folklorist. Propp showed that all folktales consist of an ordered system of thirty-one narrative units which he referred to as "plot functions". Propp's plot functions have been adapted for use in design and embodied in a game-like activity intended to stimulate creative thinking and group discussion.

Section from a fictional depiction of how Vladimir Propp completed his work on "The Morphology of the Folktale"(1928), told illustrating the thirty-one plot functions (full storyboard at: storienteer.info).

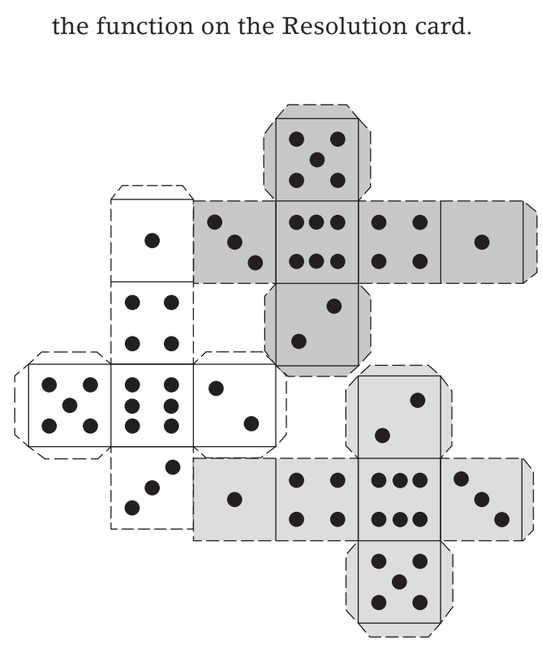


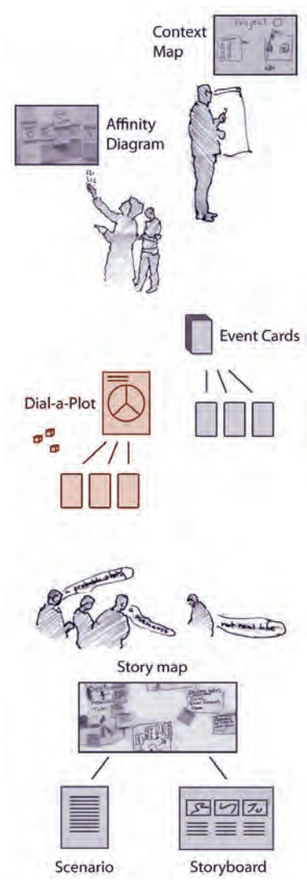
'All stories rely on the listeners' ability to fill in the blanks using their own experiences and imaginations.'
(Quesenbery & Brooks 2010: 252*)

3. story-spinning

Stories emerge from imaginings, discussion, and iteration.

§ With sources of knowledge about the story's context and purpose on hand, compose a story *beginning* that marries these sources with the function on the Setup card, a story *middle* that marries them with the function on the Conflict card, and a story *end* that marries them with the function on the Resolution card.





Dial-a-plot, coordinated with Event Cards, affinity diagram and context map, helping to direct expression of the story as a rough map. Story maps are shared sketches that act as 'stepping stones' to scenarios or storyboards.

Setup: 1 An absence or lack causes disruption. dial-a-plot	**Setup: 2** An indication not to get involved in a problem or to take action. dial-a-plot	**Setup: 3** Help is sought to resolve a problem. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 1** Counteractions must be implemented in a search for something important. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 2** Help is received from an unexpected source to attain something desired. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 3** A confrontation ends. But, doubt is cast either on the agents involved or whether it was justified. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 4** A return to normal activities after the resolution of a problem or fulfillment of a lack. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 5** Activities are marred by the recurrence of a problem or lack. dial-a-plot	**Conflict: 6** Resolution of a persistent problem or lack can only be achieved by unusual means. dial-a-plot
Setup: 4 Indication of a lack requires unusual action. dial-a-plot	**Setup: 5** Events or agents cast doubt on a decision to take unusual action. dial-a-plot	**Setup: 6** The receipt of something important is awaited. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 1** After overcoming a difficulty, things once familiar appear to have changed. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 2** Unfounded claims are made by an agent of dubious reputation. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 3** A test settles questions unanswered or issues unresolved. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 4** A deceit has harmful effects. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 5** Difficulties have been overcome. The reputation of the agent(s) responsible are strengthened. dial-a-plot	**Resolution: 6** One agent's poor reputation is exposed. Another agent's good reputation is rewarded. dial-a-plot

Design: Malcolm Jones, 2013. Postgraduate research direct to designers in practice from Northumbria University, Newcastle. UK. More at storienteer.info. Poster mailings: i. Dial-a-Plot; ii. Event Cards; iii. Proverb Randomizer. (1) Plot functions adapted from; Propp, V. Y. (1968) *Morphology of the folktale*. University of Texas Press. (2) The "three-act structure" is used in literature and drama to help set the dramatic rhythm of a story. (3) Affinity diagrams, concept maps, personas, etc., or, in the case of scenario planning; trend analyses and a matrix of driving force. * Quesenbery, W. & Brooks, K. (2010) *Storytelling for User Experience Design*. Brooklyn: Rosenfeld Media.

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