

The
Quiet
PART 1

NARRATOR GUIDE

The Quiet: Part 1, is a collaborative adventure game created by interactive artist Risa Puno and longtime D&D enthusiast Avi Dobkin in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Designed for playing remotely, this participatory artwork is rooted in tabletop role-playing game mechanics where one player presents others with narrative situations to which they respond and react. This delightfully analog, call-and-response format offers a welcome reprieve during a time where everything has been digitized. The way the story develops is informed by what the players decide to investigate and explore—the narrative becomes a living, breathing entity, shaped by their personalities and value systems. This malleable framework is an ideal way to introduce a small sense of agency during a time when many things feel beyond our control.

While *The Quiet* maintains some of the fantasy elements that have come to be expected in these types of games, this collective storytelling experience is inspired by the complex emotions and social dynamics of this unprecedented moment in history. Rather than a distraction or escape, *The Quiet* is intended to help people engage with themes of safety, guardianship, access, and support. It provides players a disarmingly fun opportunity to consider content that might otherwise seem overwhelming during this time of uncertainty.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• Why is this called “Part 1”?

The Quiet is a story that will be told in two parts. Each part is a complete adventure that can be experienced on its own. It tells a full story that will be part of the larger narrative when both parts are complete, like a movie and its sequel.

• How many people can play?

This game is designed for 3-5 people. One person chooses to play the Narrator and the other players each take the role of a Character.

In Part 1: the Narrator runs separate sessions of the same adventure for each of the 2-4 Characters. Each Character plays one-on-one with the Narrator. In Part 2 (coming soon): all Characters will play together in a single session with the same Narrator.

The Narrator’s main responsibilities are presenting the situations to the Character, running the game mechanics, and narrating the results of the Character’s actions. The Character decides what actions they take in response to the story that the Narrator presents. The story changes based on the decisions they make.

• Do I need to know how to play Dungeons & Dragons?

Definitely not! This game was designed for anyone with an internet connection who can read English or Greek. Our goal was to create a simplified version of tabletop role-playing game mechanics that can be picked up and played really easily.

• Do we have to play in person?

No! In fact, this was specifically designed to be played by people who are not in the same location. It can be nice to be able to see the people you are playing with over video chat; however, this game can also just be played over the phone as long as the Narrator has a way to send files and images to the Characters during the game. The Narrator has information that the Character shouldn’t see, so if you live in the same home, play using different devices.

• Can I play by myself?

Unfortunately, no. This time is already marked by so much isolation that we wanted to create a way for people to be able to gather virtually.

• How long does it take to play?

Learning how to play should take about 45 minutes for the Narrator and 15 minutes for each Character. (The Narrator only needs to learn how to play once, even when running the adventure in different sessions for multiple Characters.)

Each adventure session in Part I should take about 45 minutes to play. The Narrator plays one-on-one with each Character. So if you have 1 Narrator and 3 Characters, then that Narrator will play three separate 45 min sessions with each Character.

• What if I don’t have a 20-sided die?

No problem! This game instructs players to roll a 20-sided number die (aka “d20”) to determine how successful your actions are. However, if you don’t have an actual d20 at home, you can just type “roll d20” into Google, or ask Siri or Alexa to “roll a d20.” (*More info in the Character Guide*)

• My friends and I are expert D&D players, do we have to use your rules?

Not if you don’t want to. We designed this game for anyone to be able to pick up and play; however, if you would rather play with mechanics, then your DM can just use this as a rough guide to convert this adventure for Tier 1 characters.

• When and where can I find Part 2?

Soon, and... we’re not sure yet. :) Follow @risapuno and @asdobkin on Instagram/Twitter to find out when Part 2 becomes available.

FOREWORD: Letter from the Creators

We didn't quite know what we were getting into when we started talking about writing *The Quiet*. It originally was going to be a *Dungeons & Dragons* adventure inspired by social distancing and the global coronavirus pandemic. One that would allow people to unpack some of the complicated feelings they are having and increase their sense of agency in an engaging way. Rather than being anxious due to uncertainty, players would be able to feel excited about discovering the unknown. A seemingly straightforward task, even if it wasn't necessarily an easy one. We thought that we would first come up with a basic narrative framework, and then everything else would fall into place. It turned out to be nowhere near that simple.

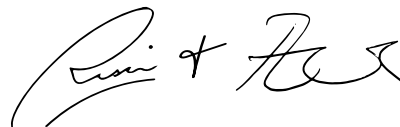
From almost the moment we began, things started to shift under our feet. One of the difficulties about writing about quarantine from inside of it was how our understanding of it kept changing. Each day, as the news brought new insights, worries, and hopes, the game grew with them. The process of writing *The Quiet* became a way for us to compare our different experiences and share hard-to-explain feelings regarding our own roles within the larger societal picture.

We found having the space to examine hard choices and sacrifices within the safety of a game so beneficial that we wanted to make it accessible to as many people as possible. But learning how to play a verbal adventure game like this can be extremely time-consuming. So instead of building a game on mechanics that can take weeks to learn, we wanted to capture the spirit of

this type of game in a format that could be picked up relatively quickly. We realized that if we wanted *The Quiet* to get into all the hands we hoped, then we'd need to come up with an entirely new gaming framework.

We had a lot of discussions about what makes this sort of game special. We even grappled with whether to call it a "role playing game." We didn't want to give people who are new to the genre the impression that our game was about acting or escapism. We started calling it a "collective storytelling experience" because we wanted a term that focuses on offering people the power to change and mold the narrative together. It is exhilarating to see how unique a story can become when multiple people bring it to life through collaboration. The idea of giving that feeling to people who might not have it otherwise, felt like something worth striving for.

It was a big push and we struggled, but we were actually able to develop our streamlined gameplay system and finish designing Part 1. While there are definitely things that we are hoping to tweak when we publish both parts in the future, we are really proud of what we were able to accomplish in this mad sprint. We hope that this game is as engaging, challenging, and helpful for you as it has been for us.



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GETTING STARTED: Gather Materials + Game Basics

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY:

1) ADVENTURE GUIDE

(separate PDF)

- **Read the Adventure Guide ahead of time.**
- The Adventure Guide is your step-by-step guide for *The Quiet: Part 1*. It has maps, diagrams, information, and descriptions to read out loud at specific moments. You want to be familiar with its contents.
- **The player should not see Adventure Guide before or during the game.**
- Follow along in the Adventure Guide as the player progresses. Each player may take a different route.
- **There are underlined links to pages in the Adventure Guide to help navigate between sections.**
- Certain pages (like the Malignant Monarch attack tracker, [on page 32](#)) might be useful to have as a hard copy, if you have access to a printer.

2) PAPER + PENCIL/PEN

(or some digital alternative)

- You should keep track of what each Character has found or earned during the adventure. If their Character goes on to Part 2, they get to bring anything with them.

GAME BASICS

- **How the story unfolds is a collaboration between you and the player.**
- There is no game board or tokens. The majority of game play is done verbally. (Occasionally, you may text or email files with extra information to the player during the game, depending on where they go and what they do.)
- **For Part 1, each player schedules a separate time to play one-on-one with the Narrator.**
- Each session starts by you reading the beginning of the story to create context and letting the player know what their Character is trying to accomplish during this adventure.
- **The Narrator has information that the player shouldn't see. If you live in the same home, play using different devices.**

If a question a player asks isn't specifically addressed in the Adventure Guide, it's up to you to fill in the answer.

- Think about how you envision the space and do your best to describe that to the player. It's okay if it's not the prettiest description, your player will be grateful for the additional information regardless.

ABOUT CHARACTERS

- **Each player creates a Character.**
- **The Character is who the story is centered around.**
- **In the game, the player makes decisions about what their Character tries to do.**
- **While this type of game is often called a "role-playing game," players are not expected to do voices or wear costumes.**

> It just means that they see things through the eyes of their Character

> The actions that the Character takes are not limited by the knowledge or ability of the player.

- **It is not necessary to memorize all of the Character's possessions. It is most important to know what they have found or earned during the adventure.**

RESILIENCE

- Each Character starts out with 10 points of Resilience.
- If they get hurt during the adventure, they lose Resilience.
- If they lose all Resilience you die.

TRADES

- When players create their Characters, they choose a Trade. (*see below*)
- Each Trade includes a different specialty skill set that allows them to add 2 points to any rolls for success that use those skills. ***Make sure to find out what Trade they chose before the start of the game.***

EQUIPMENT

- Each Trade includes specialty possessions.
- Each Character also starts out with a set of standard equipment:
 - Explorer's clothes (that you are wearing)
 - Backpack
 - Bedroll
 - Torch (w/ flint and steel)
 - Canteen full of water (½ gallon)
 - Compass
 - 50 ft of rope

NAME

- Naming their Character is optional, but it helps some players get into the spirit of the game!

CARPENTER

SPECIALTY SKILLS

Bonus: +2 → to any rolls for Physical success

SPECIALTY POSSESSIONS

- Hammer
- Nails
- Chisel
- Pouch of dried apricots

MERCHANT

SPECIALTY SKILLS

Bonus: +2 → to any rolls for Social success

SPECIALTY POSSESSIONS

- Gold coins
- Dagger
- Corkscrew
- Box of chocolate bonbons

SCHOLAR

SPECIALTY SKILLS

Bonus: +2 → to any rolls for Mental success

SPECIALTY POSSESSIONS

- Notebook and pencil
- Pen knife
- Magnifying glass
- Small bag of walnuts

Narrating is a balance of three distinct, but overlapping roles: Keeper of the Rules, Herald of the Story, and Guardian of the Player.

KEEPER OF THE RULES

- **Read the adventure guide:** Knowing how the game unfolds before you start playing will keep things moving and help you understand what a player is going to experience next.
- **You're the referee of the game:** The rules are meant to give the game structure. Even though you and the player are making the story up as you go, the rules determine things like who speaks first, who responds, etc. However, in a game with so much flexibility, the rules as written don't always neatly apply to every situation. In those cases, you must use your best judgment. It's your call.
- **Look things up:** If you don't remember how a specific mechanic is supposed to work, go back and read it. It's okay to not remember everything, it's better to pause mid-game and look something up than to make something up and realize later that you made a mistake.
- **Listen to your instincts:** We've provided you with all the tools you need to run the game and make it yours. Your instincts are going to be right for your game.
- **Keep it consistent:** Be fair. Make sure that you apply the rules the same way to each player.

HERALD OF THE STORY

- **You tell the player what is happening during the story:** As the Narrator, you describe everything the Character interacts with—from literal dialogue with creatures they meet, to describing what the surroundings look like and how they are affected by their Character's actions. You tie the different pieces of the story together and allow the player to understand what's happening.
 - > Just because you're "the voice," don't think you have to actually do voices. You don't have to do any silly voices or bad accents (unless you actually want to!).
- **Describe things clearly:** The important thing is to make sure your player understands what's happening in the story you're telling together. If they don't understand what's happening, then they can't choose how to react.
- **Make your descriptions evocative:** While clarity is most important, how you describe things helps the player get into the mindset of their Character and helps make your game unique. Feel free to get creative!

GUARDIAN OF THE PLAYER

- **The Player is your partner:** The player's ability to affect how the story unfolds is an important part of this game. It makes them feel capable, gives them a sense of achievement, and helps make every game unique.
 - If you feed them answers, then they won't get the sense of satisfaction from coming up with a solution or making the connection themselves
 - If they need hints, phrase them as questions, even if it seems obvious. For example, in the Contaminated Chamber, players often walk past the crate without examining it further. If they do this, it's useful to ask them if they want to check it out instead of just telling them to do so.
 - Honor your player's decisions. They will often try to solve things differently than you (or we, the game creators) expect. If our description of the outcome doesn't match their actions, adapt it so it does.
 - Even if you know that an action is impossible, instead of telling them they can't do it, let them try and provide them with an outcome (even if it's negative or different than they intended).
 - > For example, in the Tunnel of Overwhelm, we put in the Adventure Guide that, if a player wants to sneak by the Malignant Monarch, even though the Narrator knows there isn't enough room, let them try and fail. (See page 31 of Adventure Guide for details)
- **Keep up the momentum:** The game isn't fun for anyone when play grinds to a halt. There are tips throughout this guide to help you keep play moving. (For context, see *Running the Game, Section 5, page 10*)
- **Be prepared to think on your feet:** Your players are going to do things that you don't expect and that aren't accounted for in this guide—that's okay. Responding to dynamic situations can be one of the most rewarding parts of narrating a game.
 - Everything doesn't have to be grand or overblown. Sometimes just a small bit of flavor can make a player feel rewarded for thinking creatively in a situation.
 - > During playtesting for *The Quiet: Part I*, one of our testers decided that he was going to look in the pockets of the Cyclone of Sweatpants to see if he could find anything. This wasn't in any of the notes so we improvised and told him that he found an empty, wadded up candy wrapper. A perfectly normal thing to find in sweatpants! It gave him a hearty chuckle and he ended up using that wrapper to try to distract the children later on in The Labyrinth.
- **Keep your player's feelings in mind:** Make sure to stay aware of how your player is feeling at all times.
 - > If they're frustrated, they might need a hint.
 - > Sometimes it's fun to let the player's mood show in your descriptions of their Character. For example, if they're excited, you could say, "as you stride confidently into the next chamber...."

HOW TO PLAY: Running the Game (1 of 3)

1) When the Character enters a new space or encounters new information or creatures, read the description.

- Take your time. It's important that the player understand their surroundings.
- Don't be afraid to ask if the player needs clarification.
- If our description of the outcome doesn't match their actions, adapt it so it does.
- If there is no description provided, use the information given about the situation to create your own description.

2) Based on your description, the player tells you what action their Character will take in response to the situation or space.

- They get to decide how their Character reacts to the situation. As in life, there is usually more than one way to solve a problem.
- They may use any of their equipment or any objects in the surroundings to get the job done.
- The Character is not limited by the player's personal knowledge, experience, or abilities. They don't need to know exactly how to execute their plan or how possible it is. That's what the d20 is for. (More about that later.)
- That being said, their Character in this adventure does not have innate magical abilities. So they can't just cast spells to fly or anything.
- Everything they need is in the game—they don't need to look up any facts online.

If a player asks, "What can I do?" or says "I don't know what to do" → first, figure out what they really mean:

- *If they actually mean: "I don't know what I'm allowed to do in this world/game."*
 - > Try asking: "What would you do if you were really there, but didn't have to be limited by your own knowledge or abilities?"
- *If they actually mean: "I don't know what my goal is supposed to be."*
 - > Try drawing their attention to a problem to solve or task to complete.
 - > For example, a simple rephrasing of their current situation might help where you focus on the room elements that a Character can engage with.
 - > If possible, avoid telling them outright. For example, instead of saying "you need to figure out a way to cross the stream," try something like, "you are standing in front of a wide stream and there is a door on the other side." It's a small difference, but helps maintain player agency. (See Guardian of the Player, page 7 for further explanation)
- *If they actually mean: "I know what the objective is, but I am unsure how to approach tackling it."*
 - > If they're stuck thinking of something to do, gently remind them they might have something in their inventory that could inspire them or draw their attention to something in the environment that might be helpful.

HOW TO PLAY: Running the Game (2 of 3)

3) To determine whether or not their Character's action is successful, you may ask them to "roll for Physical/Mental/Social success."

- They will then roll a 20-sided number die (aka "d20") to determine how successful their Character's actions are.
- You act as a referee and make the final decision about: (1) whether the action requires them to roll for success and (2) whether it is Physical, Mental, or Social.

(1) Knowing when to ask your player to roll for success can be tricky and every Narrator needs to use their best judgment. Here are some things to keep in mind when considering whether to call for a roll:

- > If there is a reasonable possibility for failure, then ask them to roll. If the action doesn't require any effort, don't ask them to roll.
- > Players should always be allowed to try an idea, even if it's impossible. (See *Guardian of the Player*, page 7 for more details)
- > No one likes feeling like they can't get anything to work. If the player has failed several rolls in a row, perhaps another roll with the possibility for failure will just cause more frustration.

(2) Once you've determined that a roll for success is necessary, you need to decide which of the three skill types the action uses:

- Rolls for **Physical** success involve skills like: strength, speed, flexibility, dexterity, and/or keen senses
 - Rolls for **Mental** success involve the ability to: process new information, recall facts, understand how to build something or use a tool, and/or remember what you've seen, read, or heard
 - Rolls for **Social** success involve skills like: charm, befriend, soothe/comfort, entertain, distract, misdirect, cajole, convince/persuade, threaten, condescend, and/or bargain
- > If their Character specializes in that particular skill category (Physical, Mental, or Social), then they can add an extra 2 points to the number that they roll.**

4) Determine whether or not the roll was successful.

- **Rolls for success are broken down into three tiers of difficulty:**

- **EASY** - Requires the player to roll at least 5 on the d20
 - > Easy tasks are things that require a little bit of effort, but still have a small chance of failing.
 - **MEDIUM** - Requires at least a roll of 10 on the d20
 - > Medium tasks, like their name implies, are in the middle of the spectrum. These are things that require effort but definitely seem within the realm of possibility.
 - **HARD** - Requires at least a roll of 15 on the d20
 - > Hard tasks are exactly how they sound, hard. These are things that require a lot of effort or are near impossible without extreme skill, extreme luck, or both.
- When the player rolls, they don't know what number was needed for success. (This is up to you, with some guidelines from the game creators.) They find out the outcome through your description.

- **If a player exceeds their roll by at least one tier:** as a reward for such a good roll, feel free to throw a small hint into the description. It lets the player feel the magnitude of their success. (See next page for more info about narrative descriptions)

> When we were playtesting, something that we found very useful was to add an extra bit of information if a player rolled high. One player dipped a piece of wood in the contaminated stream and then examined it to see if the particles were harmful to the wood. She got an 18 on her roll for mental success and so I added that while the particles weren't doing anything to the wood, they didn't look like they should be touched. That added nugget of information on the high roll let her connect more with her Character's success.

HOW TO PLAY: Running the Game (3 of 3)

5) Describe the outcome and effect of Character's action.

• Many outcome descriptions are included in the Adventure Guide. However, players' creativity is always exciting and surprising, so you will likely need to ad lib your own descriptions. Here are some tips:

A) Include a play-by-play of the Character taking the action in your description, not just the effect it had.

B) Make it clear whether or not the Character was successful in completing the action, and whether it had the intended outcome (or what happened if it did not).

C) Phrase your descriptions from the player's point-of-view to draw them into the narrative.

D) Extra credit: include evocative and sensory information in your description: Are the Character's motions quick, bold, cautious, clumsy, precise, etc.? What do they hear, smell, taste during/after?

> Let's use an un-scripted outcome description to show mistakes based on the tips above: The Character is in the Chamber of Choice. The player says that they want to try breaking down the polished wooden door.

- Without Tip A: "You try it. The door doesn't open."

- Without Tip B: "As you slam your body into the door, you hear a dull thud and feel pain begin to blossom in your shoulder."

- Without Tip C: "She slammed her entire body weight into the center of the door, just below the brass buttons. The door didn't budge."

- Using all the tips: "You put your backpack down on the ground and take a few steps back as you prime yourself to ram the door. You take 3 deep breaths and start running as fast as you can toward it. You slam your entire body weight into the center of the door, just below the brass buttons. As your body rebounds off the surprisingly sturdy door with a dull thud. You feel pain radiating from your shoulder as you fall backward onto the floor. The door remains unmoved and unmarred."

- If a Character uses any consumable resource (like water) when taking an action, make sure to tell the player how much of it is left afterward.
- What do after a player failed to roll the number needed for success:
 - > They need to try to solve their problem another way.
 - > After your description of the outcome, you can help them understand this by asking things like:
 - "Would you like to try a different approach?"
 - "Have you checked your inventory for anything else that may help you?"
 - "Would you like me to read the description of the surroundings, in case there is anything in it that you could use?"
- If a player has failed several rolls and is almost out of ideas:
 - > Describe failure in a way that leaves the path forward for the player. For example, if the player fails 3 attempts to escape the Liquid Sand in the Tunnel of Overwhelm, after telling them the unsuccessful script, you could add: "You decide to give up and accept your all-but-certain death. But as you stop struggling, you realize that you are no longer being pulled downward. In fact, when you lay back and spread your arms out, you actually start to float upward!"
 - > As a last resort, you could let them try another roll for the same action. However, you should be sparing about when you allow them to do this, because this game is meant to stir creative problem solving. It's all about trying to adapt to dynamic situations. That being said, it is important to keep the game moving. (See Momentum for more details)

6) The player decides how their Character reacts and/or what they try next.

- As before, the player may choose to do something unexpected. Seeing what creative solutions players come up with is one of our favorite parts of the game. This back-and-forth is the heart of the game. It's all about collaborative storytelling!