

Lies of Passage

a friendly game of believable lies

by Lucas Garczewski



Each year a pack of Young coyotes comes of age and wishes to be recognized as full members of the Coyote Nation, that great and ancient family of tricksters and vagabonds.

And since the time of the First Howl the Young have been given one test – the quest for the Secret of Fire. When they return to their homelands and light a bonfire, an Old One appears and asks the question – “How did this Fire come into being?”

Then, the Story is told. The brave and wise deeds of the Young pack. And when all has been said, the Old One nods, the Fire dies, the Young become Old and the Story becomes Legend.

And you know what they say about legends, Young One – there’s a grain of truth in every one. Now, coyote legends might have less truth than others, true, but still, it’s in there somewhere...

The Grain of Truth

You are a **coyote**, taking part in a rite of passage along with other coyotes, friends from your pack, your brothers and sisters. Your task was simple – find Fire, bring it back, and tell the story of your journey.

The problem is... you do not want to tell *that* story. Maybe you cut some mystic corners. Maybe you pulled a few favors, making the task easier than it should have been. No, *that* story, the true story, will never do.

And yet, the Old One is staring at you, waiting, expecting a daring tale of a great journey. So, you need think on your paws. Make something up. Improvise. Fast!

So what will your Story be, Young One? You get but once chance to tell it.

Prepared for
GameChef 2012:
coyote • doctor
lantern • mimick

A friendly game of believable lies

This is a game of lies and storytelling, of trust and bonding within a pack, and of coming of age.

The first lie a child tells is a step away from the simple truths of childhood, and into the complicated life of an adult.

In this game you will tell many lies. You will weave them into believable stories. And who knows – maybe you will even come believe some them...

What you need to play

To play this game you will need a group of friends. Anywhere between 5 and 30 will work. One of you will take the role of the Old One, another player will be the Shaman, and the rest will be young coyotes.

You will need a **campfire**. Yes, a real campfire. How else would you want to tell stories, hm?

You should also get a **torch** or two – a lantern will work well too, but don't use flashlights. These will be used to mark whose turn it is to tell the story – if you don't hold a torch, you don't narrate. You'll learn how to get the torch below.

Additionally, prepare a handful of Tokens – sticks, stones or pinecones – for the Shaman to hand out. These will be thrown into the fire, so don't get too attached to them.

Finally, you may want to get some blankets, as well as feathers and other trinkets to wear. At the very least, you will need a **staff or cane** for the Old One to lean on.

What if I don't have a campfire?

If you want to play in doors, or you simply can't light fires in your area, don't worry. Substitute the campfire for a **ring of candles** placed centrally in the play area. Instead of the Torch, get a small candle that you can comfortably hold in both hands and pass around.

This should let you experience the game at your gaming table.

Preparations

Before the Story begins, light a fire (be sure to have enough firewood on the side) and choose the **Old One** and the **Young Shaman** from amongst yourselves.

The **Old One** is an elder coyote and a coyote elder, waiting to hear the pack's story and exploits on the quest for fire. He's here to welcome the pack as full members of the coyote tribe – if their story is worth it!

The **Shaman** is the spiritual leader of the pack. Very aware of the grave mistake the pack is trying to cover up with their lies. The Shaman will try to help the group, but is too ashamed to face the Old One and so will not speak publicly unless it's absolutely necessary.

The rest of you are **Young Coyotes**.

Sit comfortably around the fire and wait a while for it to grow. You have some time to get into the mood and maybe pick a name you'd like (see below). Staring into the fire is good, chanting is great!

When it's time to start, the Old One stands and asks the sacred question: **How did this fire come into being?**



Being Young

You are a young coyote. A trickster and a wanderer. You tell the Story and shape it.

Names and Entering Play

Before you answer the question or, in fact, before you take up voice at the fire, you need to state your name. You can begin by saying **I, [name], say this: [...]** or end your scene with **This say I, [name]**.

Your name is important. It defines who you are and gives you a place in the pack.

When picking a name, try to make it sound Native American. It's fine if it's slightly cliché or cheesy. Also, remember that you're a coyote and use that!

Iron Claw, Three-paws and Storm Catcher are all great names, as are *Dances-with-Humans, Howls-Like-Crazy* and *Dusk*.

A good name is short, easy to remember, and says something about the coyote carrying it.

Don't worry if you don't have a name. The Torch-bearer can **call a name** – either previously mentioned at the fire or a new one – to hand the Torch over to the next narrator. When you hear a new name you like, simply stand up and claim it for yourself, and start narrating the story from that point.

The Single Voice Rule

The pack speaks with a single voice.

Only the person holding the torch – the Torch-bearer – tells the story. This is the most important rule in the game.

You may do and say other things if you don't hold the Torch (described below), but you may not narrate the story unless you have the Torch.

If you are holding the Torch – stand tall and speak in a clear and loud voice. Otherwise somebody might think you're making this up...

The Thousand Whispers Rule

If you're not holding the Torch, you can still *suggest* ideas to the Torch-bearer.

Lucky for you, Old One is *almost* deaf. He will not hear anything you whisper to the Torch-bearer or amongst yourselves (even if you whisper rather loudly). So help each other out!

The Challenge Rule

Occasionally you will be listening to the Torch-bearer and have a great idea for a part of the story that you'd like to tell yourself. Often this will be a flash of inspiration and you'll just have a few moments to react before the story floats off into the next scene.

When this happens, you may throw a Token into the fire to challenge the Torch-bearer by mocking his last words and finishing off with **That is not how I remember it, brother (or sister)!** Then you can claim the Torch (Tokens are granted by the Shaman as rewards for good storytelling; if you do not have a Token you cannot issue a challenge).

Remember, this is not about competition. It's about telling a better story. If the idea you're about to mock is better than one you want to replace it with, think again.

The Shadow Rule

As you tell the Story, you'll recount encounters with other animals, spirits and perhaps even these strange beings called humans.

Every character in the story needs to be represented by a Young coyote shapeshifting into them. In other words, for each non-coyote character in the Story there needs to be a coyote who will mimic and play the part of that character.

As Torch-bearer, you must **call a name** (claimed or new) to introduce a new Shadow every time a new character appears in the Story.



Example

Storm's Song (Torch-bearer): (...) And as we passed through the forest, we noticed a Crow staring at us from above. **Three-paws, would you tell the Old One what the Crow said?**

As a Shadow, you need to invent a gesture, sound or pose for your character. If you're the Shadow of a Crow, you might cock your head or caw loudly every now and then. When Shadowing an Eagle, you might flap your hands as if they were wings; and the Shadow of the Great Mountain might stand perfectly still and speak in a low, booming voice.

Have fun with it, be creative and don't be afraid of it looking silly – coyotes love to make fun of other animals and spirits, especially if they're not on friendly terms...

The Death Rule

Great adventures require great sacrifice. People – and coyotes – die on great quests. So can you.

All you need to do is end a scene you are narrating with the words **And then... I died.** and throw a Token into the fire (Tokens are granted by the Shaman as rewards for good storytelling; if you do not have a Token you cannot die, sorry).

This creates some complications since, well, your pack didn't actually embark on any great quest and you are sitting right there, next to the fire, most certainly *not* dead.

So something must have happened along the way... Right?

Leave it to your brothers and sisters to tell the story of how they, um... Brought you back to life? With the help of their Shaman? Yes, that's it!

These Words should not be used more than once in any Story.



Being the Shaman

You are the Shaman, the Healer, the Guide in Darkness.

You have been tasked with leading your brethren on their quest and, for some reason, you have failed. Now all that is left to you is helping them tell a good lie.

Connecting the Pack

While the Young will typically sit around the fire, you should always keep moving in the shadows. Encourage, discuss ideas for future scenes, carry suggestions from far-off coyotes to the Torch-bearer, stand by the them and help them narrate.

Make the pack feel they are telling the Story together.

Reward the Young

A great performance should be rewarded. You may hand out Tokens – sticks, stones or pinecones – to the Young.

It is entirely up to you to judge each coyote, but some of the things you might want to reward are: helpful suggestions, amazing plot twists and making the pack laugh.

Resolve Conflicts

You are the final arbiter on any conflicts that may arise, anything from who gets the Torch or a Shadow role, to rules interpretation.

If applicable, try to take the names of those involved into account. After all, Wind-catcher is better suited to telling the story of a great escape than Silver Claws.

Bring Back the Dead

Only you may bring a fallen Young back from the dead.

To do that, take the Torch at an appropriate moment, as a Young would, and tell the story of how you resurrected your brother or sister, ending with **And that is how we brought [name] back from the dead.**

This is the only situation when you can be the Torch-bearer.

Others can introduce situations leading to the resurrection but only you can make it happen.

Being Old

You are old. Very old. Older than the moon and stars (or so you would have the youngsters believe). You know much and you've seen more. You are being lied to!

But that's alright. In fact, that's what you did when it was your time to tell the Story, a long, long time ago. It's what all coyotes have done since the First Howl.

So you smile and you listen.

Your role in this Story that is different from that of the other coyotes'. You are not telling the Story – that's done by the pack. Instead, you're here to make sure it's running smoothly, make it interesting and challenging for the Young.

Most importantly, though, you're here to make sure everyone is having a good time.

That might seem like a daunting task, but it's really not that hard. I've broken it down into a number of key areas and given you keywords to work with each of them.

Keep it Together

The first thing you need to do is make sure the lies the Young tell are believable and that their internal logic is maintained (even if it's just the dream-like logic of myth). In short: make sure everybody's on the same page and you don't have inconsistencies in the story.

Listen carefully, and point out any errors or mistakes to the narrator by saying **Ah, but it has been said [...]**! and pointing out the inconsistency.

A *different* Young needs to answer the question and resolve the inconsistency. The Torch passes on to a different coyote. If there are no Young willing to take up the story, try involving a new one (see below).

Example

Young: (...) With the Crow's Feather safe in my teeth, we've run out of the Underworld and into the Moonlit Lands again...

Old One: Ah, but it has been said you did not know the way out. How did you find it then?

Push the Story Forward

This one's easy. Whenever you think the narrator is lost in the story or is focusing too much on something that's not really interesting, fun or important, it is your duty to help the Story move on.

Just say **Yes, yes... What happened later?**

The Torch-bearer can answer the question and continue or pass the Torch to a different Young.

Example

Young: And so, for many, many days we wondered the South Deserts in search of water. We have lost all hope and were near death. The desert winds kept...

Old One: Yes, yes... What happened later?

You can use these Words to remind the pack of the ultimate goal of the Story – Fire. Make sure the Young don't lose sight of it in the narrative.

Get Coyotes Involved

At every campfire, there will be at least a couple of coyotes who, for various reasons, will not stand up and speak up.

Pay attention and look around for any unnamed Young in your group. If you feel it's time for a gentle push, ask **And what did you do when that happened, [name]?**

You should circle around to the Young you want to involve and offer them your paw, helping them stand as you say the Words above.

You can and should also use this power if you notice one player is simply talking too long. Try to distribute time fairly and evenly among the Young.



Example

Iron Claw (Young): Then our jaws closed on the Shadow's slimy limbs and we held him in place while...

Old One: Splendid, splendid... **And what did you do when that happened, Smiles-at-Shadows?**

Smiles-at-Shadows: Well...

Introduce Complications

With the Young weaving their story as they see fit, finding Fire and returning home might be seem like a trivial matter.

It is up to you to make it challenging.

Whenever you see an opportunity for your Young may to show their courage and honor, and wits, and they seem to be taking the easy way out, just say **Did you now? What about [...], hm?**

Example

Young: And then we crossed the Great River and went south to...

Old One: **Did you now? What about the White Turtle, hm?** I don't suppose he just let you past now, did he?

Maintain Order

The Young are what they are and youth is occasionally loud and chaotic. If the noise starts to get in the way of the Story, or if two or more Young try to narrate at the same time, you are within your rights to shout **Quiet!** and rein the youngsters in.

Try not to raise your voice too often, though. The pack will, in most cases, shush the troublemakers without your help.

Finishing the Story

The game ends when the Story reaches its natural conclusion – bringing Fire to the campfire you are all sitting at.

It is up to the Old One to introduce complications if the pack is getting too close to its goal too early, or help move the story along when it's not moving fast enough.

The suggested length of the Story is 2 to 3 hours, but you are welcome to make it as long or as short as you want.

A good rule of thumb, though, would be to wrap things up when the fire starts dying out or dawn comes from the east. Whichever happens first.

You're Only Young Once

One last thing.

You can only have one rite of passage, and you can only tell one Story. Once the fire dies out and a new day begins you are an adult, a full member of the tribe. You can never go back and you cannot be Young Coyote twice.

In time, though, as you grow Old, you might find yourself sitting at a different fire, listening to the Story of a group of Young. If that ever happens, remember to listen and smile...

Advice for large groups

If you have a large group (20 or more people), consider the following changes:

- Have 2 Shamans and 2 Old Ones
- Every Torch-bearer needs to call at least two names in as Shadows

Advice for small groups

If you have a small group (less than 10 people), consider the following changes:

- Remove the Shaman role
- All Young Coyotes start with 2 Tokens

Credits

Author: [Lucas 'Tor' Garczewski](#)

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Inspirations

This game would not have been born if I hadn't played *Polaris* by Ben Lehman and *Love in the time of Seið* by Jason Morningstar & Matthijs Holter. If you like *Lies of Passage*, you should try them both, too.

Acknowledgements & thanks

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Sharing

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Appendix: The Words

Words of the Old One

Start the game by saying **How did this fire come into being?**

Point out an inconsistency by saying **Ah, but it has been said...**

[Torch goes to another player]

Keep the pace and skip boring scenes by saying **Yes, yes... What happened later?**

Introduce a complication by replying with **Did you now? What about [complication], hm?**

[Torch goes to another player]

Words of the Torch-bearer

Enter play by saying **“I, [name], say this: [...]”** or stating your name in some other, ritualized form.

Call a name to pass the Torch to another Young.

Introduce a new Shadow by calling a name: **[name], would you tell the Old One what the [character] said?**

Kill your character (temporarily) by saying **“And then... I died.”**

[Spend Token & pass the Torch to another Young]

Words of the Young

You can always give a suggestion to the Torch-bearer by whispering (loudly, if needed).

Change the direction of the story by **mocking** the Torch-bearer and saying **“That is not how I remember it, brother [or sister]!”**

[Spend Token & claim the Torch for yourself]

Words of the Shaman

Bring a Young back from the dead by ending a scene with **And that is how we brought [name] back from the dead.**

[Pass the Torch to a Young]