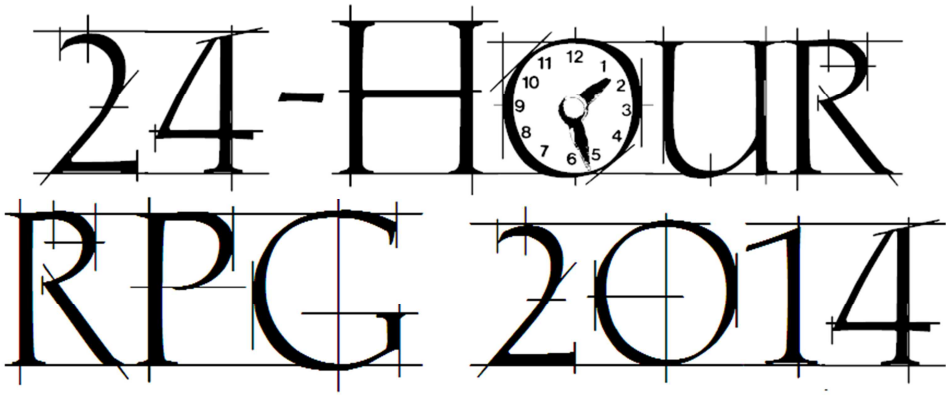
The Second-Richest Safari

A one-shot competitive roleplaying game

by Steffan O'Sullivan

Being an entry in the 2014 24-Hour RPG contest on RPGGeek.com, this game was written in a 24-hour period over 9/29/14 – 9/30/14. The theme of this contest is "Traveling".



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Preamble (or **Pre Amble**, given the theme)

For almost sixty years, long before I even knew his name, Carl Barks has been one of my favorite authors and artists. In 1956 I read an Uncle Scrooge story of his called *The Second-Richest Duck*. This story made a powerful impression on me and helped to instill a yearning for adventure in my soul that is still strong today.

In the summer of 2014, I moved to a different town. I put everything in boxes, hauled it all five miles, and am still unpacking boxes as I write this. But as I unpacked a box of comic books on the morning of 9/29/14, I had to pause and re-read a few Carl Barks stories, including *The Second-Richest Duck* and the related story, *So Far and No Safari*. This, though an inferior story, also features Scrooge's rival, Flintheart Glomgold, and African travel.

Travel! Wait, isn't that the theme of this year's 24-Hour RPG contest? Ooh, yes! And in a 24-Hour RPG contest, one has to think of not only a fresh setting, but also of fresh mechanics. New game mechanics are extremely hard to think of – "*there is no new thing under the sun*," as the book of Ecclesiastes says. But as I read about the string contest in *The Second-Richest Duck*, it occurred to me that I could use that as a mechanic. I certainly don't know of any other RPG that uses that to resolve conflict! And since I want the player characters to be humans, I can merge those two titles into one, taking out the reference to ducks entirely …

And so here it is. You will be entertained royally if you hunt up Barks' original story (http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=W+US+++15-02). I won't pretend this game is as good as Carl Barks' work, but let it serve as homage to Barks.

The Game

How Many People?

This game requires a Game Master (GM) who should read the whole thing before starting play. If you wish to be a player in this game, you should not read beyond this page.

This game is written with three to five people in mind. You will need one Game Master and two to four players. More than that and you'll need more string, and my thought experiment didn't go beyond ten pieces. So play something else if there are six of you, or only two.

In Media Res: The Story So Far

The two to four Player Characters (PCs) are wealthy individuals who have gotten into a disagreement about which of them is the richest. They've compared pretty much everything they own: cash, value of stocks & bonds, oil wells, diamond mines, gold mines as well as mines for silver and transuranic metals, barrels of Chateau Lafite Rothschild wine, farm acreage, fisheries, factories, buckets of opals and emeralds, truffle-producing groves, cases of action figures and rare baseball cards, kilograms of stored francium, etc., etc. When it's all translated into dollar values, it turns out they're even in everything! They can't stand the thought of being tied – each wants to be declared the richest person in the world.

So it's finally come down to who has collected the most string. They each have a large ball of string they've been saving over the years. The balls of string weigh the same, and have the same diameter (more than a meter across), so they've decided that length is what matters. The PCs have agreed to meet in South Africa on the edge of the veldt and begin traveling north, unrolling their balls of string as they go, until they see who has the longest string collection.

Each of the Player Characters *really* wants to win this contest, and all of them are fully capable of a little (or a lot of) chicanery to do so. However, nobody really wants anyone to die or even be seriously hurt– police investigations can be so expensive to hush up, and how are you going to remain the wealthiest person in the world paying somebody else's hospital bills? Minor scratches and bruises are all part of the risk, but you don't want anything other than an opponent's ego to be severely bruised.

Player characters can be male or female, and of any age and physical description that doesn't conflict with their Character Card. Players should come up with a name for their characters and whatever background they want. They've been brushing up on African facts for this contest, but didn't get too far – the Knowledge cards are pretty much all they really know about Africa.

STOP. If you want to be a player in this game, you should not read beyond this point. Really, it'll ruin the game for you, so stop now.

What you will need to play this game

Okay, now that we're just GMs reading this, here's the meat of the game.

You will need some string, and you will need to cut it into precisely measured lengths using a metric ruler. If you start with an eight-foot length of string, or even 240 cm, you should have enough if you *"measure twice, cut once."* Don't run with scissors unless you're feeling macho.

Cut the string into ten pieces. Each piece is a unique length, and the ten pieces should measure:

19 cm, 20 cm, 21 cm, 22 cm, 23 cm, 24 cm, 25 cm, 26 cm, 27 cm, and 28 cm.

If you are clumsy, please find someone dexterous to do the cutting for you. It's not the kind of a game where getting blood on the string would it improve it.

You will then need an **opaque bag** large enough to hold all the pieces of string and to be able to put your hand into to stir them around and pluck them out one at a time.

You will also need to print out **the last four pages** of this document and cut them into cards. The easiest way to make cards out of them is simply to put them in card sleeves, backed by some old CCG or other cards not being used for anything. Just make sure all the card backs are identical and you didn't get blood on any of them.

Note that there are two types of cards: Knowledge cards, which are vertical, and Character cards which are horizontal. The GM should look through the cards and discard any you don't want in your game, but each player will need one Character card and five Knowledge cards.

Shuffle the remaining Knowledge cards together and deal out **five** to each player randomly. Tell them to keep them secret from other players. You don't need to know who got what at this point – you'll find out eventually.

Then give each player a **single** Character card. You can do this randomly, or based on what you think they might want to play. In the latter case, you can give them what you think they might want or as close to the opposite of what they would want as you can get. Games are for entertainment, after all! Unlike Knowledge cards, Character cards are public knowledge and may not be kept secret. Place them face up on the table.

The GM may also want a single die to roll during the game. Any die with an even number of sides will do, as it will usually be used with the rule:

If it's Even, they're grievin'. If it's odd, smile and nod.

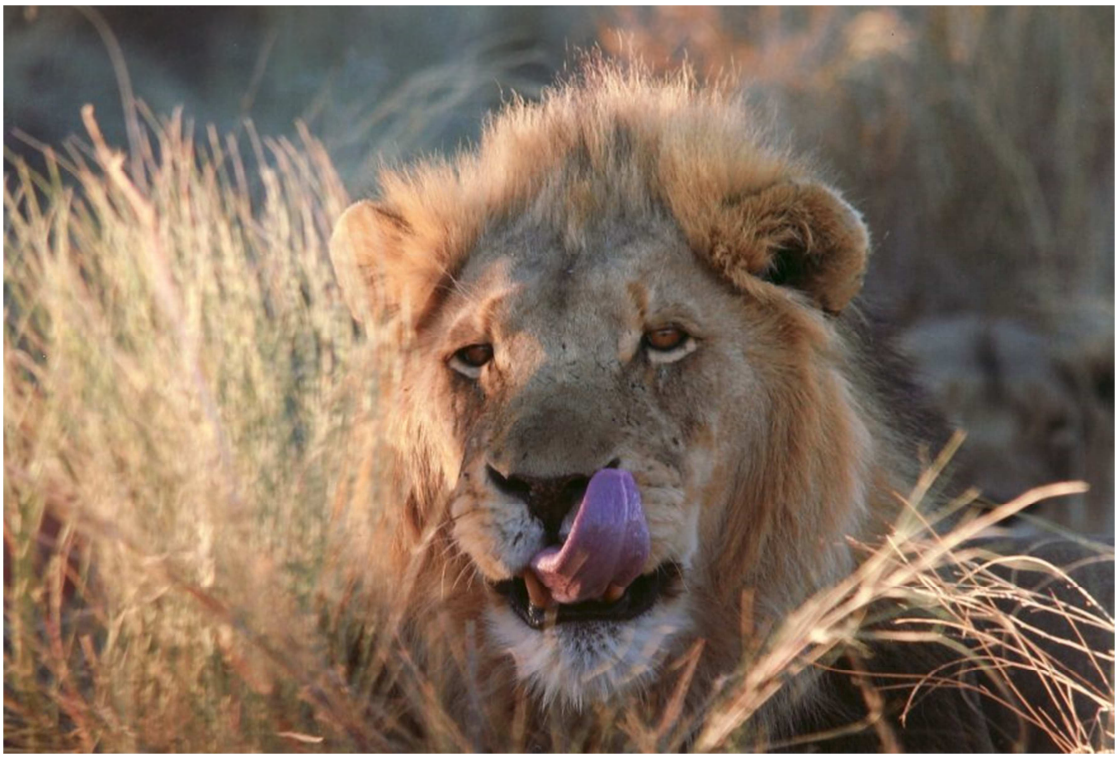
That is, the die is used as a 50% randomizer when yes/no or good/bad questions arise. **An odd result is always good** for whoever is at risk in the moment, and even is bad for them.

The Situation

The game is all about who has the longest string. Make sure that the players understand that the surest way to win the contest is to cause the other players to lose string – without getting caught, that is.

The GM needs to explain the rivalry to the players and get them enthused about winning the contest. Go ahead and read out loud the part about chicanery, but no real harm to an opponent. In fact, make sure they all understand those two points: they really, really want to trick their opponents but they really, really don't want to hurt them. The fun of the game revolves around every player being fully on board with those two points.

Once you, the GM, have told them the initial premise and started the PCs on the edge of the veldt with their balls of string, they begin to unroll them.



None of the PCs trust each other to play fair – and quite correctly, too – so they have agreed that the actual safaris that each of them has hired will not accompany them during the day. The safaris are to drive ahead, set up camp within sight of each other, and await the party each evening.

This means that during the day the PCs are carrying only "day packs" with some food for lunch and some emergency supplies. They have no weapons beyond a large knife each, as they didn't get hunting permits. (But they should always be able to escape danger *somehow*.) They

have agreed to a rule banning electronic devices: no phone calls, no internet connection, no stored encyclopedias, no modern communication with the outside world at all.

If they ask what they are carrying, you can answer questions, rolling the die as needed. In general, be generous with reasonable requests. If they are requesting unreasonable items, don't worry: all that weight in the African heat will slow them down and they probably won't make camp that evening … just remind them of that when you penalize them later.

The safaris themselves are fairly well equipped. No one wanted to spend *too* much money since they are trying to remain the richest person in the world and you don't do that by spending money like water. So don't feel bad about denying them something in the evening if they actually manage to arrive at the camp site.

Of course, with the tricks they are playing on each other, they may never actually get to their safaris. In fact, one of the possible encounters – Night time – requires this situation.

Encounters

On the next page are some possible encounters. Feel free to add others. You really don't need to flesh them out too much – the game is largely driven by player-to-player interaction. Encourage any and all player attempts to lead the plot where they think it should go. Let the other players provide the "brakes" needed to prevent the game from being too one-sided.

An encounter begins after you have described the situation and called for Knowledge card play. This can be done for encounters from this list, from your own list, or from situations the players have created. The next section details card play.

Sample encounters – remember, you don't need them all. Reading the Knowledge cards can also give you some ideas. Some encounters occur when they are tired and want to rest:

- Large conical clay mounds, which look inviting to rest their balls of string on. In reality, they are ant hills and ants would snip the string.
- High grass, perfect for hiding lions, cheetahs, servals, snakes, etc.
- Large open savannah with only occasional trees. Perfect for taking refuge in from animals fleeing a grass fire. Birds can knock down balls of string.
- Boulder-strewn area, perfect for jackals and hyenas to hang out in.
- River crossing.
- Night time when they were delayed and didn't make it to the safaris.
- Gully with thorny brambles.
- Edge of a jungle. Who knows what's lurking in there? Oh wait – the players do!
- A troop of baboons and/or monkeys.

Knowledge Card Play and Bluffing

Once they know what they are facing, each player should play a Knowledge card **face down** on the table. These may or may not be relevant to the situation – the players may bluff. (Note: these may contain some truth or some totally made up rubbish. Part of the fun!)

At this point, the braggadocio should begin. The players should boast about how they have researched this very situation and they are prepared for it. If no one is talking, the GM should point to a player and have them start. When that person seems to be done, ask another player

how they can top that. Conversely, if they all want to talk at once, the GM should act as a moderator to keep them from trying to shout each other down.

Each player should describe how he or she will come out on top of the current situation and why the others – or perhaps only one specific other– will lose some string. It is perfectly within the spirit of the game for PCs to conspire against someone they feel is winning – after all, it's better for one person to lose string than two people, if one of those two has to be you.

When everyone has made their case, they pass their Knowledge cards, still face down, to the GM. Each Knowledge card can only be used once, so they should choose wisely!

The GM now evaluates, silently to himself or herself:

1. The players' Character card strength,
2. The players' Knowledge card appropriateness (never reveal Knowledge cards to the players – a player's bluff should only be guessed at by other players!),
3. The players' explanations of why they should come out on top of the situation.
4. A bonus for superb bluffing, such as a believable story even with an unsuitable Knowledge card.

Based on those points, the GM now may award a **String Bonus** to one or two players. Never more than two, but it's possible that no player receives a bonus.

Resolving String Loss

Every encounter should result in *somebody* losing string. Multiple players can lose string in the same encounter – indeed, it's possible for *all* players to lose string at once! String loss

should be severe but vaguely worded. No one really knows how long these balls of string are, so never say anything like, *"You just lost a half mile of string."* Instead say things like, *"It looks like your ball of string is now about half the diameter it was before the cheetah played with it like a ball of yarn."* It's also possible that some players lose more string in a single encounter than others. Use the 50% die discussed on p. 2 if you don't want to be accused of being arbitrary. But you're the GM – you have the right to be arbitrary! Your decision should not be questioned – in fact, those who do complain just lost some more string!

Players should never give up, of course. After all, it becomes easier to conspire with another player when you're not perceived as a threat, and soon everyone else's balls of string should be reduced in no time.

Resolution: the bag with the ten pieces of string prepared on p. 2 is now brought forward. This will happen once per encounter. In any turn order decided by the GM (roll a die if desired), players each draw two pieces of string from the bag, trying to conceal them from the other players. They may not leave their seats, but may twist about in their chairs trying to judge how long they are. Remember, each piece of string is a unique length.

Once everyone has drawn two pieces of string, if anyone has a String Bonus, he or she may speak up at this point to request a bonus redraw. If two people have a String Bonus, whoever speaks first gets first resolution. Use the die to resolve genuine ties, or the GM may be arbitrary.

A String Bonus is resolved simply by handing one piece of previously drawn string to the GM, then drawing a replacement piece of string from the bag. Only one piece of string may be returned and replaced, and the replacement draw is final – you can't ask for your original piece

of string back. The GM now places the rejected piece of string in the bag and stirs it up a bit, in case another person with a String Bonus wants to try their luck.

Once everyone with a String Bonus has either made one draw or declined the opportunity, the players compare the lengths of the pieces of string they have drawn. They should lay them on the table, stretched out fully, and have their two pieces touching end to end. The strings for all the players should all be in parallel rows, with one end lined up evenly. Players will try to cheat, of course, which is part of the fun, but don't let them get away with it. Snug those strings together and make sure all begin at the same point!

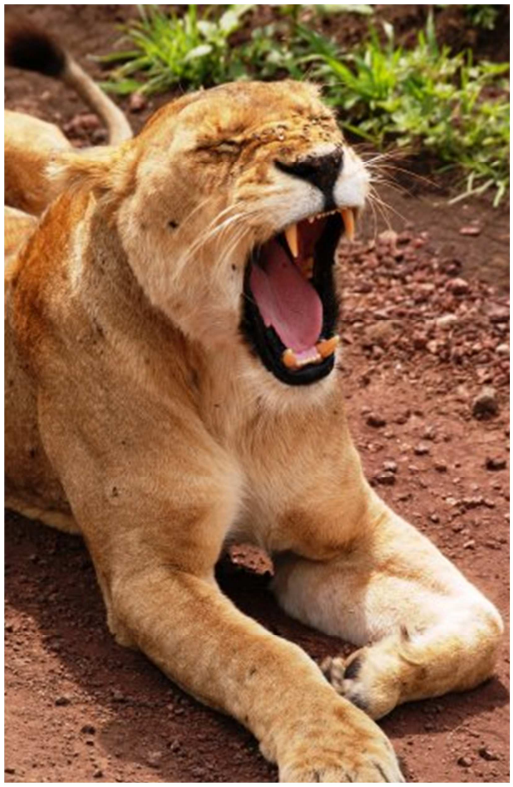
If there is a single longest pair of string pieces on the table, that character will not lose any string this encounter. Everyone else will, with the character whose string is the shortest losing the most.

If there is a tie for longest pair, *everybody* loses string this encounter! Again, the characters with the shortest pair(s) losing the most.

The GM should record who lost string, and how severely it was lost. Again, this is subjective – do not use objective units of measure. (In the original Carl Barks' story, the balls of string were reduced to basketball sized, to bowling ball sized, to baseball sized, to roughly the size of golf balls before being finally unrolled!)

The End of the Game

After the Final Encounter



Hopefully you'll have a clear winner after the final encounter. This may be the Fifth encounter, or you may have ended with fewer encounters. If everyone wants desperately to continue, deal out another Knowledge card to each player from those unused (or, if you discarded some and every card was used, reshuffle those), and have another encounter.

At any rate, eventually you'll have a Final Encounter and you should have a clear winner. If not, have each of the tied players come up with some reason why they might have a tiny scrap of extra string in their pockets and have them do one final draw from the bag as a tie-breaker. (This is entirely in keeping with the original story.) You may award a String Bonus to the player with the most entertaining story. If they're *still* tied, then they're tied. They'll have to deal with it, though probably not well.

You are very knowledgeable about: **African Ants** (They love to snip string into tiny bits yet their huge nests look like the perfect resting spot for a ball of string)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Cape Buffaloes** (Um, very, very dangerous)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Ostriches** (You can ride them but they'd rather eat string)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Gnus** (You can ride them, but very uncomfortably)
You are very knowledgeable about: **Rhinos** (Nothing they like better than hooking a ball of string on their horn and running off with it. Or so you believe)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Spiny Mice** (They take that string to their burrows)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Jackals** (Dangerous if you're weakened)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Hippos** (Dangerous)

You are very knowledgeable about: **Zebras** (You can ride them – you think they're just horses)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Electric Catfish** (Yes, they exist in certain African rivers and can give you a shock. I'm not making this up, you know. 350 Volts, baby)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Impala** (You can ride them like the wind)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Lions** (They're pretty lazy – bluff that they're dangerous)
You are very knowledgeable about: **Vervet Monkeys** (Common small monkeys – they're tricksters)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Servals** (Wild cats close to twice as big as domestic cats, of course they'll want to play with string – and be insistent about it)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Baboons** (Territorial beyond belief)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Crocodiles** (Dangerous no matter what you do, and they love string for dental floss)

You are very knowledgeable about: **Vultures** (They'll eat anything non-resisting at least once, even string)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Thorny Bramble Thickets** (Ooh – trying to get string out of these just shreds it right up)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Savannah Grass Fires** (Not just a fire hazard, but animals fleeing the fire get entangled in string)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Storks and other Large Birds** (Mmm – large balls of string make large nests)
You are very knowledgeable about: **Great White Sharks** (You're not near the ocean. What were you thinking learning about them? Can you bluff this is something useful?)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Hyenas** (Bluff that they're dangerous. They're very proud that they were the model for Wargs in The Two towers movie)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Locusts** (They find string very tasty. No, really – that's in the comic this is based on)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Chimpanzees** (They love to play keep-away with balls of string)

You are very knowledgeable about: **Social Weaver Birds** (Oh my goodness, do they love string! Their nests are huge!)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Meerkats** (String can increase their social standing – I'll be an outcast no more, baby)
You are very knowledgeable about: **African Snakes** (You know the deadly from the harmless)	You are very knowledgeable about: **Cheetahs** (Yeah, they won't bother humans but if you can convince someone to try to run directly away from them, they might)
Character Card: You think you're the wealthiest person in the world. You are famous in certain circles for your **Keen Senses and Alertness**.	**Character Card:** You think you're the wealthiest person in the world. You are famous in certain circles for your **Physical Strength and Rugged Constitution**.
Character Card: You think you're the wealthiest person in the world. You are famous in certain circles for your **Puzzle-Solving Intelligence and Engineering Talent**.	**Character Card:** You think you're the wealthiest person in the world. You are famous in certain circles for your **Exceptional Dexterity and Sense of Balance**.