

FINAL HOUR
OF A
STORIED AGE
A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF EPIC FANTASY

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REV 0.5

Introduction

Final Hour of a Storied Age is a roleplaying game of Epic Fantasy. Using these rules, some dice, some tokens, and pencil and paper, you and some friends can experience a story like those found in your favorite epic fantasy novels. *Storied Age* doesn't present the details of a particular fantasy world and hope that you'll be able to come up with a story that fits that setting. Instead, *Final Hour of a Storied Age* uses the story structure of epic fantasy literature in order to produce a story of heroes struggling against adversity in the face of world-changing events.

Collaborate At The Table

Unlike many games, a *Storied Age* story is created collaboratively at the table by all of the players. Try to avoid bringing any pre-conceived ideas to the game session – don't have plans for a particular story you want to tell, or a particular character you want to play. Being interested in big fantasy ideas, excited by fantasy tropes, or inspired by a fantasy mood is great, but if you get too specific too early you may find it difficult to make your ideas work well with your friends'.

This is a Playtest Version of the Game

Changes to Rev 0.5

Added mechanical friendship track to Supporting Characters

Removed the option of spending victory points on “temporary traits” before the end of a chapter

Added ability to impede/thwart/kill NPCs

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Part I: Creating the Plot and the World

In epic fantasy, the setting is created around the story. Although epic fantasy sometimes *reads* like history, it is rarely *created* that way. Instead, the world, the events, and the characters are all created to serve a story. Epic fantasy nearly always speaks to eternal themes like duty, love, or truth. These themes form the basis for the *seeds* from which a *Storied Age* story grows.

Setting up a *Storied Age* game is an 11 step process.

1. Roll on the theme table to generate a list of words
2. Break the list of words into groups
3. Generate *seeds* from the groups of words
4. Cast the *star charts* for each seed
5. Identify the Protagonist and Antagonist
6. Figure out the Plot Axis
7. Begin creating a map
8. Determine plot segments for the Antagonist and Protagonist
9. Select Supporting Characters for the other players
10. Figure out Subplots for the supporting characters
11. Complete the map

Generate a List of Words from the Theme Table

The first step in creating a *Storied Age* story is to create some *seeds* from which the story will grow. To begin creating these seeds, each player rolls 2d12 and finds the corresponding entry on a Theme Table, such as the one below. Note down the word on a piece of scratch paper (note down the number, too, since it will make casting the *star chart* easier in later steps). Roll the 2d12 again, and count down the table that many spaces from the first word, wrapping around to the beginning if you step off the end. Note this word and number as well. Keep going like this until you land on one of the words already on your list. (Think of this like moving a piece around a game board, if that helps you keep track of what is going on).

Theme Table

1. Noble	11. Male	21. Ambition	31. Ring
2. Responsibility	12. Female	22. Family	32. Throne
3. Power	13. Corruption	23. Division	33. Crown
4. Greed	14. Prophecy	24. Return	34. Mountain
5. Rich	15. Learning	25. Truth	35. Forest
6. Poor	16. Old	26. Lies	36. Sea
7. Farm	17. New	27. Belief	37. Underground
8. Inherit	18. Fire	28. Love	38. Gold
9. Small	19. Ice	29. Hate	39. Star
10. Large	20. Duty	30. Sword	40. Blood

Break The List of Words into Groups

It's possible to generate a *lot* of words in the previous step, so you may need to break your list down into manageable groups. No group can have more than eight words. If you have nine or more words on your list, use the first six for your first group. If you still have nine or more, use the next six to create a second group. Keep creating groups like this until you have eight or less words on your list, and put those in your final group. Once the groups are separated take them through the next steps independently.

Transform Your Groups of Words into Seeds

For each group of words you have, arrange the words in an order that inspires a sentence or two that describes a character (and possibly a situation that the character is involved in), a fact about the world, or a fact about magic. The sentences should be phrased in either the past or present tense. While these sentences should be evocative, be careful not to invest too much emotion into what you think each sentence means yet – future steps in the world creation process might lead you to interpret them in a different way than you originally intended. You don't have to use the words exactly as they appear in the list, but someone who reads your sentence along with your list of words should be able to say, “Yeah, I can see how that sentence came from those words”. Write the ordered list of words and the sentences on a *seed sheet*.

Ask the group to help if you have trouble coming up with a seed from the words you have, but make an effort to create it on your own first. A lot of creative sparks will fly when fully formed seeds play off each other in the next step; there is a risk of blandness if the seed creation process is *too* collaborative. Try just arranging the words in random order to see if a particular sequence of words inspires you. Usually you'll be able to find two or three that work well together easily, and the rest will fall into place around them.

Examples

The words Prophecy, Sword, Star, Female, and Fire could be arranged as *Prophecy Star Female Fire Sword* and inspire the sentence “A bright blue star has appeared in the heavens as foretold by prophecy, which inspires a woman to seek out the legendary Sword of Flame”

The words Poor, Ice, Hate, Crown, Responsibility, and Fire could be arranged as *Ice Crown Hate Responsibility Poor Fire* to inspire the sentence “The king of the frigid northern kingdom is overwhelmed by his responsibilities as the peasants on his lands are threatened by wildfires.”

The words Male, Lies, Underground, Poor, Ambition, and Gold could be arranged as *Poor Man Ambition Gold Lies Underground* to inspire “A penniless man seeks a fabled treasure that is buried deep underground.”

The words Division, Gold, Blood, Winter, Ring, Inherit, and Love could be arranged as *Winter Division Blood Inherit Gold Love Ring* to inspire “The coming winter has inspired a rift within the clan which can only be sealed by an arranged marriage. Unfortunately, the prospective groom has died and his younger brother must step up to take his place in the arrangement.”

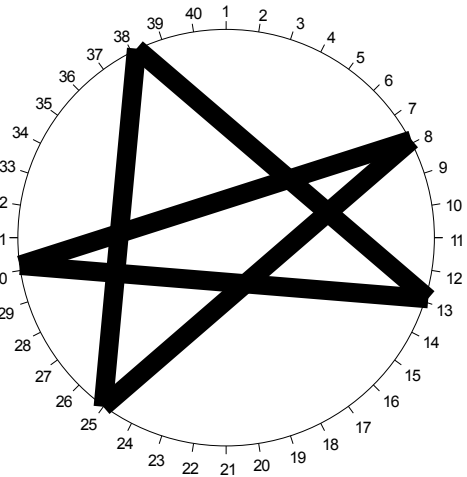
The words Poor, Truth, and Gold could be arranged as *Gold Truth Poor* to inspire a fact about magic like “Wizards can cast the True Names of people or objects in gold, gaining power over them, but must take a vow of poverty in exchange for this ability, and must rely on others to supply the gold.”

The words Rich, Prophecy, and Belief could be arranged as *Belief Prophecy Rich* to inspire “Everyone believes that a golden age is coming in which everyone will live in prosperity.”

Cast the Star Charts

Each seed sheet has a circle with the numbers from 1 to 40 evenly spaced around it. These numbers correspond to the numbers from the *theme table*. For each seed, draw a line from the number that corresponds to the first word to the number that corresponds to the second word, from there to the third word, and so on, and finish with a line from the number that corresponds to the last word back to the first word. (Often this will create a shape that looks like a star).

Note down the number of *intersections* between the lines that you have drawn on your star chart, as well as the number of *points* on your star (the number of points will be the same as the number of words in the list).



Use the seeds to generate the Starting Situation and Plot Axis

Once you have the star charts for the seeds, the starting situation and primary plot arc of the story are determined. This is a collaborative process that every player should participate in. In an epic fantasy story, a *community* is threatened with a *change in the world* and the story follows the protagonist as he or she tries to thwart that change (sometimes effecting a positive change for the world instead). The seeds generated in the last step will help determine this main plot.

First, identify a *Protagonist Seed* and an *Antagonist Seed* by comparing the number of intersections on the star charts for each seed:

- The seed with the *most intersections* will determine who is the *Protagonist* of the story as well as inform the status quo at the start of the story.
- The seed with the *next highest number of intersections* determines the *Antagonist* of the story.
- If there are multiple seeds with the same number of intersections, use the number of points in the star to break the tie. If that is tied as well, use dice or some other fair method to break the tie.
- If the same player created both the protagonist and antagonist seeds he or she must pick one and hand the other off to another player.

The *Protagonist Seed* will be used to determine a *Protagonist* character and a *community* that he or she represents. The *community* is the frame of reference through which the world of the fantasy story can be understood (in *The Lord of the Rings*, this *community* is The Shire). In *Final Hour of a Storied Age*, the protagonist must *represent* that community. That doesn't mean that the protagonist must be a completely typical member of the community (Frodo Baggins was an uncommonly adventurous hobbit, for example), but it does mean that he or she should not be an outcast or outsider. He or she may not think the community is perfect, but he should feel (or, at least, be willing to be convinced) that the community is fundamentally worth protecting. Positive change in the community might or might not happen as part of a *Storied Age* story, but the protagonist's goal will always be preventing the *negative* change that will occur if the antagonist is not stopped.

At the start of a *Storied Age* story, the antagonist character is doing something (or will do something soon) which will cause the world to change in a way that the *community* would perceive in an extremely negative light (think of words like: destroy, conquer, enslave, exterminate). The antagonist will generally either think

this change is positive (such as bringing order to a chaotic world) or be unconcerned about the negative repercussions or side-effects of his or her true goals.

As a group, use the *Protagonist* and *Antagonist Seeds* as the main guidelines (sometimes supported by other seeds) and figure out who the protagonist is, where he or she comes from, who the antagonist is, and what he or she is doing that will threaten that community (although this is a collaborative process, give some deference to the players that created the protagonist and antagonist seeds since they will need to roleplay the protagonist and antagonist characters). Sometimes the evocative sentences from the two seeds will seem to fit together in a way that seems obvious – that's great! Sometimes an evocative sentence from another seed will help serve as a “bridge” between the protagonist and antagonist seeds. Sometimes, you'll need to use some creative interpretation to get them to fit together (this is why it is important not to get too locked-in to any specific interpretations for your evocative sentences during the seed generation process – if you think it can mean only one thing you'll have a harder time getting it to work well with all of the other sentences). If you need to, add additional factors that go beyond the sentences written on the seed sheets as long as you don't negate anything that's written there – the seed sheet may say that “a man” is doing something, and that will still be true if you add the detail that the man is a powerful sorcerer.

Begin Drawing a Map

Many of the seeds will include geographic features, like cities, kingdoms, mountains, deserts, etc. Draw these on a piece of paper that represents the geography of the story. If there are any geographical features necessary for the *Plot Axis* to work, add them, too. The geography of the world is often an important part of an epic fantasy story, so developing a map in tandem with the plot outline can be helpful.

Detail the Antagonist's and Protagonist's Plot Segments

With the characters identified and the major *Plot Axis* determined, the Protagonist and Antagonist need to outline the competing *plots* that each of them will go through. Each will define a three stage plot (each stage will cover multiple chapters). Each stage should lead up to a significant turning point in the story. Some groups will prefer to figure out the details of these turning points before play so that they know how to guide the individual chapters, other groups will find that putting too much detail into these plots before play will rob them of the enjoyment of discovering the story as they go. If you are unsure, err on the side of using the bare bones outline and only fill in the details if and when you get to them in the act of playing out the story. It is usually easiest to figure out the Antagonist's plot first, since it is largely determined by the *Plot Axis* – you just need to flesh out the details of *how* the Antagonist will cause the change that threatens the *community*. The Protagonist's plot determines how he will stop the Antagonist. It is tempting to think about simply standing in the Antagonist's way at every step of his or her plan, but that's not how an epic fantasy story works. The Protagonist's plot is usually either an “end run” around the Antagonist to defeat him in an unexpected way, or else a long preparation for a climactic showdown.

Even though the overall plots of the Protagonist and Antagonist are in direct conflict, be careful not to make the first two segments of either plot contingent on the other player's plot progress. You can't know ahead of time how fast either player will progress through their plots, so don't make events in one plot dependent on events in the other. Since both plots will reach conclusion in the third segment it is fine to make these a direct conflict (say, one person wants to perform a magical ritual with an artifact that the other wants to destroy) because only one will ever be completed before the story ends.

Some good goals for individual plot stages or subplots

Travel. Epic Fantasies are often world-spanning adventures, and just getting from one place to another is an important part of the adventure. Huge mountain ranges, dark forests, and trackless deserts are all great sources of adversity.

Get the Artifact. Is there a special magic sword that can defeat the villain? Maybe an ancient scroll with a spell that will strip him of his power? Searching for an important object is a well-loved part of many epic fantasy stories.

Search out the Wise. Similar to Traveling or the Artifact quest, maybe there is some person who has the secret knowledge necessary to defeat the Antagonist. Some prophetic crone in a cave? A reclusive wizard? An old foe of the Antagonist who went into hiding?

Escape the Chaos. Sometimes the hero needs to be convinced that action is necessary before pushing back against the antagonist. This kind of plot stage is an opportunity to showcase the status quo of the world and how it will change if the Antagonist gets his way. Perhaps the Protagonist's home is ravaged by the Antagonist's army and he needs to escape from their patrols. Maybe the social structure of the Protagonist's home has been undermined or corrupted, and the Protagonist must feel the weight of that before being driven to action.

Alliances. There are often powerful forces in the world who can help against the Antagonist, once they are convinced to move to action. Be very careful with this one – the Protagonist should be the hero of the story, and shouldn't be calling in someone to do his job for him.

Gather forces. A good choice for an Antagonist's plot, it's often necessary to gather lieutenants and armies before you can put your world-shaking plan into effect.

Assault on the Enemy. Sometimes the best way to deal with an antagonist is with cold steel. Probably best to put this one at the last stage of your plot...

Destroy the Artifact. Maybe the key to the antagonist's power is like... a magic ring. And you can destroy it by... throwing it into a volcano? That would probably work as part of an epic fantasy plot.

Massive Battle. World-shaking events often include wars, and massive fantasy battles add excellent spice to stories.

Unlocking your potential. Fantasy characters often have untapped potential that they never knew about until the dramatic events of the story bring it forth. This is a great choice for characters that have raw magical power that needs some to be harnessed.

For example, the player controlling the protagonist Fredo the halfling decides that his plot will start with *Search out the Wise*, so he can figure out how to defeat his antagonist, followed by *Travel*, where he will go to wherever he needs to in order to carry out that plan, and then *Destroy the Artifact*, deciding that it will be fun if he can somehow defeat his antagonist without having to meet him face to face. This rough outline gives the players some guidance about what they'll need to do in the various chapters before that, such as knowing that they'll need to figure out the details of what artifact needs to be destroyed during that meeting with the wise at the end of the first stage.

Fredo's antagonist, playing Dark Lord Soros, is working collaboratively to come up with a plot of his own that meshes well with Fredo's (and Fredo's player probably got some suggestions from Soros's player when he was putting together his plot outline). He likes the idea that there's a magical artifact that is key to his character, and also likes the idea that they may play out the story without their characters even meeting directly. He decides on *Gather forces*, *Massive battle*, and *Find the Artifact*. His idea is that he will dominate the world with military might and then search his conquered territory for the lost artifact.

Identify Supporting Characters

The rest of the players should use the seeds to identify *Supporting Characters* for each of them to control (generally these characters will be sympathetic to the goals of the Protagonist, but that isn't a requirement). Try to pick from one of the seeds you created first. If there are no viable characters there (for example, if all of your seeds are facts about the world that don't imply the existence of any particular people or groups) then pick a seed that someone else created. If the other players don't have seeds to can be used to create characters, repeat the seed generation step.

Supporting characters get a single-stage subplot. If completed it should either complicate or simplify one (or more) of the plot segments of either the Protagonist or Antagonist. The plots should interact, but shouldn't be interdependent. Since you can't predict the order that the plots will completed, you shouldn't make subplots dependent on events that will happen in the plot segments of the Protagonist or Antagonist, or vice versa. For example, if the Antagonist has a plot segment that involves waging war, a Supporting Character's subplot of being crowned king could *complicate* that plot by giving him control over the kingdom's army.

During the game, Supporting Characters will have an opportunity to align themselves with either the Protagonist or Antagonist. If a Supporting Character completes their plot, they win the right to narrate *how* the world changes if the protagonist or antagonist they support completes *their* plot. For example, the wizard Randolph is supporting the protagonist Fredo the halfling against the antagonist Dark Lord Soros. Fredo's plot outline involves stuff at the level of individual characters, so Randolph decides he wants a higher level, grander scale subplot to provide a bit of a counterpoint. He decides on *Alliances*. If he can successfully unite the people of the world against Soros then he gets to explain the fate of the world if and when Fredo completes his plot.

Complete the Map

Now that the story is more fleshed out, there are probably more details to add to the map. Make sure that each player contributes at least one geographic feature to the map. Give the geographic features names. Whenever you can, try to name these features evocatively – “The Swamp of the Dead” instead of just “swamp”. Don't worry about figuring out too many details about these locations, save that for when you visit them during the story.

Set the Map Unit

Once you have all of the geographic features on the map, determine how you will measure distance when characters travel from place to place. In *Storied Age*, distance is measured with an arbitrary measurement known as the “map unit”. There should be about ten map units between the two geographic features that are farthest apart. The most important determining feature of the map unit is that it should be easy to measure in play, so figure out a solution that will work well for the entire group. Some groups will prefer to use a ruler, some will prefer to “walk” the distances with a compass, and some will prefer to lay out a line of poker chips along the route that the characters travel.

Part II: Characters

There are two different kinds of characters in *Storied Age*: Player Characters and Non-Player Characters. Player Characters (called PCs) are the Protagonist, Antagonist, or Supporting Characters that the players will control directly. These will be the most important characters in the story, and their actions are always under the control of the player that they belong to. Even when someone else is narrating the action, they are not allowed to describe your character feeling, thinking, or doing something that is contrary to your vision of the character. Other characters in the story, from bit parts to important secondary characters, are Non-Player Characters (called NPCs). These characters have many similarities to PCs, but they don't have a specific connection to any particular player.

Characters have a *name*, four *traits*, and a *friendship track*.

Name

The way that your characters are named can have an important impact on the “feel” of your world. Name your own character, but work with the group so that the names are harmonious, especially for characters that are supposed to come from the same culture.

Traits

Traits are *things a character is*, *things a character has*, or *things a character knows*. They are the way your character solves problems. They may be personality traits, special skills, signature weapons, loyal subordinates, or anything else that would contribute to characterization in a story. Traits should be broad enough to be useful in many adventurous situations, but not so broad that they are useful in every situation. If it takes you more than a few seconds to think of a situation in which you'll be able to use the trait, it's probably too narrow. Similarly, if it takes you more than a few seconds to think of a situation in which you *couldn't* use the trait, it's probably too broad.

Be careful not to over-specialize – if all of the traits are about how the character fights, will the character be able to deal with adversity like climbing a mountain or crossing a desert?

The traits should be relatively brief. “Master Swordsman” is fine. “Trained by Master Maksim Terrakovsky in the Royal Academy of Fencing, specializing in sabers but also proficient with rapiers” is too much.

Be true to the character, but also keep in mind that these traits need to be useful in an adventurous epic fantasy tale. If the character is a farmer, it's probably better to give him a trait like “level headed” rather than “encyclopedic knowledge of potatoes”. They're both things that might be true about a farmer, but one is much more likely to be relevant to the kind of story you're going to tell. That doesn't mean that these other minor details aren't true about a character, just that they generally aren't central to the way he overcomes adversity in the story

Don't be afraid to make the character a somewhat broad archetype – the epic fantasy literature that inspires this game is full of characters like that.

Each trait has some dice associated with it which will be used when the character participates in exchanges. Mark one of the traits as 1d10, two as 2d8, and one as 3d6.

Friendship Track

Supporting Characters and NPCs use the Friendship Track to indicate where their loyalties lie. Characters can be Personally Aligned with the Protagonist, Ideologically Aligned with the Protagonist, Neutral, Ideologically Aligned with the Antagonist, or Personally Aligned with the Antagonist. Being Personally Aligned indicates a friendship or alliance between characters. Being Ideologically Aligned indicates that the characters generally agree about whether they would prefer the Protagonist or Antagonist to succeed in their plot. For example, a character's family member is

probably Personally Aligned with them, unless there is some established rift between them in the fiction. A character who opposes the Antagonist but who has not yet met the Protagonist is likely Ideologically Aligned. A troll menacing the countryside is probably Ideologically Aligned with the Antagonist (since he wants to make life difficult for the Protagonist) but probably isn't Personally Aligned.

Supporting Characters start at Neutral on the track. The Friendship Track for an NPC should be set at the time he or she is created, at whatever value the group feels is most appropriate (start them at Neutral if there is no strong reason for them to favor one side or the other). Supporting Characters and NPCs can have the setting of their Friendship Tracks changed when they are involved in the action of a chapter. See **Ending a Chapter** for more details.

Existing and Being Established

When a character is written down on a character sheet, he or she *exists* for the purposes of the game mechanics. Even though characters *exist* as soon as they have a character sheet, they aren't considered part of the story until they are *established* (see **Establishing an Existing Character into a Chapter**). Establishing a character lets us know their location and situation. Until a character has been established, you can think of them as existing as disembodied dramatic potential – they don't become real characters in the story until they are established.

At the start of the game, all of the PCs *exist* but are not yet *established*.

Flesh Out the PCs

If you haven't already, choose a name for your character, select four traits, and assign dice to the traits. Mark the Protagonist and Antagonist's Friendship Track as Personally Aligned with themselves. Mark the Supporting Character's Friendship Track as Neutral.

Distribute Starting Tokens

You will need a number of tokens in three different colors. They will be used for Spotlight Tokens, Adversity Tokens, and Victory Tokens. Try to map the colors to the different types so that it is easy to remember which is which (For example, if you have red, white, and blue tokens, you might choose white for Spotlight, since they rhyme, and red for Adversity, because Adversity is trying to “stop” a character and red lights are associated with stopping).

Give the player who is controlling the Protagonist 4 Spotlight Tokens. Give the player controlling the Antagonist 2 Spotlight Tokens and 2 Adversity Tokens. Give each player who is controlling a Supporting Character 4 Adversity Tokens.

Part III: Playing Out Chapters

Just like a novel, a *Storied Age* story plays out in a series of *chapters*. Each chapter is played out by going through a few steps:

1. Determine the Spotlight Player
2. Set the location where the chapter begins
3. Determine the Adversity Player
4. Play out a series of *exchanges*
5. Resolve the chapter
6. Replenish your supply of tokens

Selecting a Spotlight Player

Final Hour of a Storied Age is played in a series of *chapters*. The first step is to determine the Spotlight Player for the chapter, which will determine the main character of the chapter. Each player secretly selects a number of Spotlight Tokens from their supply to bid. If a player has any Spotlight Tokens they must bid at least one token. All of the bids are revealed simultaneously. Whoever bid the most tokens is the Spotlight Player and converts the Spotlight Tokens they bid into Chapter Tokens for use during the chapter. Ties are broken in favor of the Protagonist, then the Antagonist, then the player who has spent the longest without having a spotlight chapter (roll dice if there is still a tie). The tokens bid by the players who didn't become the Spotlight Player are discarded.

The chapter will revolve around the character played by the Spotlight Player (called the Spotlight Character for short). The Spotlight Player describes the setting or location of the chapter and gives a rough guide for the kind of thing he wants the character to accomplish in the chapter, informed by his plot stage goal. If the action is happening in a different location than the Spotlight Character was established in a previous chapter, the Spotlight Player must pay the proper cost in tokens (see **Establishing Characters**). Everyone must agree that these requests are plausible and consistent with the previously established fiction – if the last time we saw this character he was lost at sea don't ask to start this chapter in an underground tunnel!

Selecting an Adversity Player

Next, the Adversity Player is determined. Every player who has Adversity Tokens, except the Spotlight Player, secretly selects a number of Adversity Tokens to bid. If a player has any Adversity Tokens they must bid at least one token. All of the bids are revealed simultaneously. Whoever bid the most tokens is the Adversity Player and converts the Adversity Tokens they bid into Chapter Tokens. Ties are broken in favor of the Antagonist and then the player who has spent the longest without being the Adversity Player (roll dice if there is still a tie). In addition, the Adversity Player takes a number of Spotlight Tokens equal to the number of tokens in his winning bid for use in later chapters.

Be An Appreciative Audience

If you are neither the Spotlight or Adversity player during a chapter, you have the ability to reward players for introducing things you enjoy into the fiction. If the Spotlight or Adversity Player introduce an element into the story that you particularly appreciate (creating a new character, bringing an existing character into the cahpter, or introducing an environmental threat) you may reward them with an extra Chapter Token (you don't lose any tokens to do this). This cannot be done for *activating* an element that is already in the chapter, just for introducing something new. The Spotlight and Adversity Players are not allowed to negotiate for these rewards or spend tokens as if receiving the reward was guaranteed – the audience can only reward the Spotlight or Adversity player for their contributions *after* they have already decided to spend their existing Chapter Tokens to pay for it.

Oppose the Spotlight Character? I'm on his side!

Players may find it confusing that they occasionally have to act as the Adversity Player against players that are aligned with them in the story. However, this is really an opportunity rather than a burden. There's no rule that says you have to play *well* when you are presenting the Adversity, just that you have to present Adversity!.

Playing out a Chapter

It is the Adversity Player's responsibility to describe the environment and explain the things that make it difficult for the Spotlight Character to achieve his goals, and it is the Spotlight Player's responsibility to describe how the Spotlight Character tries to overcome these obstacles. Both players will spend their Chapter Tokens to get dice which will let them figure out whether the obstacles are overcome or not.

As will be explained in detail in the following sections, players can spend their Chapter Tokens to:

- Activate the traits of a character
- Create an active or passive environmental threat to the Spotlight Character
- Establish an existing character into the chapter
- Create a new NPC

The dice that the Spotlight and Adversity Players gather by spending their tokens will be used in *Exchanges*. An exchange is a “decision point” in the chapter which determines what happens when the Spotlight Character faces a particular set of challenges. It will be common to have multiple exchanges in a chapter, and common to spend tokens between exchanges in order to bring new details to different exchanges. Usually, the players will need to describe some action or facet of a character in order to justify which dice they want to employ for each exchange, and each exchange will result in some narration that describes the result of the action. Like a novel, these narrations and descriptions of the events of the chapter build upon each other to tell the story.

Activate the Traits of a Character

Each character has four traits, and each trait has some dice associated with it. Spending one Chapter Token *activates* all four of a character's traits. Once activated, a trait's dice may be used in an exchange. Players may use as many or as few activated traits in an exchange as they wish, although the use of the trait must be

justified by description or narration. You can add a few sentences of description or narration to justify the inclusion of a particular trait on the fly, as long as it passes muster with the group. It is possible for the traits used in an exchange to become *exhausted* (see **Exchanges** for more about that), so it is often wise to hold some traits in reserve and not use all four of a character's traits in every exchange even when it is possible to do so. *Exhausting* happens on a per-trait basis, not a per-character basis, so it will be common to have characters that have some activated traits and some exhausted traits. When this happens, the character may find himself in a situation where the ideal trait to address the particular problem he is facing is exhausted, but several of his other traits are available. When this happens, you will need to decide whether it is better to figure out a way to use the other traits to face the challenge, or whether it makes more sense to spend a token to activate all of the character's traits so that you can use the exact trait you want (even though the most “efficient” use of tokens is to wait until all four traits are exhausted before paying to re-activate).

Environmental Threats

The Adversity Player may introduce problems stemming from the location or environment where the action of the chapter takes place. For 1 token, a *passive* environmental threat (such as a chasm that needs to be crossed, or bitterly cold weather) may be introduced as a 3d6 trait. For 1 token, an *active* environmental threat (such as nameless monsters that don't warrant a character sheet of their own, or a raging windstorm) may be introduced as a 2d8 trait (these are also subject to plausibility objections from the group). Unlike characters, environmental threats are introduced and activated at the same time – they are considered activated as soon as you spend the Chapter Token to introduce them.

Establish an Existing Character Into a Chapter

Describing a character as present in the location that the chapter is taking place and making them relevant to the action is called *establishing* the character in the chapter. You must pay the

appropriate cost in Chapter Tokens to *establish* any character, whether Protagonist, Antagonist, Supporting Character, or NPC (this cost is frequently zero tokens, however). There are two factors that contribute to the cost of establishing a character: *geographic distance* from the last place the character was established and the *likelihood* that the character would be present in the location where the action of the chapter is happening.

If the chapter is taking place in the same location where a character was previously established, or within one map unit of that location, then there is no cost for geographic distance. However, if the chapter is taking place two or more map units away, you must pay a number of Chapter Tokens one less than the distance in map units (e.g if the action is happening 4 map units away from the characters previous location, you must pay 3 Chapter Tokens).

Based what is known about the character and his intentions, the group should come to a consensus about whether a character's presence in the chapter is *reasonable and expected* (for example, a king in his throne room), *plausible but unexpected* (for example, the king is in the woods on a hunting trip), or *possible but surprising* (for example, the king in the dungeon of his worst enemy). There is no cost to establish a character into a chapter where it's *reasonable and expected*, but it costs one Chapter Token if it's *plausible but unexpected* and two Chapter Tokens if it's *possible but unexpected*. If none of those categories seem to apply, that character cannot be introduced in that location.

Only establish a PC into a scene if the player that controls that PC consents to it. The Spotlight Player is only allowed to establish NPCs that have Friendship Tracks that are Neutral or that indicate they are on the same side as the Spotlight Character. The Adversity Player is only allowed to establish NPCs that are Neutral or that are on the opposite side from the Spotlight Character.

Remember that you still need to *activate* characters before you can use their traits in exchanges.

Create a New NPC

Creating an NPC that can be established into a chapter has a cost associated with it. If the NPC is one that is *directly mentioned* in one of the seeds it costs 1 token to create them. If the NPC isn't mentioned directly on the seed, but is *implied* by a seed, or has been mentioned or implied by the story that has been developed so far, it costs 2 tokens to create them. For example, if one of the seeds mentions a prince, that *implies* that there is a king. If the character has been facing adversity from a tribe of barbarians, it is *implied* that there is a barbarian chieftain character that can be created. It also costs 2 tokens to hold up a Dark Mirror to an existing character. (See **Dark Mirrors** below). For 4 tokens, you can stat out whatever character you want.

Dark Mirror

In lots of fantasy fiction, themes are explored by having characters who are in some ways identical but in other ways are polar opposites. This contrast helps showcase the theme. *Dark Mirrors* aren't doppelgangers, they are independent characters that happen to have strong points of comparison and contrast with other characters in the story. In order to introduce a Dark Mirror Character into a game of *Final Hour of a Storied Age*, select an existing character as a starting point. Copy some of his traits over exactly, but replace one or two of the traits with a thematic opposite. For example, the player of the Dark Lord Soros character has been annoyed at how effective the Wizard Randolph character has been at foiling his plans, so he decides to introduce a Dark Mirror of Randolph. Randolph's traits are *Powerful Wizardry*, *Has Wandered to Many Lands*, *Man of Action*, and *Old and Wise*. Soros likes the wizardry and wisdom traits, so he decides to copy those directly. Instead of *Has Wandered to Many Lands*, Soros decides that *his* wizard has stayed in one place and takes the trait *Lives in a Powerful Fortress*. He decides *Man of Action's* thematic opposite is to act through others rather than directly, so he takes *Persuasive Voice*. He gives his new wizard a name, Harriman the White.

Exchanges

An exchange is played out by using dice derived from the traits of characters and from the obstacles presented by the Adversity Player. The Adversity Player must spend *at least one* Adversity Token during each exchange (either to activate a character or introduce an environmental threat). The chapter will continue with more exchanges until the Adversity Player runs out of Chapter Tokens.

Once both players are satisfied with the number of dice they have gathered for the exchange they roll simultaneously. Whoever has the die with the highest number showing wins the exchange and takes a Victory Token (if the highest die is a tie between the players, compare the next highest, and so on). However, if *any* of the dice that a player rolled in the exchange show a 1, that means that *every trait* that the player *used in that exchange* is *exhausted*. A player may not use an exhausted trait until the trait is *activated* again. (Remember that only the traits that *contributed dice to the exchange* can be exhausted). Whichever player wins the exchange should narrate things to advance the story, showing their side of the exchange in a positive light. Use the traits that were involved in the exchange (and whether they are exhausted or not) as a guideline for the narration. Whoever is narrating the results must respect the continued relevance of traits or characters that are still mechanically available for future exchanges. For example, the Spotlight Player should not narrate himself killing all of the orcs that are attacking him if the Adversity Player is still allowed to roll 2d8 for them on the next exchange – you can kill *some* of them and look cool doing it, you just can't use narration to undercut something that you or your opponent paid Chapter Tokens to introduce into the story. When an active or passive environmental threat is exhausted feel free to move past that threat in the narration since it would cost the same amount of tokens to reactivate an environmental threat as it would to introduce a brand new one.

Ending the chapter

If, at the end of an exchange, the Adversity Player has no more Chapter Tokens remaining the chapter is resolved. If the Spotlight Player has more Victory Tokens than the Adversity Player, or if there is a tie, convert any remaining Chapter Tokens into additional Victory Tokens.

If the Adversity Player wins the chapter, the Spotlight Player is not allowed to ask for a new chapter that starts in the same way. He must change either his approach (e.g. If he failed to sneak his way past the enemy army, maybe he can try fighting his way through) or his location (e.g. If he couldn't make it through the mountains by taking the snowy pass, maybe it's time to take the route through the dwarven mines) in a subsequent chapter.

Whoever has more Victory Tokens can spend the difference on the choices below. (For example, if the Spotlight Player has 3 Victory Tokens and the Adversity Player has 5, the Adversity Player can spend 2 tokens). Some choices are only available to Spotlight Players, others to Adversity Players, and some to both.

Advancing A Plot Segment or Subplot

For one token, the Spotlight Character may advance one step along their plot. It takes three steps to complete a plot segment or subplot. If the Spotlight Character completes the third stage of the plot or subplot include the details of completing this stage of the story when you describe the the chapter conclusion.

Altering a Trait

Sometimes characters change over the course of a story, and it makes sense to alter their traits to reflect that. For one token a Spotlight Player can tweak a trait slightly. For two tokens a Spotlight Player can radically alter a trait. Make sure that this change or new trait makes sense in the context of the chapter.

Change the Dice Value of a Trait

For three tokens a Spotlight Player can change the dice value of a trait. A 3d6 can be changed into a 4d6 or a 2d8. A 2d8 can be changed into a 3d8 or a 1d10. A 1d10 can be changed into a 1d12.

Add a New Trait

For four tokens a Spotlight Player can add a new 3d6 trait.

Create a New NPC

Either Spotlight Players or Adversity Players can spend Victory Tokens to create new NPCs, for the same price that it would have taken to create them during the chapter. You can only create a new NPC at the end of a chapter if they are *relevant to the chapter*. You can add a few sentences of narration or description to the chapter as part of the conclusion to help you do this. An easy approach is to introduce the new character as if they have been watching the action of the chapter from afar.

Character Interactions and the Friendship Track

The Spotlight Player can move the Friendship Track of an NPC or their own Supporting Character toward greater alignment. It costs one token to move from Neutral to Ideologically Aligned and two tokens to move from Ideologically Aligned to Personally Aligned. Supporting characters can only move one step along the friendship track per chapter, and only if their player was the Spotlight or Adversity Player.

The Adversity Player can move the Friendship Track of an NPC or their own Supporting Character toward Neutrality. It costs two tokens to move from Personally Aligned to Ideologically Aligned, and one token to move from Ideologically Aligned to Neutral. If the Adversity Player used his own Supporting Character in the chapter, he can move that character's Friendship Track toward alignment for the same costs as a Spotlight Player.

NPCs and Supporting Characters may only move on their friendship track if they had a meaningful interaction with either the Protagonist or the Antagonist during a chapter (and they can only move to Personally Aligned with a character they actually interacted with). Two characters can be considered to have interacted meaningfully if traits from both characters were involved in at least one exchange during a chapter (either both on the same side, or on opposing sides).

Travel Together

For one token, the Spotlight Player can declare that two characters who are aligned on the Friendship Track are *Travelling Together*. This means that whenever one of the characters is *established* into a chapter, the other is automatically considered established there as well. A player may voluntarily sever their own *Travelling Together* relationship at any time.

Scatter!

For one token, the Adversity Player may break any *Travelling Together* relationships that the Spotlight Character has.

Impeding, Thwarting, or Killing NPCs

The Spotlight Character may spend tokens that will make it harder to bring particular NPCs back into the story. For one token an NPC may be *impeded*. It is automatically considered at least *unexpected* for an impeded NPC to be established in a later chapter. Make sure to include justifying narration, such as the NPC being stuck on the wrong side of a collapsed bridge, when you do this.

For two tokens, an NPC may be *thwarted*. It is automatically considered *surprising* for a thwarted NPC to be established in a later chapter. Make sure to include justifying narration, such as the NPC appearing to fall into a bottomless chasm, when you do this. When you narrate something happening to the NPC, make sure to

include enough ambiguity so that it is only a *surprise* if they come back, not a continuity-killer.

For four tokens, an NPC may be killed or otherwise permanently defeated. The NPC can no longer be established into a chapter.

Capturing the Spotlight Character

For four tokens, the Adversity Player can cause the Spotlight Character to be *captured*. The Spotlight Character is no longer “traveling with” any of the characters he or she was previously associated with, but with the character of the Adversity Player’s choosing. The captured character may not advance their plot until they successfully escape or are rescued.

Adversity Player

Cost	Purchased Effect
*	Bring a new NPC into existence: same cost in tokens as during a chapter
2	Move an NPC's friendship track from Personally Aligned to Ideologically Aligned
1	Move an NPC's friendship track from Ideologically Aligned to Neutral
1	Scatter! Break the Traveling Together relationship between two characters
4	Captured! The Spotlight Character is captured by one of the characters introduced by the Adversity Character.
2	Take 1 Adversity Token for use in later chapters
1	Move the Adversity Player's character's friendship track from Neutral to Ideologically Aligned (Supporting Characters only)
2	Move the Adversity Player's character's friendship track from Ideologically Aligned to Personally Aligned (Supporting Characters only)

Spotlight Player

Cost	Purchased Effect
1	Advance plot or subplot of Spotlight Character one step (max 1 step per chapter, plot segments have 3 steps)
1	Alter the text of one trait to tweak it slightly (must make sense based on the events of the chapter)
2	Radically alter the text of one trait to completely rewrite it (must make sense based on the events of the chapter)
3	Change the dice value of a trait. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convert a 3d6 trait into a 4d6 or 2d8 trait ● Convert a 2d8 trait into a 3d8 or 1d10 trait ● Convert a 1d10 trait into a 1d12 trait
4	Add a brand new trait at 3d6 (must make sense based on the events of the chapter)
*	Bring a new NPC into existence: Same cost in tokens as during a chapter
1	Move an NPC or Supporting Character's friendship track from Neutral to Ideologically Aligned
2	Move an NPC or Supporting Character's friendship track from Ideologically Aligned to Personally Aligned
1	Declare that two Ideologically or Personally Aligned characters established in the same location are now Traveling Together
1	Impede an NPC: It is automatically considered at least <i>unexpected</i> for this NPC to be established into a chapter.
2	Thwart an NPC: It is automatically considered <i>surprising</i> for this NPC to be established into a chapter.
4	Kill (or otherwise permanently defeat) an NPC: The NPC may no longer be established into any scenes.

Chapter Token Options

Cost	Introduce and Activate an Environmental Threat
1 Token	Add a <i>passive environmental threat</i> at 3d6
1 Token	Add an <i>active environmental threat</i> at 2d8

Cost	Establish a Character into the Chapter
0 Tokens	Character has been previously established in the current location
0 Tokens	Character previously established in a location within one map unit of current location
N-1 Tokens	Character previously established in a location that is 2 or more map units away from the current location and must travel N map units to get here
0 Tokens	It's <i>reasonable and expected</i> for character to be here
1 Token	It's <i>plausible but unexpected</i> for character to be here
2 Tokens	It's <i>possible but surprising</i> for character to be here

Cost	Create a New NPC
1 Token	Character is directly mentioned on one of the seeds.
2 Tokens	Character is implied by an existing seed, or implied by the fiction in the story so far.
2 Tokens	Hold up a Dark Mirror to an existing character.
4 Tokens	Stat out whatever character you want

Example Chapter

Player	Role	Character	Tokens
Peter	Protagonist	Parson	4 spotlight
Annie	Antagonist	Queen Anastasia	2 spotlight, 2 adversity
Susan	Supporting	Shana the Sorceress	4 adversity
Fred	Supporting	General Fenton	4 adversity

Susan: OK, is everybody ready to bid for spotlight? Let's go.

[Peter bids 3 spotlight, Annie bids 1, no one else has tokens]

Peter: OK, it's my chapter. Parson is trying to find the lost sword of the ancients. I think he's looking in the Dread Swamp. Cool? Time to bid for Adversity.

[Annie bids 2, Susan bids 3, Fred bids 1]

Susan: All right, I won the bid so I get 3 spotlight tokens, and we're each going to have 3 Chapter Tokens for this chapter. Let me take a look at these character sheets...

Parson		Shana the Sorceress	
Student of the Blade	1d10	Sorcery!	1d10
Proud	2d8	Mysterious beauty	2d8
Years of training	2d8	Rapier wit	2d8
Scorns the old ways	3d6	Reading the stars	3d6

Susan: So you're looking for the sword in this swamp?

Peter: Yeah.

Susan: OK, you're approaching Dread Swamp, it's pretty wet, with lots of vegetation, and lots of fog. Basically like Degobah.

Peter: OK, that's cool.

Susan: Yeah, but instead of a little green dude, this beautiful woman steps out of the fog and says "You look a little out of place. Did you get lost on the way to your academy?" That's Shana the Sorceress. I'll use a token to activate her and she's using her *Mysterious beauty* and her *Rapier wit*.

Fred: Ooh! We get to see Shana in this chapter? That's a surprise!

Annie: More *unexpected* than surprising, I'd say.

Susan: Ha, I guess I do need to spend tokens to bring her in.

Peter: Yeah. But I agree that unexpected makes the most sense.

Susan: OK, that's one token.

Fred: I like Shana getting introduced, so take a Chapter Token.

Susan: Thanks. Peter, how is Parson responding to Shana?

Peter: I'll spend a token to activate him. I think Parson is *Proud* so he'll say, "I'm just where I'm supposed to be. I've got to find the Blade of the Ancients." So that's his *Student of the Blade*, too.

Susan: OK, I'll buy that. Ready for dice? I've got 2d8 for each of mine.

Peter: Yep, I'm bringing 1d10 and 2d8.

[Peter rolls 9, 4, 2. Susan rolls 6, 5, 2, 1]

Peter: OK, I win and you exhausted your traits... Parson steps into the swamp, ignoring Shana's looks and acting like he doesn't even care what she thinks.

Susan: All right, but the swampy ground is a passive environmental threat for 3d6. And Shana has *read the stars*, and she says, "it is foretold that you shall not find the sword here."

Peter: Well, Parson has had *Years of Training*, and that includes training in moving through difficult terrain like a swamp. And he *Scorns the Old Ways* so he doesn't care about any ridiculous prophecies.

Susan: Roll it!

[Peter rolls 5, 4, 3, 3, 2. Susan rolls 6, 6, 4, 3, 3]

Susan: Heh heh, that will teach you to scorn the old ways! Parson starts sinking into the mud, underscoring Shana's prediction.

Peter: Well, I'm *Proud* so I'm not going to let a little mud get in my way, so I'm going to just keep pushing forward. And as a *Student of the Blade*, I've read some scrolls that suggest that the sword really is here, so I'm pretty intent on searching for it.

Susan: OK, so you've still got the mud to deal with, and now there are some snakes slithering out of the swamp at you. That's a 2d8

threat, and this will be the last exchange because that's my third token.

Peter: Well, I'll bring in my *Years of Training*, too, because we had lots of classes on snake safety.

Susan: That may be so, but they probably didn't cover snakes that have been magically enlarged by Shana's *Sorcery!*

Fred: Ooh, nice. I knew I'd be glad Shana was here.

Annie: Yeah, I like giant snakes. Take another chapter token for that.

Susan: OK, so I guess this won't be the last exchange after all. I'm bringing 2d8 for the snakes, 3d6 for the mud, and 1d10 for the sorcery. Ready to roll?

Peter: Yeah. I'm bringing 1d10 for Student of the Blade, 2d8 for Years of Training, and 2d8 for Proud.

[Peter rolls 9, 8, 7, 5, 2. Susan rolls 6, 6, 6, 3, 1, 1]

Susan: Oh, man, I lose *and* all that stuff gets exhausted...

Peter: Sweet! Take that, snakes! Parson chops through them with his sword, and he's powering through the mud like it's nothing.

Susan: OK, so this is *really* going to be the last exchange, and you'll need to find your way through the fog, that's just a passive threat.

Peter: Well, I'm *Proud*, so I'm going to keep moving forward, even though it's getting hard to see where I'm going. And the scrolls said that if the sword was going to be here, it would be in the heart of the swamp, so that's *Student of the Blade* too.

[Peter rolls 5, 5, 4. Susan rolls 6, 3, 2]

Susan: Ha, I think you're ending the chapter lost in the fog.

Peter: Yeah, that sounds fair. So I won two Victory Tokens, right?

Susan: Yes, and two for me, too.

Peter: So that's a tie, but I only spent one Chapter Token and I came in with three, so I get two more Victory Tokens from that.

Susan: Right.

Peter: OK, let me see what I can spend those on...

Refresh Tokens

Whenever a chapter ends, regardless of the participating players were, every player gets more tokens to add to their supply. Protagonists get 2 Spotlight Tokens, Supporting Characters and Antagonists get 2 Adversity Tokens.

Player Type	Receives
Protagonist	2 Spotlight Tokens
Antagonist	2 Adversity Tokens
Supporting Character	2 Adversity Tokens

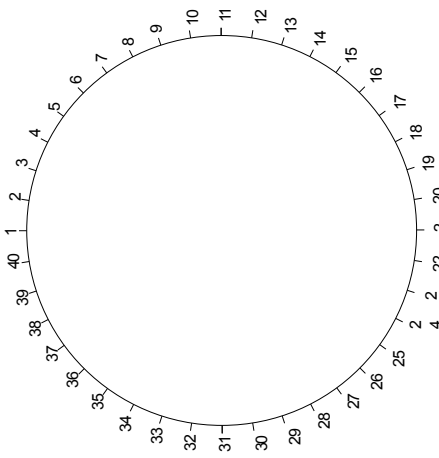
Part IV: Ending the Game

When either the Protagonist or Antagonist completes his or her third plot segment the game is over. In order to narrate the ending, determine the progress that other players made on their plots and subplots. A supporting character aligned with the victorious Protagonist or Antagonist may state one positive (from their perspective) change that happens in the world. If the Antagonist's plot completed, he or she gets to narrate the aftermath of the story. If the Protagonist's plot was completed, he or she gets to narrate the aftermath, but the Antagonist may get to impose some conditions based on how much progress he or she made on the Antagonist's plot. If the Antagonist wasn't able to complete any plot segments, it's a happy ending for the Protagonist and no concessions are required. If the Antagonist successfully completed one plot segment, it's a slightly bittersweet ending. One minor concession regarding either the Protagonist or the Protagonist's community is required (as an example, the Protagonist has been changed by the experience and can not longer be happy in his own community). If the Antagonist successfully completed two plot segments it is a bittersweet ending, and either a major concession or two minor concessions are required.

Future Revisions

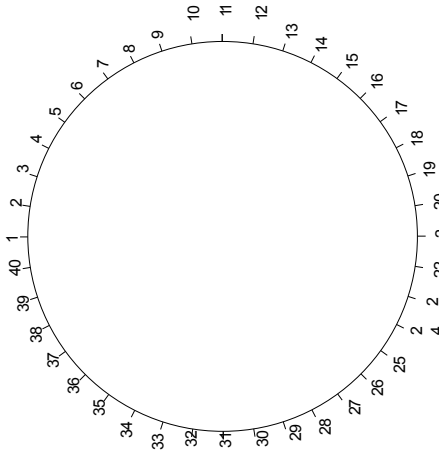
I have a number of ideas for enhancing the game that have not yet been incorporated into the design:

- More Theme Tables (e.g. Star Wars-style space opera)
- Instructions for creating your own Theme Tables
- Mechanical rewards tied to the plot segments
- Make supporting player's friendship track have more mechanical weight
- Consider exhausting on 1 or 2, not just 1
- Should the Adversity Player have to spend more than 1 token per exchange if he has lots of tokens?
- Do “characters” *have* to be people, or can something like a mountain be a character?
- Different types of NPC s with different dice for their traits?



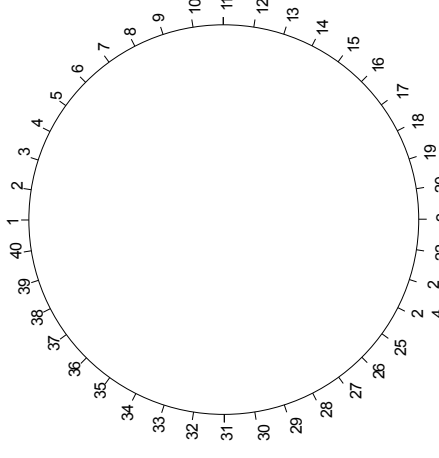
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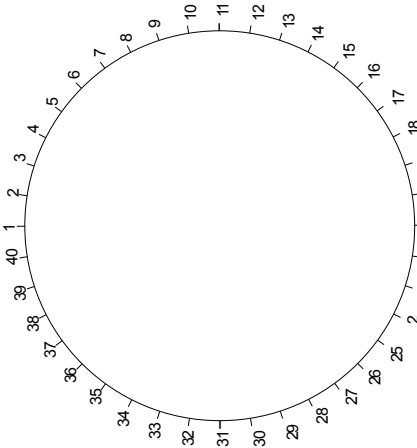
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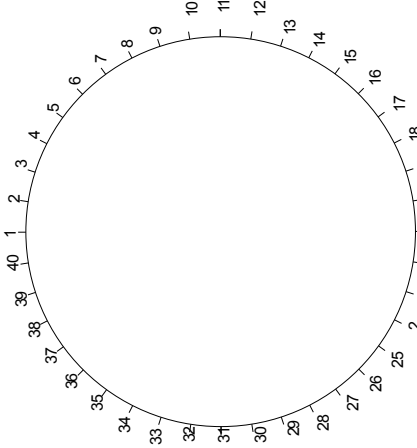
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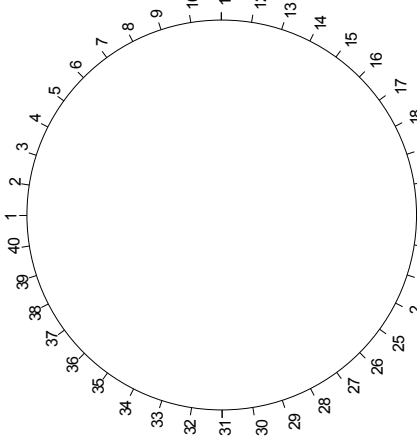
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