

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

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REV 0.62

Introduction

Final Hour of a Storied Age is a roleplaying game of Epic Fantasy. Using these rules, some dice, and pencil and paper, you and some friends can experience a story like those found in your favorite epic fantasy novels: stories of heroes struggling against adversity in the face of world-changing events. This game combines ideas and techniques that fantasy authors use when crafting their stories with elements that fantasy readers enjoy when reading them. By channeling the creative, collaborative energy of the entire group this game produces a story for you all to enjoy.

Collaborate At The Table

A *Storied Age* story is created collaboratively at the table by all of the players. Collaboration works best in an environment where everyone feels comfortable putting lots of ideas on the table with the recognition that not every idea is going to work. It's easy to derail a creative effort by fixating on one idea, so resist that temptation. The best way to prepare for a *Storied Age* game session is to get yourself into the right frame of mind. Think about big fantasy ideas, get excited by fantasy tropes, or be inspired by a fantasy mood. Be careful not to get too specific too early, though, or you may find it difficult to make your ideas work well with the ideas that your friends contribute!

This is a Playtest Version of the Game

Changes to Rev 0.62

Added mechanical benefit for completing plot segment/subplot

Added post-subplot mechanics for supporting characters

Additional plot/world creation examples

New Dark Mirror example

Clarified: 3 segments per plot, 3 stages per segment

Improved explanation of active/passive threats

Clarified difference in NPC/Supporting Character alignment tracks

Added mechanical benefit to Supporting Character alignment track

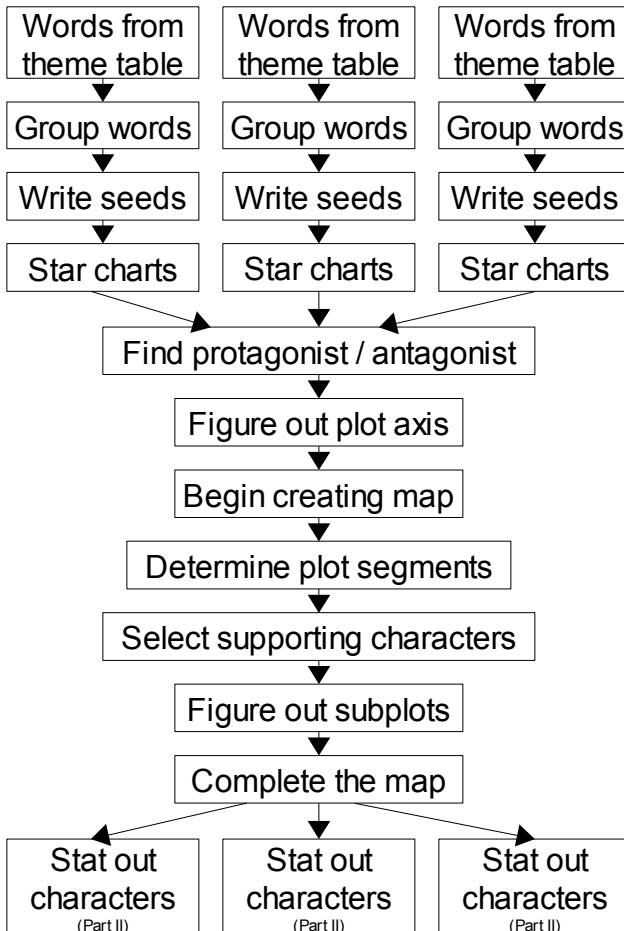
Supporting characters must interact to adjust their alignment tracks

Part I: Creating the Plot

Theme Table

Although epic fantasy novels sometimes *read* like the history of a pre-existing world they are rarely *created* that way. Instead, the world, events, and characters are all created to serve a story that speaks to eternal themes like duty, love, or truth. A *Storied Age* story starts with individual creativity, each player working through the first few steps in parallel. Then the individual contributions are collaboratively put together to create a story that no one player would have come up with on their own.

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



Generate a List of Words from the Theme Table

First, each player needs to independently create some seeds from which the story will grow. To begin creating the seeds, roll two d12's, add them together, and find the corresponding entry on a theme table such as the one to the left. Note down the word on a piece of scratch paper (note down the number, too, since it will make later steps easier). Roll the dice 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 (don't add the duplicate on the list).

Susan rolls a 23 on her dice and writes Division (23) on her scratch paper. She rolls again, getting a 9. She counts 9 entries down from 23 and adds Throne (32) to her list. Rolling a 10 steps her off the end of the table, so she wraps around to the beginning and writes Responsibility (2) on her list. She rolls a 5 and adds Farm (7). She rolls an 11 and adds Fire (18). She rolls an 18 and adds Sea (36) to the list. She rolls a 7, wraps around again, and writes Power (3) on the list. She rolls 13 and adds Old (16). She rolls another 13 and adds Hate (29). She rolls a 7, which would give her Sea, but that is already on her list so she stops rolling.

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.

Susan has nine words on her list, so puts the first six in one group: Division Throne Responsibility Farm Fire Sea. She puts her final three words in a second group: Power Old Hate.

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.” For each group, write down the ordered words and the corresponding sentence on a seed sheet.

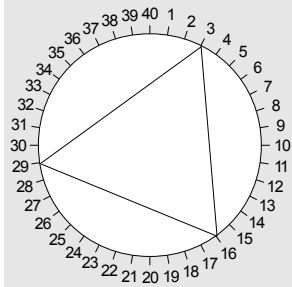
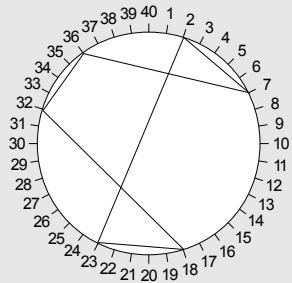
Susan looks at her first group of words: Division Throne Responsibility Farm Fire Sea. She likes the idea of a division of responsibility, so she decides to group those two words together. She likes the way Sea and Farm fit together, too, since it conjures the idea of fishermen in her mind, since they harvest food from the sea. She's not sure exactly what a Throne of Fire is, but it sounds like an evocative fantasy idea to her, so she decides to include that, too. She orders her words as Division Responsibility Farm Sea Throne Fire and writes a sentence: “Two twins have divided responsibilities: one must harvest food from the sea while the other seeks the Throne of Fire.”

She looks at her second group of words: Power Old Hate. She decides to arrange them as Hate Old Power to inspire the sentence: “Civilized society shuns the wielders of ancient mystical powers.”

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 (this will sometimes create a star shape). Record the number of intersections between the lines that you have drawn on your star chart.

Susan's first ordered list is Division (23) Responsibility (2) Farm (7) Sea (36) Throne (32) Fire (18). She casts the star chart and gets two intersections.



Her second ordered list is Hate (29) Old (16) Power (3). She casts the star chart and gets zero intersections.

Use the Seeds to Generate the Plot Axis

Once you have the star charts for the seeds you can figure out the plot axis, the central conflict around which the story will turn. 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 previous steps will help determine this main plot.

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 the protagonist 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 words in the group to break the tie. If it's still tied as, use dice 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 a different player.

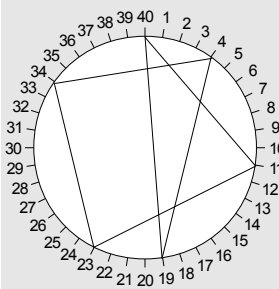
Use the protagonist seed to identify a protagonist character and a community that he or she represents. The community is the frame of reference through which the rest of the fantasy world can be understood (in *The Lord of the Rings*, this community is The Shire). In *Storied Age*, the protagonist must *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 should feel that the community is fundamentally worth protecting. Positive change in the community might happen as part of a *Storied Age* story, but the protagonist is focused on preventing the negative change that will occur if the antagonist is not stopped.

When the story opens, the antagonist is endeavoring to cause the world to change in a way that is negative for the community (think: destroy, conquer, enslave, exterminate, etc.). The antagonist will 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 to 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 characters). Sometimes the sentences from the two seeds will seem to fit together perfectly – that's great! Sometimes a 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 (remember that good collaboration happens when you keep an open mind to the perspective and suggestions of others). If necessary, you can add 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.

While Susan has been working on the seeds “Two twins have divided responsibilities: one must harvest food from the sea while the other seeks the Throne of Fire” with two intersections and “Civilized society shuns the wielders of ancient mystical powers.” with no intersections, her friends Fred, Annie, and Peter have been working on seeds of their own. Fred's first seed of “A greedy, cold-blooded man foments division among the mountain people” has two intersections on its star chart. His second seed of “A prophecy foretells that the king will welcome the blackening of the sea” has one intersection. Annie's seed “A man from an old bloodline has taken the throne of a declining kingdom and hopes to master his ancestral ice sword” has twelve intersections. Peter's seed “Women past childbearing age are expected to take vows of poverty” has one intersection.

Since Annie's seed has the most intersections it is the protagonist seed. Fred's first seed is next in number of intersections, so that is the antagonist seed. The group discusses the seeds, and they decide that Annie's kingdom in decline is a good community, and the new king from the seed will be a good protagonist to represent that community. They notice some interesting counterpoints between the king's sword of ice and Susan's Throne of Fire, and that both mountains and the sea are mentioned on seeds. They think that's pretty close to the classic elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and that the corruption of the sea could be a symptom of a larger problem. It also sounds to them like there are multiple kingdoms, and that the meddling with the mountain people might just be a part of the cold-blooded antagonist's larger plan. They decide that the antagonist is fomenting chaos in a balkanized region of small kingdoms and tribal holdings, each with dominion over one of the four elements, which will lead to a breakdown in the delicate elemental balance, causing disaster across the whole region.

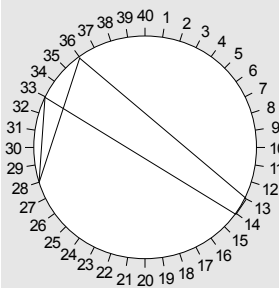


Words: Greed Ice Blood Male Division Mountain

4 19 40 11 23 34

Sentence:

A greedy, cold-blooded man foments division among the mountain people.

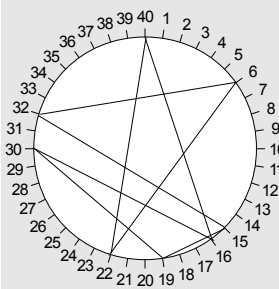


Words: Prophecy Crown Love Sea Corruption

14 33 28 36 13

Sentence:

A prophecy foretells that the king will welcome the blackening of the sea.

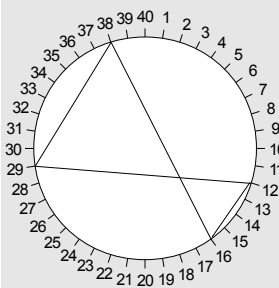


Words: Old Blood Family Poor Throne Learning Ice Sword

16 40 22 6 32 15 19 30

Sentence:

A man from an old bloodline has taken the throne of a declining kingdom and hopes to master his ancestral ice sword.



Words: Old Female Hate Gold

16 12 29 38

Sentence:

Women past childbearing age are expected to take vows of poverty.

Begin Drawing a Map

Many seeds will include geographic features, like cities, kingdoms, mountains, deserts, etc. Draw these on a piece of paper to represent 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 plot has three segments, and each segment should lead up to a significant turning point in the story. It's 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 or she will stop the Antagonist. It is tempting to think about simply standing in the way at every step of that antagonist's plan, but that's not how an epic fantasy story works. The protagonist's plot should either be an “end run” around the antagonist to defeat him or her in an unexpected way, or a long preparation for a climactic showdown.

Even though the overall plots of the protagonist and antagonist are in 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 segments, so don't make events in one plot dependent on events in the other. Since the story ends if either player completes their third segment it is fine to make these a direct conflict (say, one wants to perform a magical ritual with an artifact that the other wants to destroy) because only one can be completed before the story ends.

Identifying individual plot segments provides guidance for how to play out the moment-to-moment events of the story. Each segment has three stages, and each stage is chronicled through one or more

chapters (See Part III: Playing Out Chapters). Breaking the plot down into segments and breaking the segments down into stages allows the story to proceed at the proper pace. By looking at a character's overall segment goal, and the number of completed stages within that segment, players will be able to create appropriate challenges for the character to face in each chapter.

Record the protagonist's and antagonist's plot segments on the plot track area of their character sheets.

Susan, Fred, Peter, and Annie continue to flesh out their story, expanding on their element balance arc. Since Annie's character was only recently elevated to the throne, she suggests that eliminating her predecessor could have been the first step in the antagonist's plan, leaving three other elements for Fred's character to deal with in his three plot segments. Fred likes that, and also suggests that driving the king of the sea kingdom mad could be an element of his plan, inspired by the seed about a king welcoming a blackening sea. Susan suggests that seizing the throne of fire could be a good segment for Fred's character, too, building on her seed. Fred likes that suggestion, realizing that he's been concentrating on disruption and confusion with respect to the other elements, so seizing control of one of them fits well with the "upset the elemental balance" idea. Fred sets up his plot segments as "Break the sacred stone of the mountain people," "Drive the sea king insane," and "Seize the Throne of Fire."

Annie's protagonist seed mentions mastering an ice sword, so she thinks that will be a good plot segment for her, although it doesn't seem to directly address how to stop Fred's character's plan. They go back and forth for a bit, thinking that the straightforward way to go would be to destroy the Throne of Fire with the ice sword. Then the antagonist won't be able to gain power, even if he succeeds in disrupting the earth and water elements. Peter suggests that Annie's character could do a "seek out the wise" quest to learn what she needs to do, suggesting that it could be the same person who foretold the prophecy in Fred's second seed. Annie likes that and takes "Master the ice sword," "Find the prophet," and "Destroy the Throne of Fire" as her segments.

Some suggestions for individual plot segments

Travel. Epic Fantasies are often world-spanning adventures. Are there huge mountains, dark forests, or trackless deserts to cross?

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

Search out the Wise. Is there some person with the secret knowledge needed to defeat the antagonist? A prophetic crone in a cave? A reclusive wizard? One of his old foes now in hiding?

Escape the Chaos. Sometimes the hero must be spurred to action by seeing how the world will change if the antagonist gets his way. Maybe the protagonist must escape from the antagonist's army, or from the undermined and corrupted normal order of society.

Alliances. There are often powerful forces in the world who, once moved to action, can help take part in world-shaking events (make sure you don't make *them* the main character, though).

Gather forces. Sometimes an antagonist needs to gather lieutenants and armies before putting a world-shaking plan into effect.

Direct Assault. Sometimes the direct approach is the best approach. Probably best to keep this for the final the segment...

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 to be harnessed.

Identify Supporting Characters

The rest of the players should use their 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 required). Unlike the multi-segment plots of the protagonist or antagonist, supporting characters get a single-segment subplot. If completed, it must either complicate or simplify one or two of the protagonist's or antagonist's plot segments. They should interact but shouldn't be interdependent or contingent on each other since you can't predict the order in which segments will be completed.

Record each supporting character's subplot on the first segment of their character sheet's plot track. For the second and third segments, choose either *complication* or *support* and identify corresponding segments from either the protagonist or antagonist's plot track (choose two different segments or the same one twice). If the supporting character completes his or her subplot, complication segments can make the protagonist or antagonist face harder challenges in that part of their plot, and support segments can help them overcome challenges they face.

In addition to their impact on the protagonist or antagonist's plot, completing a subplot may give the supporting character player some influence on the conclusion of the overall story. During the game, supporting characters will have an opportunity to align themselves with either the protagonist or antagonist. If a supporting character completes his or her subplot, and the protagonist or antagonist they align with completes *their* plot, the supporting player will have a role in deciding the story's conclusion. See **Part IV: Ending the Story** for more details.

Susan and Peter look at their seeds to find supporting characters to play. Peter thinks the most interesting character he can derive from his “Women past childbearing age are expected to take vows of poverty” seed would be an aging, wealthy woman who doesn't want to take the expected vow. Since that character sounds to him like someone who wants to overturn the established order, his first impulse is to support the antagonist, who also wants to change

things. He is also interested in exploring a character who has something to do with the sea. He decides that his character will be the matriarch of a trading clan who, rather than taking vows of poverty, wishes to become a pirate queen. He writes down “Become the pirate queen” as his subplot, and makes his second segment a support segments for Fred’s “Drive the sea king insane”. He considers taking a second support segment for the same one, but doesn’t want to put all his eggs in one basket, and asks Annie if she thinks she would need to explore the sea to find her prophet. Annie thinks that would be cool, so Peter makes his third segment into a complication segment for Annie’s “Find the prophet”.

Susan has been listening to Peter and Annie talk about the prophet who lives near the sea, and is tempted to use her “ancient mystical powers” seed to make a sea witch character to fill that role. She decides that character would work better as an NPC, however, since she wouldn’t want to be too geographically bound. Furthermore, putting that aside lets her refocus on the idea she had originally of playing one of the twins. She decides that it would be fun to have a third character interested in the Throne of Fire, so she settles on that twin, with an obvious subplot of “Find the Throne of Fire”. She wants to support the protagonist, and thinks that her subplot dovetails quite nicely with a support segment for Annie’s “Destroy the Throne of Fire” and a complication segment for Fred’s “Seize the Throne of Fire”. Susan’s ideas about the sea witch aren’t wasted, though: Everyone thought she sounded like a very interesting character, so odds are someone will create her as an NPC later in the story.

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.

Record Initial Dice on Plot Tracks

As in a novel, different characters will be “in the spotlight” at different times based on their role in the story. In *Storied Age*, this is modeled by having different spotlight dice for each character at different stages of their plot or subplot. **Part III: Playing Out Chapters** will explain how these dice are rolled and interpreted in more detail, but the plot track determines which dice you roll. At most, a player will roll a single d20, a single d12, and a single d10 for their spotlight dice, and will often not roll all of them. The character sheet contains a grid indicating whether to roll the d20, d12, or d10 for each plot stage the character is progressing through. At the start of the game each player has only a single die per stage, but it is possible to earn more dice through play.

On the protagonist's character sheet, mark the d20 available for the first six stages and the d10 for the final three. On the antagonist's sheet, mark the d12 for all nine stages. Mark the d10 available for the three stages of each supporting character's subplot segment. Also mark the d10s available for every stage of a supporting character's support or complication segments.

Record Adversity Dice

In a novel, we get to know characters by watching them overcome adversity. Sometimes this adversity is outright antagonism from an enemy, sometimes it is a complicated situation introduced by a well-intentioned friend, sometimes it is simply the character's own emotions and limitations that must be overcome, and sometimes the adversity comes from the environment. In *Storied Age*, players will take turns providing adversity for the other players' characters. Providing good adversity is an important task in *Storied Age*, because heroes and villains can only prove they are worthy of the name by overcoming adversity.

Each player's adversity dice are fixed based on their character's role in the story. The protagonist gets two d10s for adversity dice. The antagonist gets three d12s. Each supporting character gets a d20 and a d10.

Another Plot and World Creation Example

Fred, Annie, Peter, and Susan have all gathered together to play *Final Hour of a Storied Age*. They all start rolling their d12s and begin consulting the theme table to generate their list of words.

Fred rolls up his list of words: Corruption, Truth, Underground, Small, Fire, and Throne. He sees “small” and “underground” and immediately thinks of dwarves – small guys that live underground. He figures he can add in “throne” by talking about the king of the dwarves. He thinks that Corruption and Truth link together well, too, since that implies some sort of deception. And that leaves Fire, which is presumably the thing that the deception is about. He decides that a volcano could easily be the kind of “fire” that dwarves care about. So he arranges his words as Small, Underground, Throne, Corruption, Truth, Fire. He writes down the sentence: “The king of the dwarves has deceived his people about the true threat of a volcano”. He casts the star chart, getting two intersections.

Annie goes through a similar process. She has two groups of words. She decides to arrange Old Throne Inherit Lies Gold Corruption as Gold Corruption Throne Inherit Old Lies for the sentence: “A man who bought his way onto the throne must face the consequences of the lies and deceptions of the previous king”. She casts the star chart and gets five intersections.

Annie's second group of words is Hate Noble Female. She arranges them as Female Noble Hate to justify the sentence “Female nobles are agitating for war.” She casts the star chart and gets zero intersections.

Peter rolls up a group of eight: Ambition Truth Power Prophecy Lies Noble Old Crown. He decides to arrange them as Noble Ambition Truth Power Lies Prophecy Old Crown to justify the sentence: “A nobleman seeking the power of Truespeaking has lied about the prophecy of the Old Crown”. The star chart gives eight intersections.

Susan has rolled up seventeen words total, and will need to make three seeds to take care of them all. Her first group is Ice Lies Sea Star New Underground. She arranges them as New Star Lies Underground Sea Ice to justify: “A fallen star lies buried underground across the Sea of Ice”. This has two intersections.

Susan's second group is Farm Hate Rich Return Greed Male. She arranges them as Male Return Farm Hate Greed Rich and writes: “A politician has returned to the simplicity of his farm, having been disillusioned by the greed and selfishness of the ruling class”. This gives her two intersections.

Susan's third group is Division Sword Inherit Family Blood. She arranges them as Inherit Sword Family Blood Division and writes: “A man has inherited a sword, thrusting him into the middle of an ancient family's blood feud”. The star chart yields five intersections.

[Peter looks around the table at the completed star charts]

Peter: So, it looks like I'm the Protagonist.

Annie: And I'm the Antagonist.

Peter: And if I say that I'm the nobleman who lied about the prophecy, that can hook into your thing about the previous king having lied and deceived.

Annie: So you're the old king?

Peter: Well, since I'm seeking the Power of Truespeaking, that feels more like I'm a young person, so maybe I'm the son of the old king, or a brother or something.

Annie: OK. And I can be the guy who bought his way onto the throne.

Fred: Do we want to tie in mine? I've got a lying king, too.

Peter: Sure, if we put everything into a dwarven kingdom you can be the displaced king, I can be your son, and Annie can be the usurper.

Annie: That makes sense. So it looks like we've got our community, right? The dwarven kingdom?

Peter: Yeah, I like that.

Fred: So is this, like, an above-ground kingdom or are we going hardcore Moria style?

Peter: Moria!

Annie: Definitely! If I'm going to be usurping a kingdom, it's got to be a cool one.

Susan: So how are you threatening the community?

Annie: Well, we've got this volcano thing going on, it feels like it ought to have something to do with that.

Peter: And Fred and I have been lying about it, presumably we've got a good reason for that. It's got some kind of forbidden power that we don't want people to use.

Annie: OK, I think the volcano is the forge of our dwarf god, and I want to seize control of it, which will let me do something cool.

Susan: Like make some kind of super-weapon or something?

Fred: Hey, don't think small. If it's where the dwarf-god works, it's probably where he forged the dwarves themselves, right? So she can reforge dwarves to be the way she wants.

Annie: Ooh, I like it!

Peter: OK, that seems like a pretty strong threat to the community.

Susan: Let's start working on this map. We've got a volcano, this dwarven mining kingdom, a sea of ice, some farmland...

[they draw a map]

Annie: OK, let's work out the plot segments. It seems like I've only recently seized power, so I probably need to consolidate that first. Then I'm thinking that I've got to find this forge, like it's some secret chamber inside the volcano. Is that cool with everybody?

Peter: Yeah, makes sense to me.

Annie: OK, then I think there's some ritual I need to perform once I've taken control of the forge.

Peter: OK. My seed says I'm seeking the Power of Truespeaking, which I assume is some kind of magic. I think I want my first segment to be about unlocking that power. Then I need to find somebody who will tell me how to stop you, which is Seeking Out the Wise. Then how do I actually stop you?

Annie: Hmm, do you want to just have our characters fight?

Peter: No, this seems like it ought to be a bit more mythic. Like I need to end the power of the god's forge.

Susan: You haven't done anything with your Prophecy of the Old Crown yet. We can combine that with my fallen star thing, and say that the crown of the dwarf god fell to earth, and if you get it you'll be able to control the power of the forge.

Peter: That's cool. So my final segment will be to get the crown.

Fred: Cool.

Susan: So, Fred's the displaced dwarf king? I guess I'm the last one to pick a character. I've got a few to choose from here. I think I like this farmer guy, since we've established that we've got issues with people buying their way to political power.

Annie: So what are your subplots?

Fred: I want to reclaim my throne.

Peter: That kind of undermines Annie, though. If you reclaim the throne, how could she consolidate her power?

Fred: Oh, yeah. Let's see, maybe I can work with the female warmongers to set up an opposition to Annie's rule.

Annie: So the war they're agitating for is a civil war?

Fred: Heh. Yeah.

Annie: OK, cool. Is that complicating my "consolidate power"?

Fred: Right. And your “find the forge”, too, since consolidating your power doesn't mean that you wipe out the opposition. They'll still be a thorn in your side.

Annie: Makes sense. Susan, what's your subplot?

Susan: I was thinking I could be the wise person that Peter is seeking out. Is that cool with you, Peter?

Peter: Sure.

Susan: OK, so I think my guy is more like a philosopher or sage, and he's kind of disillusioned with the current state of dwarf society. So I want to rediscover the true teachings of our dwarf god, something like that.

Annie: That's cool, we can do some great stuff with that. Are you complicating or supporting?

Susan: I think I should have a support segment for Peter's seeking out the wise. Once I get the philosophy settled it should be easier for him to find me. And then I can also complicate Annie's ritual, since it should be harder to steal the dwarf god's forge from him if we start following him properly.

Annie: Sounds good to me.

Peter: Yeah, I like it.

Fred: Cool. Is there anything else we need to add to our map? And let's make sure we record our plot stuff on our character sheets...

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 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 an *alignment 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 make the character unique. Traits should be broad enough to be useful in many adventurous situations. 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.

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 characters that are broad archetypes – epic fantasy literature frequently features characters like that.

Trait Dice

Each trait has a die-size associated with it which will be used when the character participates in exchanges. Mark one of the traits as d8, two as d6, and one as d4.

Alignment Track

Supporting characters and NPCs use the alignment 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 and NPCs can have the setting of their alignment tracks changed when they are involved in the action of a chapter. See **Ending a Chapter** for more details. The alignment 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). Since the thoughts and feelings of PCs are determined by the players controlling them, supporting characters' alignment tracks work differently from NPCs. Rather than tracking an internal emotional state, supporting characters use the alignment track to show how well their friendship or alliance has been demonstrated in the story. Supporting characters start at neutral on the track. A supporting character's alignment with the protagonist or antagonist helps determine how much that player contributes to the overall ending of the story. See **Part IV: Ending the Game** for more details.

Part III: Playing Out Chapters

Just like a novel, *Storied Age* plays out in a series of chapters.

Selecting a Spotlight Player

The first step is to determine which character the chapter will focus on. Each player with an unfinished plot stage rolls a set of spotlight dice based on which plot stage the character is moving through (Supporting characters who have finished their subplot do not roll for spotlight). Whoever rolls the die with the highest number showing becomes the spotlight player. (If there is a tie, compare the next highest die to break it, and then the next, etc. If one player doesn't *have* a next highest die to compare then the player *with* a die wins. If all of the dice are exactly equal, the player that has gone the longest since being the spotlight player wins. If that still doesn't break the tie, the protagonist wins, followed by the antagonist. If there's *still* a tie, use some fair method like a dice-off to break it). The winning player should leave all the dice they rolled on the table – they are now story dice and the numbers showing on them will be important once the action of the chapter begins.

Selecting an Adversity Player

Next, the adversity player is determined. Every player except the spotlight player rolls their adversity dice. The die with the highest number showing determines the winner (break ties using the same method as the spotlight roll), who becomes the adversity player. Just like the spotlight player, the adversity player should leave the dice on the table with the numbers undisturbed so they can be used as story dice once the action of the chapter starts.

Support and Complications

If the spotlight character is moving through a plot segment targeted by a supporting character's complication or support segment, and that supporting character has completed his or her subplot, then the supporting character's player may choose to roll the dice from an available stage of their complication or support segment to modify the story dice available in the chapter. A support segment allows the supporting character player to swap dice for a spotlight player's story dice. A complication segment allows the supporting character player to swap dice for the adversity player's story dice. The supporting player chooses how many and which dice to swap after rolling them, but can't change the number of story dice that the spotlight or adversity players have. The supporting player must mark the stage completed when these dice are rolled regardless of whether any dice are swapped.

Describe How the Chapter Begins

The chapter revolves around the spotlight character, the character played by the spotlight player. The spotlight player describes the setting or location of the chapter and reminds everyone what the character's current plot segment is.

Playing out a Chapter: Overview

The events of a chapter are told in a series of exchanges – decision points in the story where there is uncertainty whether the spotlight character will achieve a goal or face a setback – where a roll of the dice determines which path the story takes. Although there's an element of randomness and uncertainty, the action dice that the players roll to make this decision are based on the details of the story that they narrate, giving them some control over the outcome. A player picks up an action die to roll when describing a trait of a character or other story element and how it either makes life difficult for the spotlight character or how that trait helps the spotlight character respond to the adversity. These story elements and their traits are introduced into the chapter by spending story dice.

- Spend **story dice** to introduce **story elements**
- Each **story element** has **traits**
- Narrate **traits** into the story to get **action dice**
- Roll **action dice** to win an **exchange**

Although both the spotlight and adversity players have similar mechanical choices in terms of spending story dice, narrating traits into the story, and picking up action dice to roll against their opponent, there is a structure to play that prevents it from being a chaotic free-for-all. Every exchange begins with the adversity player presenting adversity, possibly spending story dice to introduce new characters or story elements as the source of that adversity. Once the adversity player has described the obstacles, the spotlight player responds to that adversity, possibly spending story dice of their own. They roll the dice and the winner narrates the result of the exchange. The story continues in another exchange, and then another, until one player is unable to continue and the chapter concludes.

Put Forward Adversity

To begin an exchange, the adversity player puts forward some adversity. Specifically, the adversity must stem from active traits of story elements the adversity player introduced into the chapter. (Since neither player begins a chapter with any active traits, the adversity player will need to spend story dice to introduce story elements like characters or obstacles in the environment. See **Spending Story Dice** below). The adversity player decides which traits to use and narrates events to explain why those traits contribute to a problem that must be overcome, building the story to a “crisis point” or “decision point” where it is unclear whether the spotlight character will succeed or not. The adversity player picks up an action die for each trait and prepares to roll them.

If it's time to begin an exchange and the adversity player has no active traits to put forward, and no story dice to spend to get more, the spotlight player wins the chapter. Other than that, the adversity player can spend story dice however he or she chooses. The adversity player can put forward as many or as few traits as he or she wishes, but must put forward at least one trait from each story element that has any active traits.

Respond to the Adversity

After hearing the challenge, the spotlight player responds by invoking traits from characters he or she introduced into the chapter. (The spotlight player will need to spend story dice to introduce a character first. See **Spending Story Dice** below). As the spotlight player describes how the character is addressing the adversity he or she should pick up an action die corresponding to each relevant trait. The description should address *how* the characters respond but not whether or not the response is successful – that's what the action dice decide.

If the adversity player has presented adversity but the spotlight player has no active traits to put forward, and no story dice to spend to get more, the adversity player wins the chapter. The spotlight player can put forward as many or as few traits as he or

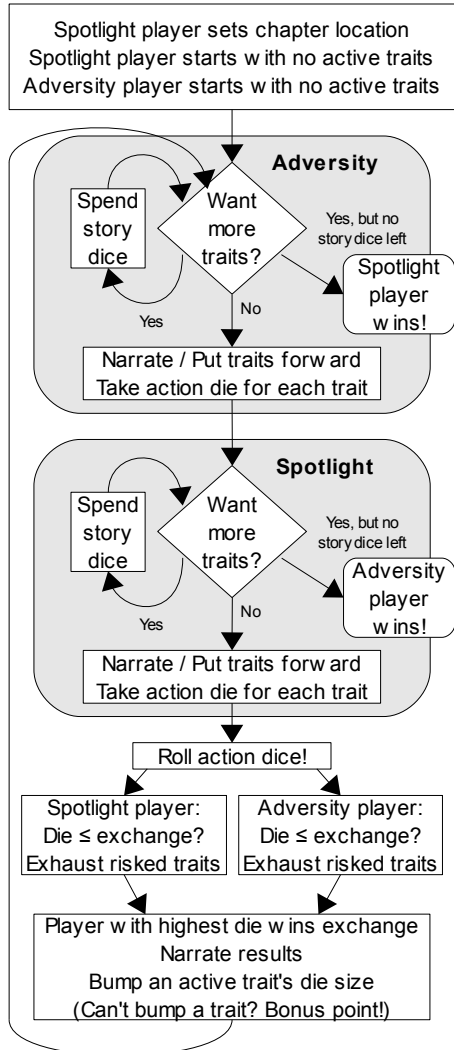
she wishes, but must put forward at least one trait from each character introduced that has any active traits, and must put forward at least one trait from his or her PC as part of each exchange.

Exchanges

Keep track of how many exchanges have occurred in a chapter. It's important for resolving the action dice roll.

Roll the Action Dice

Both the spotlight and adversity players roll action dice to determine whether the spotlight character overcomes, makes progress against, faces a setback from, or is overcome by the adversity he or she is confronted with. Both players roll at the same time. Whoever has the die with the highest number showing gets the better of the exchange. If the highest die is a tie between the players, compare the next highest, and so on. If all of the dice tied then neither player wins. However, if *any* of the dice that a player rolled in the exchange show a number less than or equal to the current exchange number (e.g. a 1 on the first exchange, a 1 or 2 on the second exchange, etc.), that means that *every trait* that the player *used in that exchange* is *exhausted* and can't be used in future exchanges unless it is activated again by spending another story die. (Remember that only the traits that *contributed dice to the exchange* can be exhausted).



Whichever player wins the exchange should narrate events to advance the story, showing their side of the exchange in a positive light. Use the traits involved in the exchange (and whether they are exhausted or not) as guidelines for the narration. If the action dice are tied the adversity player narrates the results of the exchange but shouldn't describe either side gaining an advantage. 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 describe his character killing all of the orcs that are attacking him if the adversity player is still allowed to roll a d6 for the orcs 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 story dice to introduce into the story.

In addition to describing the action, the winner of the exchange increases the die size of one of his or her active traits (up to a d8) or reduces the die size of one of the other player's active traits (down to a d4). These changes only last until the trait is exhausted or the chapter ends – they aren't permanent. Both character and environmental traits can be modified this way, and traits can be modified again on later exchanges. If there are no available traits to modify (either because of a lack of active traits or because all of the active traits are at the final possible die size) then the player gets one bonus point which can be spent when you win a chapter.

Spending Story Dice

Story dice are used to introduce story elements – characters or environmental hazards – into a chapter. The spotlight player may only introduce characters with story dice, but the adversity player can introduce either type. A story die buys different story elements based on the number that was rolled on it before the chapter started. A die showing 16 to 20 can activate up to four traits on a character (see **Using Characters in a Chapter**). A die showing 10 to 15 can activate up to two traits on a character, or introduce an active environmental threat (see **Using Environmental Threats in a Chapter**). A die showing a 1 to 9 can activate a single trait on a character, or introduce a passive environmental threat.

Using Environmental Threats in a Chapter

The adversity player may introduce problems stemming from the location or environment where the chapter takes place. Environmental threats have only a single trait, so the name of the threat itself serves as its trait. A *passive* environmental threat (such as a chasm that needs to be crossed, bitterly cold weather, or emotional turmoil) may be introduced with a d4 trait. A passive threat is problematic because of its very existence – it wouldn't be a problem if the spotlight character didn't care about getting past it. An *active* environmental threat (such as nameless monsters that don't warrant being full characters, or a raging windstorm) may be introduced with a d6 trait. An active threat has, or seems to have, anthropomorphic properties and the ability to actively work against the spotlight character. Once introduced into the chapter an environmental threat must be included in every exchange until it is exhausted.

Using Characters in a Chapter

Either player can use characters in a chapter (in fact, the spotlight player *must* use the spotlight character in every exchange). A character has four traits and each one is independently either *active* or *exhausted*. If a trait is exhausted you can't use it for mechanical effect in the chapter (unless you spend a story die to make it active). If a story die that is used to bring a character into a chapter can't activate all of the character's traits, the player that spent the die decides which traits to activate. The first time that a character is used in a chapter you may not be able to activate as many traits as the story dice normally allow due to the *distance tax*, *plausibility tax*, and *creation tax* (See **Paying Tax** below). You may use multiple story dice to activate traits on a single character, but if the taxes are so high that none of the traits would be activated than you may not introduce that character. Once introduced, a character must contribute at least one trait to every exchange until all of his or her traits are exhausted.

Friends and Foes

The spotlight player can only bring in NPCs that have alignment tracks that are neutral or are aligned with the spotlight character. The adversity player can only bring in NPCs that are neutral or are aligned against the spotlight character.

Only bring a PC into a chapter if the player that controls that PC consents to it. Note that the restriction on using aligned characters as sources of adversity only applies to NPCs. Using friendly PCs as sources of adversity for the spotlight character can be a fun way to add texture and nuance to a story. Remember that outright antagonism isn't the only valid source of adversity – the confusing feelings of a budding romance, the demands a mentor places on a student, or a friendly rivalry are all challenges for a character to overcome. The spotlight and adversity players must control the mechanical decisions of which traits to put forward, but they can “deputize” other players to speak for their PCs if it's appropriate.

Paying Tax

Whenever a character is first introduced into a chapter, there is a possibility that the story die used to introduce the character will not purchase as many active traits as normal. The various taxes are an incentive to maintain continuity in the story – they make it more expensive to introduce characters in ways that don't make sense. That doesn't mean that surprise twists aren't allowed in the game, but it does reward consistency so those twists can have a dramatic impact when they *do* happen.

Distance Tax

The distance tax is required whenever a character is introduced into a chapter and was established in a different location in a previous chapter. If the character was previously *nearby*, there is no distance tax. If the character would have needed a *short journey* to get to the current location, activate one less trait than usual. If the character would have needed a *long journey* to get to the location, activate two less traits.

Plausibility Tax

The plausibility tax is required whenever a character appears in a chapter where you wouldn't normally expect. If it is *reasonable and expected* for the character to appear in this chapter (such as a king in his throne room) there is no plausibility tax. If it is *plausible but unexpected* for the character to appear (such as a king in the woods on a hunting trip), activate one less trait than usual. If it is *possible but surprising* for the character to appear (for example, a king in the dungeon of his worst enemy), activate two less traits. If it would be impossible for the character to appear, they may not be introduced into the chapter.

Creation Tax

The creation tax is required whenever a character is introduced into the story that hasn't previously had his or her traits defined (Since all of the PCs are defined before the first chapter, this tax will only ever need to be paid to create new NPCs). If the new character is one that is *directly mentioned* in one of the seeds then one less trait than usual is activated. If the character 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, then two less traits than usual are activated. 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. If the character being introduced is a *dark mirror* of an existing character (See **Dark Mirrors** below) activate two less traits than usual. You can introduce any character you want, without relationship to the established fiction, by activating four less traits than usual.

Dark Mirror

A useful technique in fantasy fiction is to explore themes by having characters who are in some ways identical but in other ways are polar opposites. You can achieve this contrast in *Storied Age* by introducing a *dark mirror* character. Dark mirrors aren't doppelgangers or evil twins, they are independent characters that happen to have strong points of comparison and contrast with other characters in the story. To introduce a dark mirror character, select an existing character as a starting point. Copy some of the traits over exactly, but replace one or two of the traits with a thematic opposite.

Fred wants to introduce a religious leader for some orcs in a story and decides to do so by creating a dark mirror of the supporting character Sarena the elven priestess. He looks at Sarena's traits *Priestess*, *Crystal Pendant*, *Wise Beyond Her Years*, and *Elven Grace*. He decides to keep the *Priestess* trait and flip *Elven Grace* to *Orcish Strength*. He thinks about the other two traits and realizes he doesn't like the feel of a character who is either foolish or elderly, so he keeps *Wise Beyond Her Years* the same, too. To create an opposite for *Crystal Pendant* he still wants to keep it in the realm of jewelry that showcases the wearer's personality, but wants something rough and visceral instead of cool and smooth. He settles on *Necklace of Human Ears*. He gives her the name Griska the orcish priestess and begins using her in the story.

Ending the chapter

If it is time to begin an exchange but the adversity player has no active traits and no story dice to activate more, the spotlight player wins the chapter and narrates the conclusion. If the adversity player presents adversity and the spotlight player has no active traits to respond with and no story dice to get more then the adversity player wins and narrates the conclusion. Winning a chapter gives different benefits based on the player's role: Winning as the spotlight player advances your plot, winning as the adversity player gives you new dice on your plot track.

Advancing A Plot or Subplot

If the spotlight player wins the chapter, he or she advances one stage along his or her plot. It takes three stages to complete a plot segment or subplot. If appropriate, include details about completing the segment or subplot when narrating the chapter conclusion. In addition, a player completing a plot segment or subplot gets a mechanical effect equivalent to spending two bonus points to implement the segment goal (e.g. thwarting an NPC, performing trait updates on two characters to transfer an important item from one character to another, etc.). If no mechanical effects are needed for the segment goal then the player gets a bonus point.

Add Dice To Plot Track

If the adversity player wins the chapter, he or she marks a new die available for an uncompleted plot track stage of his or her choice. For each stage, the d10 must be selected before the d12, and the d12 before the d20.

Modify Character Traits

If the spotlight player wins a chapter, he or she may spend a bonus point to modify the spotlight character's or an aligned NPC's traits, completely rewriting one trait or applying minor tweaks to several. Players may rearrange trait dice with this option, but characters must always have one d8 trait, two d6 traits, and one d4 trait.

Move Along the Alignment Track

Any player who wins the chapter may spend one bonus point to move the alignment track of an NPC involved in the chapter by one step in any direction. Whenever the alignment track is adjusted this way, the player may declare that the characters have started or stopped traveling together. If two characters are traveling together, whenever one of them is introduced into a chapter, the other may be introduced without paying any distance or plausibility tax.

A supporting character player who wins a chapter may spend a bonus point to adjust that character's alignment track and traveling together status if the character meaningfully interacted with the protagonist or antagonist during the chapter. Interacting with either one lets you move to ideologically aligned, but moving to personally aligned requires personal interaction. Supporting characters' degree of alignment with the protagonist or antagonist factors into how much influence their players have over the story's conclusion. See **Part IV: Ending the Story** for more details.

Impeding, Thwarting, or Killing NPCs

If the spotlight player wins the chapter, he or she may spend bonus points to make it harder to bring particular NPCs back into the story. For one bonus point an NPC may be *impeded*. It is automatically considered at least *unexpected* for an impeded NPC to be introduced in a later chapter. Include justifying narration, such as the NPC being stuck on the wrong side of a collapsed bridge, when doing this.

For two bonus points, an NPC may be *thwarted*. It is automatically considered *surprising* for a thwarted NPC to be introduced in a later chapter. Include justifying narration, such as the NPC appearing to fall into a bottomless chasm, when doing this (make sure to include enough ambiguity so that it is only a *surprise* if they come back, not a continuity-killer).

For three bonus points, an NPC may be killed or otherwise permanently defeated. The NPC can't be introduced again.

Example Chapters

Role: Protagonist
Player: Peter

Plot	x									
d20	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
d12										
d10								x	x	x

Praxiteles

d8 Blademaster
d6 Razor's Edge
d6 Steely Gaze
d4 Tender Hearted

Role: Antagonist
Player: Annie

Plot	x	x								
d20										
d12	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
d10	x									

Queen Arachnia

d8 Spider Queen
d6 Cold Beauty
d6 Magical Weavings
d4 Poisonous Lies

Role: Supporting
Player: Susan

Plot										
d20										
d12	x									
d10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Sorcia Moonsinger

d8 Enchanting Song
d6 Elven Grace
d6 Imperious Manner
d4 Lore of her People

[Peter rolls 12. Annie rolls 8. Susan rolls 8, 5.]

Peter: OK, it's my chapter. Praxiteles is working on the "Find the Crown of Ages" plot, and he's heading into the Dreadwood.

[Annie rolls 12, 12, 3. Susan rolls 10,2.]

Annie: I'm playing the adversity. The Dreadwood, eh? Let me think for a minute... So, you start to head into the Dreadwood but you quickly discover that the path is blocked by thick, sticky spiderwebs. I'm spending my 3 to put that in as a passive environment, a d4.

Peter: I'll spend my 12. We were right on the edge of the Dreadwood in the last chapter, so I don't think I need to pay any tax. That gives me two traits. Let's go with Blademaster and Razor's Edge. A few spiderwebs will be no match for Praxiteles' razor sharp blade! I've got a d6.

[Peter rolls a 3. Annie rolls a 4.]

Annie: You try to slice through the webs, but they're soft and stretchy so they're harder to cut through than you realized. I'll advance them to a d6.

Peter: Undaunted, Praxiteles slashes the webs faster and faster. Still d6.

[Peter rolls 1. Annie rolls 2.]

Annie: Hmm, it's the second round, so we both exhausted... Sweat streaming from his brow, Praxiteles cuts a clearing around himself, but his sword is covered in a gummy, sticky mess from the webbing. I'll reduce your Blademaster to a d6. Plus, I'll spend a 12 to introduce an active threat, Giant Spiders, d6. You hear the swishing and clicking of chitinous legs as the spiders crawl down from the trees toward you.

Peter: Even with the stuff on my sword, I'm still a master with the blade, so I'll be making short work of them. That's a d6.

[Peter rolls 5. Annie rolls 2.]

Peter: So I win and you exhaust... Praxiteles charges the spiders, slicing off legs, splitting open abdomens and spilling out their guts. I'll advance Blademaster back to d8.

Annie: OK. I'll spend my last 12 to introduce Queen Arachnia herself. She was over in Cloudkeep the last time we saw her, so I think that's a short journey, and we know that the Dreadwood is one of her places of power, so it's not really unexpected, right?

Peter: Yeah, I fully expected her by this point.

Annie: OK, start with two, reduce by one for the distance tax... that leaves me with only one trait, and I'm going with Spider Queen. She calls out to you, "Foolish man, do you not know that my minions are beyond number?" You hear eight thousand legs scuttling through the forest toward you. I've got a d8.

Peter: Well, I don't scare easily, and I won't pass up this opportunity. Blademaster, coming at you. I've got a d8, too.

[Peter rolls 3. Annie rolls 2]

Peter: Let's see, I win but we both exhaust... Arachnia stumbles backwards under a rain of blows, barely able to defend herself. She turns and runs into the forest, humiliated, slipping through her minions' webs. Praxiteles, already tired from fighting the spiders, stops and stares daggers at her as she disappears out of sight.

Annie: I'm out, so that's the end of the chapter.

Peter: Sweet. I'll advance my plot.

Susan: Is everybody ready to roll for the next chapter?

Role: Protagonist
Player: Peter

Role: Antagonist
Player: Annie

Role: Supporting
Player: Susan

Plot	x	x									
d20	x	x	x	x	x	x					
d12											
d10							x	x	x		

Plot	x	x									
d20											
d12	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
d10	x										

Plot											
d20											
d12	x										
d10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Praxiteles

d8 Blademaster
d6 Razor's Edge
d6 Steely Gaze
d4 Tender Hearted

Queen Arachnia

d8 Spider Queen
d6 Cold Beauty
d6 Magical Weavings
d4 Poisonous Lies

Sorcja Moonsinger

d8 Enchanting Song
d6 Elven Grace
d6 Imperious Manner
d4 Lore of her People

[Peter rolls 19. Annie rolls 11,10. Susan rolls 9.]

Peter: OK, it's me again. I'm still in the Dreadwood, and if I win this chapter that will complete my Find the Crown of Ages segment. Who's the adversity player?

[Annie rolls 11, 5, 5. Susan rolls 17, 10]

Susan: Looks like it's me. OK, I'll start off by using that 10 to introduce a group of wood elf hunters, an active environmental threat, d6. In the distance you hear arrows piercing the bodies of the rest of Arachnia's spider minions, and a group of tall elves with tattoo-covered skin enters the clearing with their bows drawn.

Peter: And I use my 19 to activate all four of my traits. I'm Tender Hearted, so I don't want to fight them if I can help it. Instead, I'll fix them with my Steely Gaze.

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

Peter: They pause, clearly seeing that Praxiteles is a formidable warrior. I'll advance my Tender Hearted to d6.

Susan: They may have paused, but they're still surrounding you with bows drawn. They say, "Your kind are not allowed in these woods." Still a d6.

Peter: I'm still staring them down, but I hold up my sword showing them I mean business. "I don't want to fight you, but I will if I have to." That's d6 from the gaze, and d6 from Razor's Edge.

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

Peter: OK, I win, but I'm exhausted. They lower their bows and I sheath my sword. I'll reduce them to a d4.

Susan: OK. But I'll spend my 17 to bring in Luanna the Elven Huntmistress. I think that qualifies as implied by the fiction, right? The leader of these elves?

Peter: Sounds fair to me.

Susan: OK. Let's say she's got Piercing Warcry d8, Elven Grace d6, Humble Steward d6, and Peerless Tracker d4. With a creation tax of two, I've still got two traits to activate. I'll go with Elven Grace and Humble Steward. You try to step past the hunters, but they part before you and this savage yet beautiful elf woman steps forward from behind them. She says, "We do not wish to fight you if we can avoid it, but caring for the wood is my responsibility, and I won't allow you free rein here." That's her Humble Steward at d6, and the hunting party is still there as a d4.

Peter: OK, Praxiteles is Tender Hearted so he can see that she's clearly just doing her job. I hold up my sword, and say, "I've given you fair warning. Don't try to stop me." That's d6 from Tender Hearted and d8 from Blademaster.

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

Susan: This is the third exchange, right? That means I exhaust, but at least I win. She tells the other elves that she will deal with you herself and they disappear back into the undergrowth. You can see that she isn't willing to back down. You're going to have to deal with her to go deeper into the woods. Reduce your Blademaster to d6. She says, "You're not the only one with a weapon, outsider." She flicks her wrist and some sort of vine whip comes at you. She's using her Elven Grace in her attack. That's a d6.

Peter: I say, "I won't be beaten that easily." Never breaking eye contact, I slash out with my sword to cut the whip in half. That's Steely Gaze d6 and Blademaster d6.

[Peter rolls 4, 2. Susan rolls 6]

Susan: Gaze and Blademaster exhausted, huh? Well, you certainly *try* to

slice it, but the whip seems to come at you from every direction as she's moving around you like a dancer, almost faster than you can track, delivering shots you can't predict. She gets the whip wrapped around your wrist and yanks, and your sword falls to the forest floor. I'll bump her Elven Grace up to d8, and it's still coming at you.

Peter: Yeah, but I'm out, so we end the chapter there.

Susan: OK, Praxiteles feels a quiver of fear in his stomach, wondering if he's finally met a foe that he can't beat. She smiles confidently, waiting for his next move.

Peter: Nice.

Susan: I'll take the d20 Spotlight Die for the plot stage I'm working on.

Annie: Everybody ready to roll for the next chapter?

Role: Protagonist
Player: Peter

Role: Antagonist
Player: Annie

Role: Supporting
Player: Susan

Plot	x	x																	
d20	x	x	x	x	x	x													
d12																			
d10															x	x	x		

Plot	x	x																	
d20																			
d12	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								
d10	x																		

Plot																			
d20	x																		
d12	x																		
d10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								

Praxiteles

d8 Blademaster
d6 Razor's Edge
d6 Steely Gaze
d4 Tender Hearted

Queen Arachnia

d8 Spider Queen
d6 Cold Beauty
d6 Magical Weavings
d4 Poisonous Lies

Sorcja Moonsinger

d8 Enchanting Song
d6 Elven Grace
d6 Imperious Manner
d4 Lore of her People

[Peter rolls 3. Annie rolls 11. Susan rolls 10, 9, 2.]

Annie: I'm up. I'm working on my "Unlock Hidden Power" plot. I was just in the Dreadwood, and that still works for me. Who's adversity?

[Peter rolls 4,2. Susan rolls 12, 7.]

Susan: OK. I'll spend the 7 to introduce the passive threat of your humiliation at the hands of Praxiteles a few chapters back. That's d4. You're still fuming at being so powerless against him.

Annie: I'll spend my 11 to activate Spider Queen and... Hmm... Let's go with Poisonous Lies. Because she can lie to *herself*, too. She only lost because she was conserving her power for the task in front of her. I'm rolling 1d4.

Peter: Heh heh, nice.

[Annie rolls 3. Susan rolls 2]

Annie: I'll raise Poisonous Lies to d6. She's still upset, but she's nearly convinced.

Susan: Nearly, but not completely. She's walking through the forest, and she sees some spiders that were wounded in the combat. They're dragging themselves along the ground, and she's reminded that this only happened because she failed. The d4 from the humiliation.

Annie: Their blood paves the way for her ascension. Still using

Poisonous Lies, so 1d6.

[Annie rolls 5. Susan rolls 1]

Annie: Arachnia puts the loss behind her, a mere triviality in the grand scheme of things. I'll raise her Lies to 1d8.

Susan: Some of her spider minions walk out of the forest toward her. I'm spending my 12 to bring them in as an active threat, which is a d6. In their chittering language, they explain that they're completely devoted to you, but fear that they don't have the strength to do what you demand of them, as demonstrated by their losses to the elves and the swordsman.

Annie: Their fears are irrelevant! I am the Spider Queen and demand complete obedience! I stare at them, waiting for them to submit to my authority. I'm rolling 1d8.

[Annie rolls 6. Susan rolls 6.]

Susan: Tie! I guess there's a bit of a staredown. I'm still rolling a d6.

Annie: And I'll stick with my d8.

[Annie rolls 5. Susan rolls 3.]

Annie: They bow before my obvious authority, and I order them to carry me to the center of the forest, basically giving them a really demeaning task as punishment for questioning my will. I'm already at max, and you're completely exhausted, so I get a bonus point.

Susan: Yup. And I'm out, so you win the chapter.

Annie: Nice. I advance my plot, which finishes off my "Unlock Hidden Power" segment. They take me to the center of the forest, and all of the spiders from the entire forest gather there. They all milk their venom into a ceremonial fountain in the center of the forest, and I bathe in it. I'll use my bonus point to rewrite my stats, and I'll change Spider Queen to Spider Goddess.

Peter: Awesome!

Susan: Yeah, that was good. Ready to roll for spotlight?

Role: Protagonist
Player: Peter

Role: Antagonist
Player: Annie

Role: Supporting
Player: Susan

Plot	x	x								
d20	x	x	x	x	x	x				
d12										
d10							x	x	x	

Plot	x	x	x							
d20										
d12	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
d10	x									

Plot										
d20	x									
d12	x									
d10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Praxiteles

d8 Blademaster
d6 Razor's Edge
d6 Steely Gaze
d4 Tender Hearted

Queen Arachnia

d8 Spider Goddess
d6 Cold Beauty
d6 Magical Weavings
d4 Poisonous Lies

Sorcja Moonsinger

d8 Enchanting Song
d6 Elven Grace
d6 Imperious Manner
d4 Lore of her People

[Peter rolls 5. Annie rolls 11. Susan rolls 11, 10, 3.]

Susan: Woohoo, I get a chapter. The Dreadwood seems to be where the action is, and there are elves there, so I may as well go there too. I'm working on my "Gather The Elven Army" subplot.

[Peter rolls 8, 4. Annie rolls 9, 7, 4.]

Annie: OK, I'll use my 7 to activate one of Luanna's traits. Let me see the sheet you wrote up... I think I'll go with the Piercing Warcry. You hear a wood elf battle cry as she charges at you, ready to take vengeance for the wrongs she thinks your people have committed against hers. That's d8.

Susan: I'll use my 3 so I can activate my Imperious Manner, so I can intimidate her into not fighting.

Annie: Wait a second, I think there's some tax here. The last time we saw Sorcja she was way over in the Golden Halls of Highgarden.

Susan: You're right, let's call that a long journey. That's a distance tax of two, so I'll use my 10 to cover it.

Peter: Yeah, and the wood elves hate the high elves, so I think it's at least unexpected for her to be here. Maybe even surprising.

Susan: But I'm trying to build an army of all elves, not just high elves.

Peter: OK, that makes sense, but I think it's still unexpected that she'd start here rather than with her own kind of elves.

Susan: Yeah, that's fair, let's call it unexpected. I'll use my 11 instead of my 3, and that will cover the tax and still give let me activate Imperious Manner for a d6.

Annie: OK, let's roll it.

[Susan rolls 3. Annie rolls 7.]

Annie: That imperious manner isn't so impressive when you're cowering in fear from Luanna's warcry. Reduce it to d4. And she's still screaming as she's bearing down on you.

Susan: Well that's not good... Hey, Peter, you want to help me out?

Peter: Sure. What did you have in mind?

Susan: I'll spend my 3 to activate Praxiteles' Blademaster. The last time we saw Luanna she was right there with Praxiteles and they hadn't exactly settled things. I figure that I came in an interrupted that.

Peter: OK. I say to Luanna, "You would fight an unarmed woman? Have you no honor? Face me instead!"

Susan: Great. I've got a d8 from his Blademaster, and I've got a d4 from my Imperious Manner.

[Susan rolls 1,1. Annie rolls 8.]

Susan: Ouch!

Annie: Oh, wow. I clobbered you *and* you're exhausted. She uses her vine whip to wrap up your legs and pulls you off your feet, and you go head over heels and land in an undignified lump. Praxiteles, still unarmed from the earlier chapter, can only stand there, powerless to stop it. I can't raise my d8 any more, and you're exhausted, so I get a bonus point.

Susan: And you win the chapter, I'm out of dice to spend.

Annie: Cool. Luanna stands over you, gloating about how easily she bested you. I'll take the d10 Spotlight Die for my fourth plot stage, and I'll use my bonus point to move Luanna to ideologically aligned with me. She may not be a spider worshiper, but she certainly hates the humans and high elves.

Part IV: Ending the Game

When either the protagonist or antagonist completes his or her third plot segment the story 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 – a minor change if ideologically aligned with the winner, a major change if personally aligned. 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 no 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:

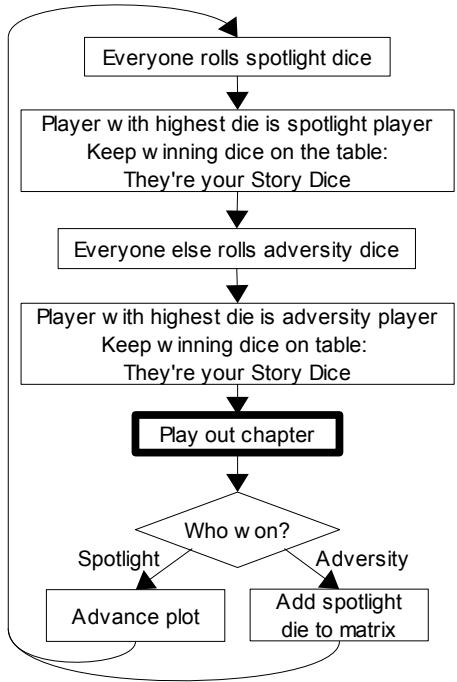
- More Theme Tables (e.g. Star Wars-style space opera)
- Instructions for creating your own Theme Tables
- Do “characters” *have* to be people, or can something like a mountain be a character?

Part V: Game Term Glossary

- action dice** – dice that resolve the action of a chapter (d8, d6, d4)
- active threat** – environmental threat that has, or seems to have, anthropomorphic properties and independent agency
- active trait** – a trait which can be used to generate an action die when included in the narration of a chapter
- adversity dice** – dice that determine who provides adversity in a chapter; they become the adversity player's story dice
- adversity player** – the player that provides adversity in the chapter
- alignment track** – indicator of where a character's sympathies lie
- antagonist** – the protagonist's primary opponent in the story
- bonus point** – saveable game resource that can be spent on special mechanical effects when a player wins a chapter
- community** – the protagonist's home, threatened by the antagonist; lens through which we view the rest of the fantasy world
- dark mirror** – a character that has strong points of comparison and contrast with another character
- environmental threat** – story element stemming from the environment where chapter occurs rather than a character
- exchange** – an individual “decision point” in a chapter where the spotlight character attempts to overcome trouble
- exhausted** – a trait which can't be used to generate an action die, can be made active by spending a story die
- impede** – setback an NPC enough to make it *unexpected* to see them in future chapters
- passive threat** – environmental threat that is problematic because of its very existence but which wouldn't be a problem if the spotlight character didn't care about getting past it
- plot axis** – the main arc around which a *Storied Age* story revolves
- plot segment** – a third of a pro- or antagonist's plot
- plot stage** – a third of a plot segment or subplot; the amount of plot that can be completed in one successful chapter
- plot track** – a matrix which tracks which plot stages are completed and which spotlight dice to roll for each stage
- protagonist** – the main character of the story
- seed** – a sentence or two that's evocative of an epic fantasy character, situation, or fact

- spotlight dice** – dice which determine the focus character for a chapter; they become the spotlight player's story dice
- spotlight player** – player that controls a chapter's focus character
- star chart** – a diagram that helps identify the major story arc
- story dice** – dice spent to introduce story elements (d20, d12, d10)
- story element** – an important, identifiable factor in the story; a character or environmental threat
- subplot** – the part of a *Storied Age* story that focuses on a supporting character
- supporting character** – an important character that isn't the primary protagonist or antagonist
- tax** – number of traits you *don't* get when spending story dice to account for the distance, plausibility, or lack of previous existence that would otherwise prevent a character from appearing in a chapter
- theme table** – a list of words that inspire epic fantasy concepts
- thwart** – setback an NPC enough to make it *surprising* to see them in future chapters
- trait** – an identifying feature of a character, a way a character solves problems

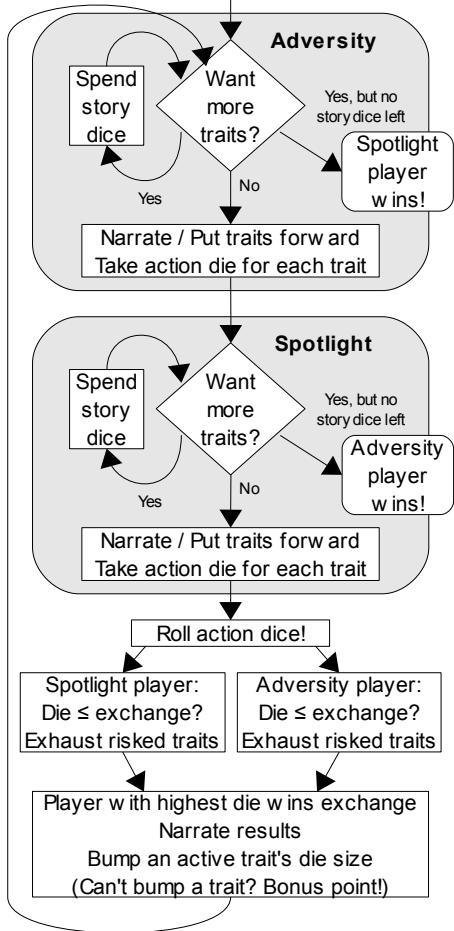
Playing the Game



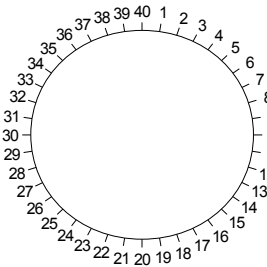
Story Die	Activated Effect
15 to 20	4 character traits
10 to 14	2 character traits OR Active Threat
1 to 9	1 character trait OR Passive Threat

Distance Tax	
0	Nearby
1	Short Journey
2	Long Journey
Plausibility Tax	
0	Reasonable and Expected
1	Plausible But Unexpected
2	Possible But Surprising
Creation Tax	
1	Mentioned on seed
2	Implied by previous fiction
2	Dark Mirror
4	Any character you want

Spotlight player sets chapter location
Spotlight player starts with no active traits
Adversity player starts with no active traits

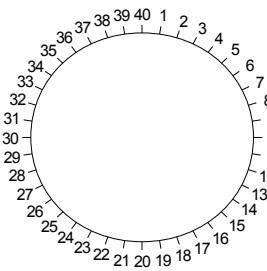


Player	Cost	Bonus Point Effect
Either	1	Modify alignment Track/Traveling Together
Spotlight	1	Modify Traits
Spotlight	1	Impede NPC (Unexpected to see NPC in future)
Spotlight	2	Thwart NPC (Surprising to see NPC in future)
Spotlight	3	Kill NPC (Won't see NPC in future)



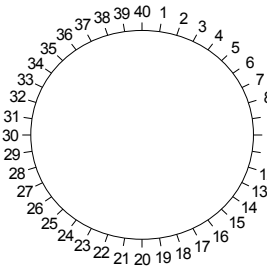
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Sentence:



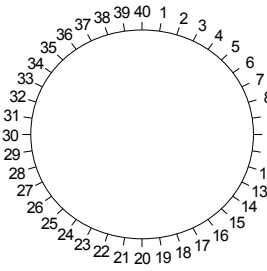
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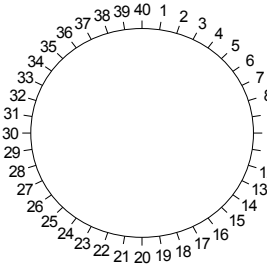
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Character Sheets

Player:

Story Role Adversity Dice
 Protagonist d10 d10
 Antagonist d12 d12 d12
 Supporting d20 d10

Plot
 d20
 d12
 d10

Name:

Antagonist — Alignment — Protagonist

Trait Die

Name:

Antagonist — Alignment — Protagonist

Trait Die

Name:

Antagonist — Alignment — Protagonist

Trait Die

Name:

Antagonist — Alignment — Protagonist

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Name:

Antagonist — Alignment — Protagonist

Trait Die
