

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

BY DAN MARUSCHAK

REV 0.65

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.

This is a Playtest Version of the Game

Changes to Rev 0.65

New “Why Epic Fantasy?” intro

Eliminated fixed trait die sizes – now decided chapter by chapter

Changed “spotlight” to “viewpoint” for more literary feel

Revamped die rolling mechanics within a chapter

“Deputizing” non-viewpoint/adversity players to roll dice

Eliminated bonus points, implemented new way to get same effects

Added gameplay advice section

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

Why Fantasy?

Why play a fantasy game? Because fantasy is awesome. But more than that, it's important. Don't just take my word for it, though: In the denouement of the brilliant *Hogfather* by Terry Pratchett, Susan and Death (who speaks LIKE THIS) have a conversation about the believing in the Hogfather, their equivalent of Santa Claus:

“All right,” said Susan. “I'm not stupid. You're saying that humans need... fantasies in order to make life bearable.”

REALLY? AS IF IT WAS SOME KIND OF PINK PILL? NO. HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN. TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE.

“Tooth fairies? Hogfathers? Little—”

YES. AS PRACTICE. YOU HAVE TO START OUT LEARNING TO BELIEVE THE *LITTLE LIES*.

“So we can believe the big ones?”

YES. JUSTICE. MERCY. DUTY. THAT SORT OF THING.

“They're not the same at all!”

YOU THINK SO? THEN TAKE THE UNIVERSE AND GRIND IT DOWN TO THE FINEST POWDER AND SIEVE IT THROUGH THE FINEST SIEVE AND THEN *SHOW* ME ONE ATOM OF JUSTICE, ONE MOLECULE OF MERCY. AND YET— Death waved a hand. AND YET YOU ACT AS IF THERE IS SOME IDEAL ORDER IN THE WORLD, AS IF THERE IS SOME... *RIGHTNESS* IN THE UNIVERSE BY WHICH IT MAY BE JUDGED.

“Yes, but people have *got* to believe that, or what's the *point*—”

MY POINT EXACTLY.

Fantasy helps us believe in important, real things – things that we might feel hokey about expressing in our modern, cynical world, but things which are nonetheless vital to us. Fantasy is a way of looking at ideas, ideals, themes, and philosophies that are all-too-easy to believe don't fit in our everyday lives.

Why *Epic* Fantasy?

Nailing down what makes epic fantasy special is harder since the genre isn't well defined, but *The Lord of the Rings* clearly qualifies and this dialog from *The Two Towers* movie starts to explain it:

Frodo: I can't do this, Sam.

Sam: I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo; the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness

and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end... because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was, when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going... because they were holding onto something.

Frodo: What are we holding on to, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

A key feature of epic fantasy is the scope of the action. The core of an epic fantasy story is a protagonist defending what is good about the world (for some definition of “the world”) from forces that would tear it down – it's about linking personal action and personal virtue to bigger and broader things, things worth saving.

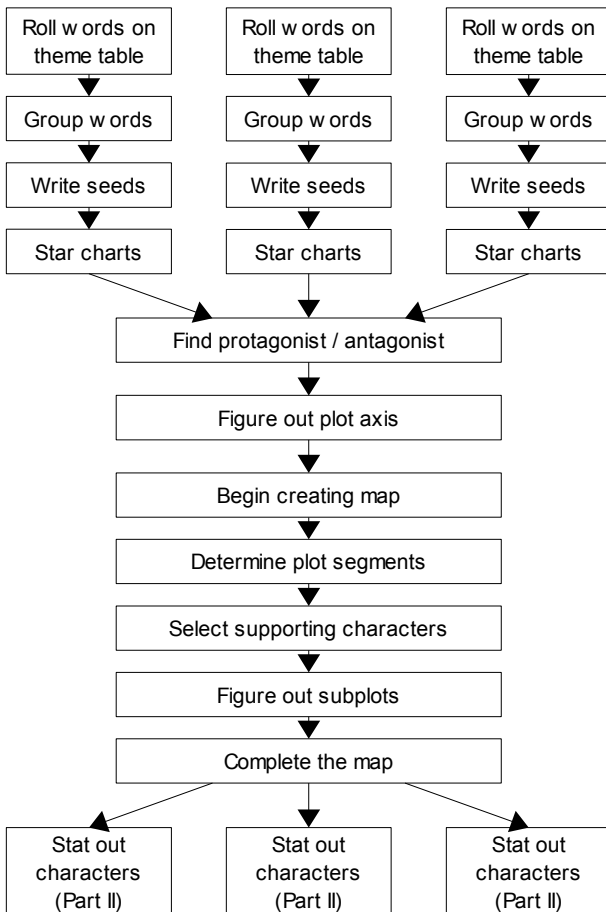
In the cynical world we live in there is constant pressure to be small-minded, hopeless, and complacent. Dishonest politician? *They're all like that.* Your boss wants you to cut corners to hit a deadline? *No one will know.* A festering problem could be solved with a conversation? *Best avoid the conflict...* Epic fantasy heroes don't give in to that mindset: they stand against the tide of evil. The stories don't tell us it's *easy* to do that, because it usually isn't, but they tell us it's *right* to do that, and it's nice to be reminded.

Fantasy lets us practice believing in difficult ideas, and the idea that epic fantasy asks us to believe is that individual virtues matter, that doing the right thing matters. Sam Gamgee saved a world by being a good friend. It was a fantasy world and not a real one, but Tolkien made it *real enough* for us to see the truth of that idea. Forces in the world want us to believe that everything is going downhill and none of us can do anything about it. Epic Fantasy is out there, confronting that idea, shouting “You shall not pass!” and reminding us that we all have the capacity to stand alongside it.

Plus, there's wizards and magic and sword fights and a bunch of other awesome stuff.

Part I: Creating the Plot

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.



Theme Table

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.

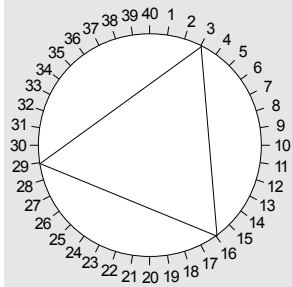
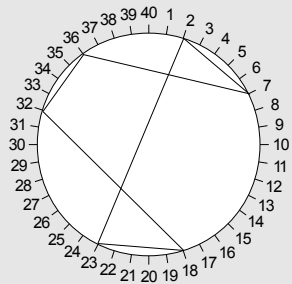
Susan looks at her first group of words: Division Throne Responsibility Farm Fire Sea. She likes the idea of a division of responsibility, so she decides to group those two words together. She likes the way Sea and Farm fit together, too, since it conjures the idea of fishermen in her mind, since they 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.

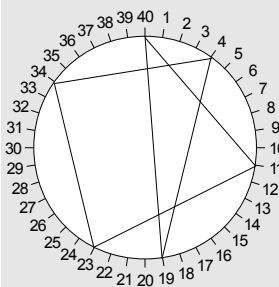
Use the protagonist seed to identify a protagonist character and a community that he or she represents. The community is the frame of reference through which the rest of the fantasy world can be understood (in *The Lord of the Rings*, this community is The Shire). In *Storied Age*, the protagonist must *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.

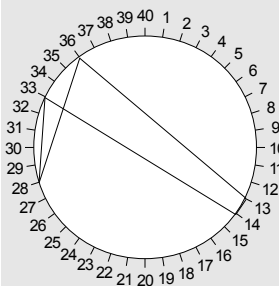


Words: Greed Ice Blood Male Division Mountain

4 19 40 11 23 34

Sentence:

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

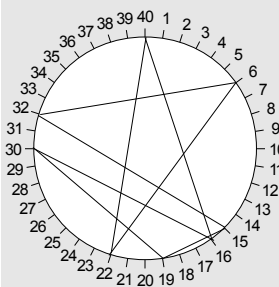


Words: Prophecy Crown Love Sea Corruption

14 33 28 36 13

Sentence:

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

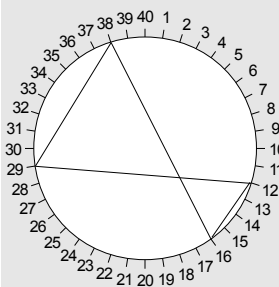


Words: Old Blood Family Poor Throne Learning Ice Sword

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 focused on at different times based on their role in the story. In *Storied Age*, this is modeled by having different viewpoint 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 viewpoint 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...