THE DRAGON PRINCE

Tales of Xadia

ROLEPLAYING GAME

RULES PRIMER

Tales of Xadia: The Dragon Prince is a tabletop roleplaying game about people who experience love, war, family, heartbreak, and triumph in the world of Wonderstorm's *The Dragon Prince*. With your friends, you create characters using familiar archetypes from the show. In your shared imagination, you forge alliances, uncover secrets, engage in mighty battles, and protect those you love from peril and prophecy. Work together or at cross-purposes... or both! Whatever your chosen path, your characters explore the mysteries of the elves, the human kingdoms, and the dragons, as well as the primal sources that flow through everything.

What's in this Book

Tales of Xadia uses the Cortex game system. This rules primer introduces you to key elements of Cortex as it appears in this game, from bringing life to characters of your own creation to spinning tales of wonder and magic. The *Tales of Xadia: The Dragon Prince Roleplaying Game Handbook* covers all of this and more in much greater detail.

Setup: This is an overview of what you need in order to play a game of *Tales of Xadia*.

Your Character: We examine an example character—Rayla, the Moonshadow elf assassin from the show—and how the game represents her in the form of her character journal.

Playing the Game: These are the Cortex system rules you need to know as a player, from making decisions and rolling dice to tracking stress and keeping notes.

Running the Game: These are the Cortex system rules for running the game as the Narrator, including using scenes and sessions to help the players tell the story of their characters, and playing the part of Narrator characters.

Resources: Here's where we include a glossary, helpful cheat sheets, and a blank character journal.

CREDITS

SETUP

To play *Tales of Xadia*, one person needs to be the Narrator. Everyone else is a player. You also need game dice, character journals to record your character traits and info, and a supply of game tokens such as coins or beads. These game aids are also available to use digitally at *talesofxadia.com*.

The Players

Tales of Xadia works best with two to six players, each creating and playing their own **player character** or **PC**. You record your player character's vital statistics and information in a character journal. As a player, you imagine what your character would do, describe their actions, feelings, and experiences, and use the game rules to see if they succeed or fail.

As a player, you are responsible for:

- Deciding what your PC does.
- Confronting any problems that the Narrator throws in front of your PC.
- Pointing your PC in directions that make for good stories.
- Supporting other PCs and giving them a shot at what they're good at.
- Deciding how your PC changes and grows over time.
- In general, exploring the world of Xadia and telling your character's story.

The Narrator

The Narrator presents exciting scenes, locations, and **Narrator Characters** (or **NCs**). Often, but not always, the Narrator is the person who bought the game and has read the rules a few times. As the Narrator, you give the players fun situations to respond to and help facilitate all the rules that govern how those characters interact with the world they're in.

As Narrator, you are responsible for:

- Preparing and presenting the session to the players.
- Acting out the parts of NCs and deciding how they react to the PCs.
- Asking leading questions of the players to lead them into further adventure.
- Revealing the important details of the world to the players.
- Facilitating the game rules at the table and maintaining the pace of the session.
- In general, bringing the world of Xadia to life in the minds of the players.

Dice

We use five different kinds of dice in *Tales of Xadia*: ▼, 6, ◆, 10, and 12. The number tells you how many sides the die has; the more sides, the bigger the numbers. A handful of dice together is called a **dice pool**. Roll all the dice in a dice pool together, right out in the open—even if you're the Narrator!

Any time you roll a die, the number you get is called the **result**. Usually you choose two results to add together to get a **total**. Adding two or more results together is about the only math you need to do in *Tales of Xadia*.

Dice are used to resolve **tests**, **contests**, and **challenges**.

Traits and Die Ratings

All characters in *Tales of Xadia*, whether they're player characters or Narrator characters, are described using game **traits**. Every trait in the game is rated with a die, called a **die rating**. Whenever you use a trait, you pick up a die of that many sides for your dice pool.

The die rating tells you how much effect that trait has on the outcome of any given test, contest, or challenge. They're a useful shorthand for how strong, smart, or skilled your character is.

More sides don't always mean *better*, so much as they mean more important or significant in the story. Having a 12 in a trait like STRENGTH vs a 12 in a trait like JUSTICE doesn't mean that physical strength or valuing justice measure the same things. It just means that being inhumanly strong can affect the outcome just as much as being obsessed with justice can.

Stepping Up and Stepping Down

Sometimes you swap out one or more dice in your dice pool for dice with more or fewer sides. This is called **stepping up** or **stepping down** a die rating.

To step up a die by one, swap it for a die that's one step bigger than the original, like a 6 to a ◆. To step down a die by one, swap it out for a die that's one step smaller, like a 6 to a ▼.

STEPPING UP BY 1   **STEPPING UP BY 2**   **STEPPING DOWN BY 1**
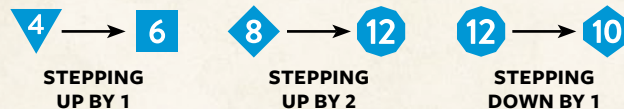
Die ratings can only have five possible steps, from ▼ to 12. If you step a 12 in a dice pool up by one, it remains at 12, but you can step up another die in your dice pool by one step instead. If you step a ▼ down by one, it's removed from the dice pool.

If you're asked to step up a 12 that isn't currently in a dice pool, it remains at 12, but you gain a 6 alongside it.

Hitches and Botches

Any die that comes up with a result of 1 is called a **hitch**. Set hitches aside; they can't be included in a total and count as zero. The Narrator has the special ability to activate hitches; this is covered later in Playing the Game. When the Narrator rolls a hitch, it's called an **opportunity**. Why the different terms? It's because some game effects apply only to hitches, and some only apply to opportunities.

If *all* your dice come up as 1, that's a **botch** and it's a sure sign of trouble, especially since your total is effectively zero. With a typical failed test, contest, or challenge, not everything is bad. The story still moves forward, just not how your character might like. With a botch, there's no ambiguity about it—things are bad for your character, and sometimes their story hits a brick wall for a moment.

Plot Points

Plot points (PP) are a way for players to affect the story beyond the roll of the dice. Plot points can be spent to give yourself more dice for your dice pool, make the dice you have more powerful, or activate certain traits or trait **special effects** (**SFX**) on your character journal.

You need a way to keep track of plot points. One way is to write them on your character journal as tally marks. Another option is to use poker chips or some other kind of token (pennies, paperclips, glass beads... you get the idea).

The Narrator uses plot points as well. Keep a supply of them in the middle of the table for everyone to draw from. Important NCs have their own 🅿🅿, which are the Narrator's responsibility to keep track of.

Character Journal

Your PC has a **character journal** that you use to keep track of vital statistics, personality traits, and important game notes. All your traits, including their die ratings, are recorded on your character journal together with other useful information. When you're playing the game, the character journal helps you build your dice pool.

The character journals for the pregenerated characters in this primer, can be printed out and marked up with pencil. Alternately, you can keep track of your character journal using the digital tools at *talesofxadia.com*.

YOUR CHARACTER

As a player, your interaction with the rules of *Tales of Xadia* starts with your character journal. Everything you need to discover new places, puzzle out intrigues, and enjoy high adventure comes from the traits and die ratings you have before you.

Characters are all based on archetypes. Information on both basic and advanced character archetypes is included in the *Tales of Xadia: The Dragon Prince Roleplaying Game Handbook*. For this primer, pregenerated characters using basic archetypes are provided (Duren Soldier, Duren Herald, Moonshadow Elf Assassin, Sunfire Elf Knight, Sunfire Elf Mage, Del Bar Hunter).

How it Works

We're using Rayla's character journal by way of example. Here's what it looks like.

RAYLA

As of the End of Book One: Moon.

AGILITY `10`
AWARENESS `8`
INFLUENCE `6`
INTELLECT `6`
SPIRIT `8`
STRENGTH `8`

VALUES

DEVOTION `10`

Love and devotion compel and define me.

GLORY `4`

If those I care about know me, that is all the legacy I want.

JUSTICE `8`

At great personal cost I will strive for what's right.

LIBERTY `8`

My real allegiance is to my heart and those who know it.

MASTERY `6`

I am naturally talented and feel little need to seek training from others.

TRUTH `6`

I search for my own truth, rather than the truth others feed me.

DISTINCTIONS

MOONSHADOW ELF `8`

As a Moonshadow elf, Rayla draws power from the Moon and is at her strongest at night, especially on the night of a full moon. Her heritage provides her with greater natural agility and speed than other elves.

- *Hinder:* Gain one **PP** when you switch out this distinction's die rating for a `4`.
- *Elf Grace:* Spend a **PP** to step up your AGILITY die in a test, contest, or challenge that factors in your elven speed and balance.
- *Moonshadow Form:* When trying to hide, sneak, or go unseen during a full moon, spend a **PP** to double your MOONSHADOW ELF distinction die and keep an extra die in your total.

RELUCTANT ASSASSIN `8`

Rayla's been trained since she was young to join Moonshadow elf hunting parties, but her heart just isn't in it.

- *Hinder:* Gain one **PP** when you switch out this distinction's die rating for a `4`.

ACT FIRST, THINK LATER `8`

More often than not, Rayla leaps into action regardless of the consequences, which can make her seem both brave and reckless.

- *Hinder:* Gain one **PP** when you switch out this distinction's die rating for a `4`.

SPECIALTIES

SNEAKING `6`

Used for getting around without being noticed.

SWORDPLAY `6`

Used when doing battle armed with swords, knives, and other bladed weapons.

TRACKING `6`

Used when following or pursuing others by the evidence they leave behind.

ASSETS

ELVEN BUTTERFLY BLADES `8`

Rayla's twin weapons are both deadly and versatile, capable of transforming between lethal blades and curved hooks. While a sharp blade is always useful in a fight, a surprise hook to the legs can catch an opponent off-guard.

- No SFX yet unlocked.

Attributes

How do you do the things you need to do? You draw upon your **attributes**. Every character has a rating in these six traits from a lowly 4 to a world-class 12. You always include one of your attributes in your dice pool when you attempt a test, contest, or challenge. Which attribute you include depends on the circumstances.

- **AGILITY:** Your hand-eye coordination. Use this when you need to fight, sneak, aim, or balance.

- **AWARENESS:** Your ability to perceive your surroundings and other people. Use this as you pay attention to the world around you.

- **INFLUENCE:** Your presence and persuasiveness. Use this while you convince, coerce, charm, or collude.

- **INTELLECT** Your capacity to comprehend. Use this to study, learn, recall things you know, or figure out a puzzle.

- **SPIRIT:** Your mental resolve and emotional reserves. Use this when the situation requires courage, determination, perseverance, or willpower.

- **STRENGTH:** Your level of physical fitness and power. Use this if you're called to be tough, strong, or use brute force.

> Rayla has amazing hand-eye coordination, so her AGILITY is 10. She's alert, tough, stubborn, and quick-witted, so her AWARENESS, SPIRIT, and STRENGTH, are all 8. Rayla tends to struggle in social situations, so her INFLUENCE and INTELLECT are 6. All of this means that she's most successful when she uses her quick reflexes and speed, and least successful when trying to convince others to do what she wants.

Values

You're about to embark on a story set in the World of Xadia, so you need to know what matters to you and why you do what you do—this is represented by your **values**. Every character's investment in these six traits runs from a barely interested 4 to a supremely committed 12. The bigger the die rating, the more that value helps you on your journey. You always include one of your values in your dice pool when you're attempting a test, contest, or

challenge; which one depends on what your character is most motivated by in each situation.

Each value also has a **value statement** attached to it, which describes how your character thinks or feels about that value. An optional advanced rule about denying your value statements is detailed in the *Tales of Xadia: The Dragon Prince Roleplaying Game Handbook*, but for now just use the value statement to help you roleplay your character.

Values always have fifteen die steps in total, with a 4 counting as one step; if you step up one value's die rating, you step down another.

- **DEVOTION:** Have you ever been obligated to others? This value is about duty, faith, and friendship. You're motivated by the bonds of loyalty and your love for others.

- **GLORY:** Have you ever wanted to be celebrated by history? This value is about legacy, fame, and fortune. You're motivated by praise, acclaim, and your desire to be remembered.

- **JUSTICE:** Have you ever been compelled to fix what's wrong? This value is about balance, righteousness, and reward. You're motivated by adherence to fairness and what you think is right.

- **LIBERTY:** Have you ever resisted the control of others? This value is about freedom, independence, and autonomy. You're motivated by a world without oppression or suppression.

- **MASTERY:** Have you ever needed to rise above your own limits? This value is about control, achievement, and skill. You're motivated by power, growth, and self-development.

- **TRUTH:** Have you ever sought out all the answers? This value is about fidelity, certainty, and authenticity. You're motivated by finding strength in facts and by the principle and pursuit of knowledge.

> Rayla will do anything for those she loves, and this is where she has the most investment: DEVOTION 10. She is fiercely independent even though she accepts her role in her community, so her LIBERTY is 8. She wants to do what's right, even at personal cost: JUSTICE 8. She doesn't see power as more than a tool, so that's MASTERY 6.

She seeks out her own truth, not that which others tell her: Truth 6 . Finally, she doesn't have much time for Glory with a rating of 4 . Clearly, when she's driven by her heart, she's at her peak, with duty and integrity as runners-up.

Distinctions

Who are you and where do you come from? What do others remember about you? How are you described to others in the tales told of your adventures? You are the sum of your **distinctions**. Every character starts with three distinctions rated at 8 and may acquire more or raise their die ratings over time. You always include one of your distinctions in your dice pool. Which one you choose may have a part to play in the outcome of your test, contest, or challenge.

Each distinction comes with one or more **special effects** (**SFX**) that let you bend the rules in specific ways under specific circumstances. This typically involves a **benefit** such as stepping up a die, doubling a die for a roll (adding another die of the same size to your dice pool), including an extra die, creating an asset, or gaining a PP . This is usually paired with a cost, such as spending a PP , taking stress, stepping down a die, or rolling a 4 . You may use an SFX whenever it's appropriate, whether or not you're rolling the distinction die it's attached to.

Every distinction has the *Hinder* SFX by default:

- *Hinder*: Gain a PP when you switch out this distinction's die rating for a 4 .

All the premade characters have additional unlocked SFX.

Distinctions each belong to one of three broad groups:

- Your character's background, **kindred**, or ancestry
- Your character's training, **vocation**, or role
- Your character's most memorable or peculiar **quirk** or feature

  Rayla's three distinctions are Moonshadow Elf 8 , Reluctant Assassin 8 , and Act First, Think Later 8 . Each starts with the *Hinder* SFX so Rayla can use them in dice pools as a 4 , representing them getting in her way.

This is especially true for Reluctant Assassin and Act First, Think Later. She has also unlocked two more SFX under her Moonshadow Elf distinction: *Elf Agility*, which lets her spend a PP to step up her Agility in dice rolls when drawing on her elven speed and balance; and *Moonshadow Form*, which lets her spend a PP during a full moon to double her Moonshadow Elf distinction die and keep an extra die in her total when she's trying to hide, sneak, or go unseen.

Specialties and Assets

Your character might be particularly skilled at a couple of things—their **specialties**—making it easier for them to succeed when those specialized situations come up. Or they might possess an **asset**—an item, a weapon, an ally, or some other helpful source of assistance.

Specialties

A specialty is rated from 6 to 10 and covers a narrow field of expertise or ability, such as Sky Magic, Swordplay, Animals, or Politics. A 6 means you're **trained** in that specialty. A 8 means you're an **expert**. And a 10 means you're a **master**. You can include these dice in your dice pool when you roll so long as what you're doing is relevant to the specialty's area. It's possible to have as much as a 12 in a specialty—**grand master**—but very few characters in all of Xadia are so gifted.

  Rayla has three specialties at 6 : Sneaking, Swordplay, and Tracking. Whenever she's sneaking around, fighting with her swords, or tracking somebody or something, she can include these dice in her dice pool.

Assets

An asset is also rated from 6 to 10 and is something or someone who can assist you that isn't inherent or part of you, such as a Primal Stone, an Enchanted Staff, a Glow-Toad, or a Faithful Squire.

A 6 means the asset is moderately useful, a 8 means it's very useful, and a 10 means it's extremely useful. As with specialties, it's possible to have a 12 asset, but such things are legendary in nature. Include the die in your dice pool when the asset might be helpful or beneficial.

> Rayla has her twin Elven Butterfly Blades 8, which can be used to fight with and to help her climb or scale walls.

During any story it's possible to create or discover other temporary assets that last as little as a single action or as much as a day or two. Since temporary assets are by nature always helpful, it's good to have them around, but unlike a character's assets they always go away or become less important.

Stress

Characters in *Tales of Xadia* must often endure great hardships or suffer through perilous situations in order to triumph. We represent these personal obstacles with **stress dice**, which are rated from 6 to 12. Your PC acquires stress dice through play; track your stress dice on your character journal.

Stress dice are added to your opposition's pool whenever it might make things harder for you, so they're like the opposite of assets.

You can recover stress dice when your character has time to rest, recuperate, or gain the benefits of medicine. By spending a PP, you can also step down one of your stress dice when the Narrator rolls an opportunity. That represents shaking it off, taking a breath, or realizing that it wasn't as bad as you thought. Stress dice that are stepped down to 4 are removed from your character journal.

Types of Stress

Stress dice come in six different **type**s. Your character might be affected by more than one type of stress, but only one stress die can be added to your opposition in any given roll. If you take more stress of a given type, it steps up the die, rather than adding another die of the same type. When any of your stress dice reach 🎲 and would be stepped up again, you are **stressed out**.

- **Afraid:** This is the stress of fear and panic. Once this exceeds 🎲, you are gripped in the clutches of terror.

- **Angry:** This is the stress of rage and frustration. Once this exceeds 🎲, you are lost to your wrath.

- **Anxious:** This is the stress of apprehension and worry. Once this exceeds 🎲, you succumb to anxiety.

- **Corrupted:** This is the stress of dark magic. Once this exceeds 🎲, you are consumed with darkness.

- **Exhausted:** This is the stress of fatigue and weariness. Once this exceeds 🎲, you can no longer remain awake.

- **Injured:** This is the stress of pain and wounding. Once this exceeds 🎲, you collapse unconscious and may die.

> At the start of the first session, Rayla has no stress dice. However, there are places on the character journal for her stress dice to be recorded. During a particularly dangerous battle, such as the first attack on the castle of Katolis, Rayla might acquire Angry, Exhausted, or Injured stress.

A Note About Magical Ability

Unlike the other creatures of Xadia, humans aren't inherently magical. A rare human mage like Claudia may learn limited primal magic, but it's difficult and requires much study and the use of a primal stone or powerful artifact tied to a primal source; this journey should take more than one tale. Human mages like Callum, who can channel primal magic without a stone, are so extremely rare that human PCs can't learn magic this way.

It's easier for a human to become a **dark mage**, learning dark magic that drains the magical essence of another creature and warps the mage's soul and appearance over time. This difficult, dangerous (and, frankly, evil) path repulses most humans and is condemned by all creatures in Xadia, so dark mages are relatively rare.

Many elves are **rune mages**, channeling a primal source through runes they draw in the air. Elves are predisposed to learn the primal magic associated with their people, through the arcanum of the primal—their innate connection to a primal source. Elves who haven't studied rune magic can do some minor magic using their inherent primal connection. Elves revile dark magic and avoid it at all costs.

Magical ability is represented in the game by a combination of distinctions, specialties, and assets. To play a character who uses magic from the primal sources or dark magic, choose one of your distinctions, usually your vocation, to be a **magical distinction**, representing your affinity with magic or your training. Then make sure you have at least one **magical specialty** that further defines your magical talents.

If you're playing a dark mage or you want to expand your elven mage's power, you must choose an asset that represents your **focus** or magical tool, such as a staff or an amulet.

Creating magical effects has its own set of rules, but usually you can't even attempt them without having these magic-themed traits to include in your dice pool.

- Examples of magical distinctions: Dark Magic Apprentice, Skywing Sage, Acolyte of the Sun.

- Examples of magical specialties: Dark Magic, Sky Magic, Sun Magic, Moon Magic, Earth Magic

- Examples of magical focuses: Tremor Staff, Lunar Rod, Amulet of the Winds, Sunblessed Bracers

  Rayla isn't a mage, but as a Moonshadow elf she's attuned to Moon magic. Her *Moonshadow Form* SFX is an example of using magic without being a rune mage like Callum or a dark mage like Claudia.

Dark magic, and some malign spiritual forces, can taint the mind and body of living things. We reflect this with Corrupted **stress**. Using dark magic can inflict this type of stress on you, and even though it's possible to embrace it and use it to enhance your own spells, it can consume you if you don't find a way to get rid of it.

PLAYING THE GAME

This section tells you how to play your character and determine how they interact with the world of Xadia using the Cortex game system. It covers tests, contests, and challenges, as well as how to roll and read your dice, spend your plot points, and track the outcome of your decisions.

Being a player doesn't just mean looking up traits and die ratings and rolling dice, of course. You're responsible for making decisions for your character, decisions that you think your character would make under the circumstances. Sometimes those might be terrible decisions! That's all part of the fun of roleplaying. You don't have to be right all of the time, and some of the best scenes in any game come from a character making a choice based on their values and what's important to them, or to their loved ones, which we as players might balk at.

Your Dice Pool

Any time you're called to roll dice for a test, contest, or challenge, you assemble a dice pool out of the following traits:

- One **attribute** die
- One **value** die
- One **distinction** die
- One **specialty** die, if applicable
- One or more **asset** dice, if applicable
- One of your opponent's **stress** dice, if applicable
- Extra dice from your **SFX**, if applicable

The dice pool represents all the things that contribute to your success: attributes for your physical or mental talents, values for what motivates you to succeed, distinctions for what makes you who you are, and so on. There's no maximum number of dice in a dice pool, but generally the pool includes anywhere from three to six dice.

Rolling Dice

Whenever you roll dice, you want to get a higher total than your opposition. This is the core principle of *Tales of Xadia's* Cortex game system. The key difference between tests, contests, and challenges is who rolls the dice first.

When you roll two or more dice, you choose two dice results to add together for your **total**, and a third die to use as the **effect die**. If you're rolling one die, your total is equal to the result of that die. If you don't have a third die, your effect die starts at 🔻. Your effect die indicates how well your efforts did, beyond a simple pass or fail. When you pick a die to use as the effect die, the number it rolled doesn't matter—just the size of the die.

After rolling dice, leave them on the table in view of everyone. Only pick up the dice once a test, contest, or challenge has been resolved. The Narrator does not hide dice from the players; all rolls are done in the open.

When you or the Narrator roll to oppose someone else, you're putting together an **opposition pool**. For tests and challenges, the opposition pool is assembled by the Narrator and is rolled first, so you know what total you have to beat.

For contests, however, the opposition pool roll comes after you've already rolled your own dice, and in that case the roll needs to beat what you've rolled.

You are free to choose *any two dice* for your total. You don't need to choose the two highest rolling dice. You may want to save a die with more sides for your effect die, even if was the highest result. Likewise, the Narrator may decide to let the dice fall where they may and always keep the two highest rolling dice or go easy on you and keep a smaller total. It's totally up to the person rolling the dice.

You and the other players make decisions for the group in response to the challenging situations the Narrator presents. *Not every decision needs to lead to dice.* Unless the outcome of a roll—success or failure—would be interesting or move the story along, or unless there's something keeping you from doing what you want to do, then don't bother picking up the dice. If a particular outcome is guaranteed to happen, the Narrator can either describe what happens and move on, or have *you* narrate the outcome of what your character does.

Heroic Success

If you beat the difficulty by 5 or more on a test, you've got a **heroic success**. You not only get what you want, your roll produces unexpected beneficial results. If your opponent loses by 5 points or more in a contest, you get a heroic success and are the clear victor. As with any success, the Narrator should ask you to describe your amazing efforts but that's just icing on the cake. There's an added benefit as well. The **effect die** (see following section) is stepped up by one for every 5 points you beat the difficulty by.

Effect Dice

The **effect die** is chosen from the dice pool after the dice used for the total are taken out and added together. The effect die is used for things like overcoming challenge dice or inflicting stress dice on others. Only the size of the effect die (number of sides) matters; the result rolled on the effect die has no further use in the roll.

We differentiate the dice results by the color of the outline and interior. **Gray** for unchosen dice results. **Green** interior for effect die, and **black** for hitches, **blue** interior denotes die type and a **blue** outline shows die results in the total.

ROLLED DICE RESULTS	TOTAL OF DICE	EFFECT DIE
5 3	8	4
1 2 6 5 11	17	10
4 6 6 7 3 2	13	12

Ineligible Dice

Any die that came up as a hitch can't be used as an effect die. If you spend plot points to add more dice to a total beyond the first two, those dice can't also be used as effect dice. If there are no dice left in the pool once the total is determined (or the remaining dice are hitches or otherwise spoken for), the effect die is always a 4.

Effect Dice in Opposition

When rolling dice for tests, the effect die can give you an idea of how well you did in the test. A 12 effect die means the test had a mind-blowing outcome, while a 4 means it was barely successful. If you failed the test, the Narrator might give you a stress die equal to the opposition pool's effect die, but if you succeed, the opposition's effect die doesn't matter.

When rolling dice for contests or challenges, the effect die is more important. If you win a contest, you compare your effect die against the opposition's effect die (from the roll they just made to try to beat you). If your opponent's effect die is bigger than yours, your effect die is stepped down by one before you use it for a stress die. If it's equal to or less than yours, it doesn't matter.

If you win a dice roll in a challenge, the effect die lets you know if you can reduce the challenge pool by a whole die, or just step down one of the dice in the pool.

Effect Dice in Automatic Outcomes

When a test, contest, or challenge isn't opposed and you need an effect die, use the largest die in the difficulty pool (for a test) or the initiating dice pool (for a contest). Most of the time, however, you won't need an effect die if no test, contest, or challenge is rolled.

Adding Extra Effect Dice

You can spend a PP to keep an additional effect die. This is most often used to represent doing more than one thing at a time with a single roll. Additional effect dice can be used for different things, such as inflicting other types of stress or creating assets.

Tests, Contests, and Challenges

A **test** is when you roll dice to resolve a situation by determining if there's a successful outcome or a challenging failure. Examples might include climbing a wall, escaping a guard, or solving a riddle. Almost always, tests are initiated by the Narrator asking the player, *"What do you do?"*

When your PC gets into a conflict over something they want, this is called a **contest**, which determines if any other character can intervene, thwart, or oppose your character. Examples include fighting a duel with a foe, arm wrestling a friend, or baking the best pie. Contests are almost always initiated by a player, who picks up dice and essentially says, *"I'm doing this. Who's stopping me?"*

Something in between tests and contests is a **challenge**. This is when the Narrator describes a situation that might take more than a single test to resolve, often one that is time-sensitive or carries an ongoing risk. Examples include fighting back an army, disarming a complex magical trap, or convincing a room full of nobles to do things your way. Challenges start with questions like, *"Can I do this before time runs out?"* or *"How long is this going to take?"*

A player can always choose not to respond to a test or a challenge and find another way forward. The Narrator or other player can always respond to a contest by declaring that they don't oppose the initiating player, in which case the character simply gets what they wanted. In all of these cases, there's usually no need for an effect die; if one is needed, use the largest die in the dice pool (the opposition pool for a test, or the player's dice pool for a contest).

Plot Points

Plot points (PP) give players a measure of control over their character's fate. They represent luck and fortune, but also narrative authority; they're how we separate important characters in the story from those who aren't as critical. With plot points, both the players and the Narrator can tweak the results of the dice, activate SFX to do interesting things, and place a hand on the scales for a moment when the dice are fickle.

Every player gets a PP at the beginning of each session. Unspent PP roll over to the next session, but even if you end a session without any, you always start the next session with one PP .
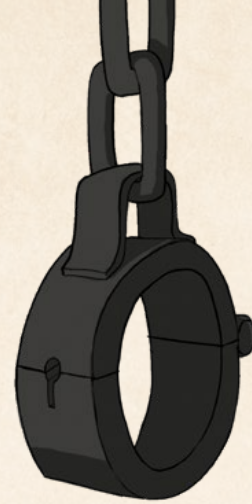
Earning Plot Points as a Player

There are several ways for players to earn PP during play. If you earn a PP because of a die roll, such as a hitch, you can't use that PP until your die roll is resolved (so you can't roll a 1, get a PP , and then spend it to keep more dice in your total).

- **Hitches**: The Narrator may hand a PP over to you to activate one or more of your hitches. They can step up a stress die on your character, they can create a 6 temporary asset for one of their NCs involved in the scene, or they can step up a die in a challenge pool (if there is one). If you rolled multiple hitches, the Narrator can step up the stress, asset, or challenge die by one more step for each additional hitch you rolled (maximum 12) without giving you an additional PP . If the Narrator wants to do different things with each hitch you rolled, they need to give you a separate PP for each one. Otherwise you only get one PP even if they use all the hitches to step up one of your stress dice.

- **Giving in**: If you give in during a contest and let your opponent succeed rather than rolling the dice to beat their total, you earn a PP . You only get this PP if you've already rolled at least once in the contest; you don't get a PP if someone starts a contest and you choose not to oppose it.

- **SFX**: Some SFX (including the default *Hinder* SFX for all distinctions) give you a PP .

- **Roleplaying**: The Narrator is always free to hand out PP for remarkable moments in play, including making everyone laugh, doing something truly heroic and in character regardless of your distinctions, and so forth. This should be limited to one PP for each such occasion.

Spending Plot Points as a Player

You can spend 🅿🅿 to do several things. Remember, you can only spend 🅿🅿 you've earned from a die roll after your die roll has been resolved and the total announced.

- **Activate SFX**: Some of your SFX must be activated by spending a 🅿🅿. These effects only last for the duration of the roll you're using it on; once you do something else, the effect must be activated again.

- **Create a Temporary Asset**: You can create a temporary asset by spending a 🅿🅿. This asset has a 6 die rating and you must give it a name, like TREE BRANCH or HIGHER GROUND. You can assign it to yourself, or to somebody else. It's an advantageous bonus for a test, contest, or challenge, and lasts for as long as the test, contest, or challenge lasts. You may include it in your dice pool just like you would any other asset. If you spend an extra 🅿🅿, the asset lasts for the rest of the session.

- **Include More Results**: After any roll, you may spend a 🅿🅿 to include more results in your total out of those you just rolled. This way, your total may be three, four, or five dice added together. The only limit to how many results you may add to your total is how many dice you rolled to begin with and how many 🅿🅿 you have available. Remember, you can't add any hitches to your total.

- **Keep an Extra Effect Die**: Sometimes you want to be able to achieve multiple outcomes with a single test or contest. In that case, you need more than one effect die. You can spend a 🅿🅿 to choose another of your remaining dice as an effect die in addition to the first. You can't do this if you don't have any dice left over from your roll, or if the only dice left over are hitches. These extra effect dice can't all be used in the same way: if you're giving a foe EXHAUSTED stress with one effect die, you must choose a different sort of stress or create an asset with the other effect die.

- **Share an Asset**: If you've created a temporary asset or you have an asset of your own that you'd like to share with other characters, you can spend a 🅿🅿 to make this asset open, allowing other characters in the scene to use it in their dice pools. This lasts for as long as the temporary asset lasts, or until the end of the scene if it's one of your character assets.

- **Activate Opportunities**: When the Narrator rolls an opportunity—which is the same as a player rolling a hitch—you can spend a 🅿🅿 to activate it if the roll is opposing you, i.e., if it's being rolled in opposition to you on a test, contest, or challenge. When you do this, the Narrator assigns it to their personal 🅿🅿 supply that's used for all Narrator characters. You can do one of two things: you can step down one of your stress dice or you can step up an existing asset (even one of your character assets) until the asset goes away or the scene ends, whichever comes first. Some SFX might activate on opportunities, as well.

Tests: Success or Failure

In a test, the Narrator assembles an opposition pool and rolls it, setting the **difficulty** by adding together two dice from the roll and announcing the total. That difficulty is the number you need to beat with your own total when you roll your dice for the test. If you beat it, the test is a **success**. If you didn't beat it, the test is a **failure**. Beating a difficulty means rolling *higher* than the difficulty total. If your total is the same as the difficulty's total, you didn't beat it, so this still counts as a failure.

The difficulty dice are usually two dice of the same number of sides, based on the situation:

4 4 : Very easy

6 6 : Easy

8 8 : Challenging

10 10 : Hard

12 12 : Very hard

In addition to difficulty dice, the Narrator picks up one or more dice based on traits present in the location, Narrator characters who are in opposition, or anything else that might make things tricky.

When in doubt, the Narrator can simply add one or more 6 to represent increasing risk, threats, or challenges, like *"It's rocky in here so it's hard to move around"* or *"It's raining a lot, so it's hard to see."*

Tests are usually uncomplicated. A success means your character does what they wanted to do, and a failure means they don't. Occasionally, you might set the difficulty for a NC's test. In this case, you roll first and the Narrator rolls to beat the difficulty set by you. Usually, though, the Narrator sets up scenes where you roll tests as opposed to NCs trying to do things while you just sit and watch.

Examples of tests include: trying to climb something, craft something, use rune magic to affect a non-living target, search a room, or decipher a mysterious inscription on a wall.

Example: Rayla's Test

Rayla has been separated from her friends after a battle with Del Barian bandits and hurries to catch up to them. She arrives at a mysterious ravine filled with howling winds. Her destination is on the other side, so her player declares that she's going to try to scale the ravine walls to get above the winds. The Narrator says this requires a test with a difficulty of 🔹8 🔹8.

Rayla's player looks at her character journal and assembles her dice pool: STRENGTH 🔹8, because that's the attribute that covers physical effort; DEVOTION 🔟, because she's desperate to reunite with her friends and the ravine is in her way; ACT FIRST, THINK LATER 🔹8, because her impulsive nature often helps her avoid hesitation; and her ELVEN BUTTERFLY BLADES 🔹8, which she's using in their hook configuration to help her climb. That's 🔹8 🔹8 🔹8 + 🔟, a pretty good dice pool!

The Narrator rolls the 🔹8 🔹8 difficulty: 4 and 6, for a total of 10.

Rayla's player rolls her 🔹8 🔹8 🔹8 + 🔟: 6, 3, and 2 on the 🔹8s, and 6 on the 🔟, for a total of 12 (6 + 6). If she needs it, she picks one of the remaining 🔹8s as her effect die, but for this test all the Narrator needs is the total.

Because the 12 beats the Narrator's 10, Rayla is successful and reaches the top of the ravine wall and safety... for the moment!

Contests: The Struggle

For a contest, you're the one initiating it, so you pick up the dice and roll first, adding together two results for a total. If your opposition decides against opposing you after seeing what you rolled, you automatically win the contest. If your opposition decides to stop you, they assemble a dice pool and try to beat the difficulty you just set.

If your opposition doesn't beat your difficulty, you've won the contest and you get what you want. If they do beat your difficulty, it goes back over to you; you can choose to **give in**, in which case you define the failure on your own terms, and you get a 🅿️. Otherwise, your opposition's total becomes the new difficulty, and you must roll again to try to beat it. Failing to beat your opposition means your opponent gets to define how they stopped you.

Contests go back and forth until one side gives in or fails to beat the difficulty. The losing side takes stress, and the winning side gets what they wanted in the first place.

Sometimes the Narrator may initiate a contest when a NC chooses to do a thing; the Narrator is essentially asking you, "What are you going to do about it?" However, the PCs are the heroes of the story, so Narrators shouldn't do this too often or else the players are just watching the NCs do things.

Examples of contests include: dueling across a battlement, putting your case before the king's court, struggling over a prize that your rival also wants.

Example: Rayla's Contest

Hurrying across the rocky clifftops to join her friends, Rayla is surprised to see one of the Del Barian bandits, Ulfred, from the battle earlier that day. It looks like he was pursuing her friends as well, but took a moment to catch his breath. Rayla's player wants to avoid engaging with this rough character for too long, even if she thinks she could easily take him. She decides to sneak along the cliff just out of sight, and hope that he doesn't see her. Rayla's player declares this and asks the Narrator if Ulfred is going to stop her (or, in this case, notice that somebody's sneaking around him). The Narrator says yes, Ulfred's on high alert for anything that isn't a bandit, so he's going to contest Rayla's attempt.

Because Rayla initiates the contest, she assembles her dice pool first. She picks AGILITY ⑩, since this falls under her ability to move carefully; TRUTH ⑧, because while she's still trying to reach her friends she's hoping to hide the truth of her presence from Ulfred; MOONSHADOW ELF ⑧, because sneaking is a thing her people do well; and her SNEAK ⑥ specialty, for obvious reasons. That's ⑩ + ⑧ ⑧ + ⑥ for her dice pool.

Rayla's player rolls the dice to set the starting difficulty for Ulfred: 7 on the ⑩, 5 and 2 on the ⑧ ⑧, and 6 on the ⑥. The 7 and 6 add up to a total of 13! She chooses one of the remaining ⑧ s as her effect die.

The Narrator looks at Ulfred's character journal. He's got AWARENESS ⑧, TRUTH ⑥, and DEL BARIAN BANDIT ⑧. He doesn't have any specialties that seem relevant, but the Narrator spends one of Ulfred's 🅿 to create a temporary asset: WATCHFUL ⑥. That's ⑧ ⑧ + ⑥ ⑥ for his dice pool.

The Narrator rolls to try to beat the difficulty Rayla set: 3 and 2 on the ⑧ ⑧, and 5 and 4 on the ⑥ ⑥. That's a grand total of 9. Even if the Narrator spent a 🅿 to keep one of the other dice, the most he could get is a 12 (from adding the 3 to the 9). He decides not to, and the contest is over.

Because Ulfred lost the contest, Rayla gets what she wants: she sneaks past and is on her way. She also gets to inflict stress on Ulfred with her ⑧ effect die, and so she chooses to make it EXHAUSTED stress. Ulfred's clearly worn out and it's dulling his senses! The Narrator makes a note of this in case Ulfred shows up again during the session.

Challenges: Overcoming Extended Obstacles

In a challenge, the Narrator sets out a challenge pool based on how difficult the challenge is and how long it will take to overcome it. The former uses the same difficulty ratings as a test; the latter is several dice from three to five, or sometimes more, where fewer dice means it won't take as long to overcome and more dice means it takes concerted effort by multiple characters to do it quickly.

Challenges take place over several rounds. Each round represents some passage of time; it could be a few seconds, or it could be minutes or hours. Fighting your way out of a water-logged tunnel filled with rats might use rounds of only a few seconds each, but trying to transcribe a complex spell from a wall carving might take rounds of several hours to achieve.

The Narrator may declare that something happens after a certain number of rounds, such as guards arriving, a cave collapsing, or the sun going down over the horizon. If this happens, the challenge may be a failure. If there's no such time-sensitive element to the challenge, then it becomes a matter of how long it takes you to overcome the challenge without getting stressed out.

Other PCs might help you take on challenges, but everyone must take turns, one turn per player per round. The Narrator decides which of you goes first, but once a PC has had their turn, that player chooses who goes next out of the remaining PCs. Finally, the Narrator gets a turn for the challenge pool, just as if it were a character of its own—the Narrator chooses a PC to test against, and that player sets the difficulty with their dice. Once the Narrator has had their turn, it's back to the first PC, and play continues like it did the first round.

In a challenge, the Narrator rolls the challenge pool to set the difficulty, just like a test. Then you roll your own dice pool and try to beat the difficulty. If you don't, you fail to progress the challenge, and you take stress equal to the Narrator's effect die. If you beat it, you make progress, and compare your effect die to one of the dice in the challenge pool. If it's bigger, the challenge die is removed from the challenge pool. If it's equal to or smaller, the challenge die is stepped down by one step.

Getting a heroic success in a challenge lets you overcome the challenge faster. Each heroic success lets you step up your effect die by one step, or keep an additional effect die from your remaining dice; if you choose the latter option, you can compare this added effect die to another die in the challenge pool and either eliminate it or step it down, as well.

Once the challenge pool is reduced to zero dice, the challenge is over, and you've won!

Examples of challenges include: sneaking past dangerous guards, confronting a group of hungry beasts, overcoming a magical trap, dismantling an enchantment, laying siege to a fortified castle.

Example: Rayla's Challenge

Rayla is almost upon her friends—she can see the trail clearly in the woods ahead of her. But there's one more obstacle in her way: a roving group of spiders, each as big as a cat, skitters through the undergrowth and in the trees, watching for prey. With no other option but to fight her way through the spiders, Rayla's player informs the Narrator of her goal. The Narrator says this will be a [6] [6] [6] challenge: nothing too dangerous, but the sort of inconvenience Rayla doesn't need right now.

Because it's a challenge, the Narrator rolls the [6] [6] [6] challenge pool first to set the difficulty: 6, 4, and 3, for a total of 10. The effect die is [6].

Rayla's player reviews her traits and selects the following: AGILITY [10], because this requires her fighting skills; DEVOTION [10], because she's so close to her friends now and this is her primary motivation; RELUCTANT ASSASSIN [8], as that's where she gets her battle training from; SWORDPLAY [6] as her specialty; and her ELVEN BUTTERFLY BLADES [8], as her asset. That's a hefty [10] [10] + [8] [8] + [6], which shows that this is where Rayla shines.

Rayla's player describes her leaping into the trees, jumping from branch to branch, her blades going snicker-snack as the spiders hiss and spit. She rolls: 10 and 2 on the [10]s, 8 and 1 on the [8]s, and 5 on the [6]. Oh no, a hitch! She sets aside the [8] that rolled the 1 and then adds the two best dice together for an 18, using her other [10] as the effect die. That's easily enough to win the first round of the challenge.

Because she beat the Narrator's total by more than 5 (18 vs 10), that's a heroic success. Rayla can either step up her [10] effect die, or keep an additional effect die. She chooses the latter, using the only remaining die in her pool that isn't being used for something else: the [6]. So her effect dice are [10] and [6].

The Narrator says that the [10] effect die gets rid of one of the [6]s in the challenge pool, reducing the pool to [6] [6] The [6] effect die isn't bigger than the dice in the pool, so it steps down a die from [6] to [4]. The challenge pool is now [6] + [4]. Also, the Narrator gives Rayla a [PP] to activate that hitch she rolled. He gives her ANGRY [6] stress—many of the spiders spun webs in the air and they're beginning to get in Rayla's way, throwing her off and raising her temper.

Now for the second round of the challenge. The Narrator rolls again for the spider's challenge pool, but this time it's [6] + [4] for the pool, and a d6 for the ANGRY stress Rayla picked up last round. He rolls: 5 on each of the two [6], and 4 on the [4]! Total of 10, with a [4] effect die.

Rayla can change up her dice pool if she wants, but she's happy with the dice she had before and isn't doing anything different. More leaping, more flashing of knives, trying to get through the nasty spiders. She rolls: 9 and 8 on the **10**s, 5 and 4 on the **8**s, but another hitch, this time on the **6**. She adds the 9 and 8 to get 17 total, and uses both of the **8**s for effect dice as once again she has beaten the difficulty by more than 5.

The Narrator tells Rayla's player that her two **8** effect dice eliminate the remaining **6** and **4** in the challenge pool. Even though he included Rayla's ANGRY stress in the dice pool, it doesn't count as part of the challenge, so with all the challenge dice gone, Rayla has successfully defeated the spiders. The Narrator also gives Rayla's player another **PP** to activate the hitch she rolled on that **6**, which steps up the ANGRY stress to a **8**. Rayla runs off into the woods, frustrated and tangled up in webs, hoping she can get rid of the sticky gooey strands before something else jumps out at her...

Outcomes

When a player wins a test, contest, or challenge, they get what they wanted, and they can narrate the **outcome**. What this means usually depends on what they said they were trying to do. Was a player character trying to dispel the magical effect? It's gone. Knock out the bad guy? They did that. The player describes it and then the story moves on. If the player can't think of what might happen if they succeed, the Narrator can do the honors, and remind the player to think about what the consequences of success are before they roll the dice next time.

When a player fails, however, they should try to be entertaining in how they describe their failure. The only lasting effect is the story heading in a different direction than they wanted, unless they picked up stress or they rolled all hitches and came up with a total botch.

Outcomes Change the Status Quo

When your character fails, it doesn't necessarily mean the scene ends and their goals are thwarted permanently. A scene can have many tests and contests in it, involving many characters, sometimes even several tests or contests going on at the same time. Failure should always mean that the situation has changed in one way or another. Consequences should always come from failure, even if they're as simple as "You dropped it; now what do you do?"

In some cases, losing a test or contest can result in your character being taken out of the scene. But in most cases, your character only needs to revisit their new circumstances and take a different course of action, perhaps with a stress die making their lives a little trickier.

Helping Others

When a friendly PC makes a test or challenge, you can contribute to their success in several ways:

- When it's your turn, you can make a test (difficulty based on the situation—usually 6 6 or 8 8) and give the friendly PC your effect die as a temporary asset for their next roll.

- When it's not your turn, you can spend a PP to give the other player a 6 asset.

- On the other player's turn, you can step down one of your value die ratings by one in order to step up that same value in their own dice pool for that roll.

- In a challenge, you can take your own turn against the challenge pool.

If you choose to step down a value, you don't recover the value until the end of the session. It's polite to ask if they need help, of course—and be sure to describe what this help looks like (spirited encouragement, linking of hands, distracting the opposition, and so on).

Callum's player wants to help Ezran's player across a dangerous river ford. He decides to step down his MASTERY value by one to step up Ezran's MASTERY by one for this roll, which Callum's player describes as Callum purposefully slowing down and aiding Ezran in the form of motivational advice. Ezran won't get to keep the stepped up value after the roll, but it could make the difference in this test between getting across the river or being swept away.

Interfering with Others

If there's a contest underway in the same scene as you and you want to join in or bring it to a halt, you can attempt to **interfere**. Usually this means you want something neither of the other two characters wants, or maybe you want the same thing as one of them but on your own terms. To interfere, spend a PP to jump in and roll your dice before the outcome is resolved, but only after both original contestants have had a chance to roll. If you beat the highest roll of the other two characters, you bring the contest to an immediate halt. Nobody wins, nobody is stressed out... yet.

If both sides are really keen on continuing their contest, they may hand you a 🅿 each to continue. That's two 🅿🅿! At this point, the original characters reroll their dice, just like they were starting a new contest, and neither side in the contest may give in. The combatants should describe how they're fighting around, over, or at the cost of your interference. Compare the two original contestants to see who wins the contest; the winner inflicts a stress die on the loser. In addition, if either or both of the original contestants rolls higher than you, you also take stress dice—possibly from both contestants. In other words, if your interference fails, the contest may continue.

Using Interference as A Group Contest

The rules for interference can be used for all-out scrambles for some kind of object, goal, or prize. The highest roller is the successful character; everyone else takes their lumps. Nobody needs to spend 🅿 to join in, but everyone faces the risk of taking stress if they aren't the winner. If you lose in such a contest, describe how things went badly for you. The winner chooses their effect die and gives it to all of the other contestants as stress, but they can decide to make it a different type of stress in each case if they like (it still uses the same effect die to determine the size of the stress die).

If you want to assist a character who's in a group contest like this, but don't want to actually join the contest, use the same helping rules as described earlier under Helping Others—either create an asset before the contest starts, or step down a value to step up a contestant's value.
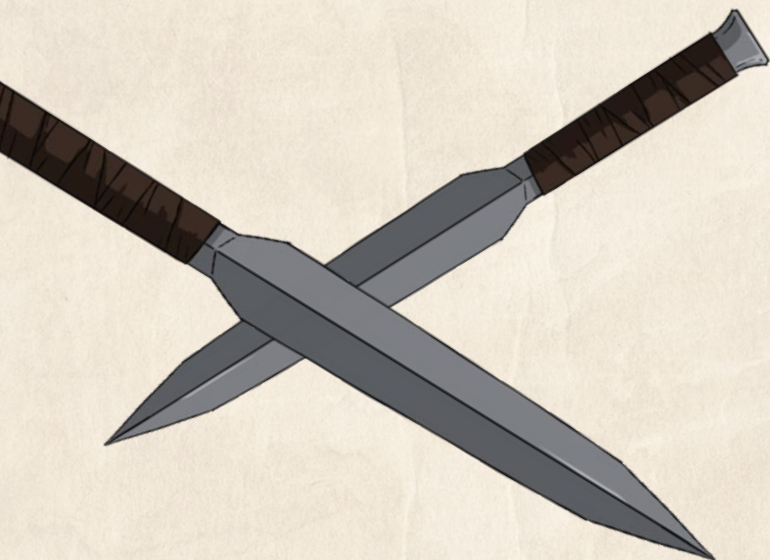
Taking Stress

Your character takes stress when they fail at a test, challenge, or contest. The size of the stress die is equal to the effect die of the opposition pool. Whoever inflicted the stress die on you gets to choose what type of stress it is, based on the nature of the test, contest, or challenge. The Narrator can also step up one of your existing stress dice when you roll a hitch and they activate it; if you don't have any stress dice, the Narrator can inflict one on you at 6️⃣.

If all of your dice come up as hitches, this is called a botch. The Narrator can inflict 6️⃣ stress of any type on your character and step it up by one for every hitch on the roll past the first. If this ends up being more than 12️⃣ stress (i.e. you rolled five hitches, which is a 6️⃣ stepped up four times) or it steps up existing stress past 12️⃣, then your character is **stressed out**. You don't get 🅿 for a botch.

By default, no character has any stress dice. On occasion, the Narrator might introduce a NC who has already taken stress from something, such as an injured soldier, an afraid child, or an anxious mage.

Recovering Stress

During any scene in which your character spends most of the time sleeping, resting, or otherwise taking care of themselves, all of your stress dice step down by one. At the end of every session, all of your stress dice also step down by one, unless the Narrator decides there's some reason for the stress to persist (such as ending the session on a cliffhanger).

You can also recover stress dice in other ways, usually by seeking out somebody or something to step them down more. Activating one of the Narrator's hitches lets you step down a stress die by one. Other characters can attempt to recover your stress by making a test against an opposition pool based on difficulty dice equal in size to the stress die being recovered. If they succeed, compare their effect die to your stress die. If it's larger, your stress goes away. If it's equal to or less, your stress steps down by one.

Stress can't go lower than 6. If it gets stepped down from 6, it's eliminated.

Stressed Out

If any stress die is ever stepped up past 12, your character is **stressed out** and no longer takes part in the scene they're in. Once the scene is over, and your character is somewhere that they can rest or recover, the stress die goes away entirely and is replaced by a **trauma die** (page 24).

It's possible that you don't get to safety or a place of healing soon enough, in which case the Narrator might say that your character has been lost, died, or suffered some other terrible fate. This doesn't happen often, but if it does, there should be some dramatic send-off to your character. Taking a character permanently out of the game should be a conversation between the player and the Narrator. Tears are shed, friends swear revenge, and songs are sung. Next session, you can start with a new character and a new story.

Pushing Stress Dice

You can choose to have your character shoulder through their pain and suffering and use it as a motivator rather than a setback. To do this, spend a ⓟⓟ and add your stress die to your own dice pool for that test, contest, or challenge, rather than adding it to the opposing dice pool.

Using stress dice in this fashion has an additional cost, however. After the test, contest, or challenge is resolved, the stress die you included in your dice pool is stepped up by one. This may result in your PC being stressed out if the die is stepped up past 12.

Stress and Growth

Any time you fully recover stress, you add the stress die to a pool of dice called your **growth pool**. You add to your growth pool until the end of the session, at which point you can use it to grow your character, modify your SFX and trait ratings, and so forth.

Just taking stress isn't enough for growth; you need to get rid of it. The die you add to your growth pool is equal to the highest die you had of that type of stress; if you take Anxious 10 in the session and later reduce it to 8 and then recover it completely, the growth die you add is 10.

The *Tales of Xadia: The Dragon Prince Roleplaying Game Handbook* will have more information about learning from your hardships.

Trauma

Trauma is like long-term stress. Any time a PC's stress is stepped up past ⑫, they're stressed out of the scene they're in, and they gain 6 trauma of the same type as the stress that just increased. Trauma functions just like stress but is much harder to recover.

During any scene in which your character is stressed out and has taken trauma, additional stress of that same type to your character goes directly to trauma of that type. This won't happen often! You're already out of the scene, after all. But it might occur under some circumstances. Once trauma is stepped up beyond ⑫, your character is permanently out of options—they're dead, hopelessly incoherent, lost to their own psyche, or whatever seems most appropriate.

If the next scene is one in which your PC can be taken care of or allowed to recuperate, your character's stress is reduced to zero, but the trauma remains at the level it was at the end of the previous scene. Recovering trauma requires somebody else to make the tests to help you. This works like recovering stress but the effect die isn't used, as follows:

- **If the player beats the difficulty**, the trauma is stepped down by one.

- **If the player fails to beat the difficulty**, the trauma does not get any better or worse. The player can't try to recover that trauma again until time passes, although another friendly character might try to help.

- **If the player rolls a hitch on a successful attempt to recover trauma**, the Narrator may hand over a ⓟⓟ and inflict stress of a different type than the trauma that's being recovered, starting at 6 (or stepping up by one if the PC already had stress of that type).

- **If the player rolls a hitch on a failed attempt**, the trauma gets worse, stepping up by one for each hitch rolled. If this steps the trauma up past ⑫, that's all, folks.

RUNNING THE GAME

As the Narrator, your role in *Tales of Xadia* is to present the players with exciting opportunities for their characters to engage in heroic feats, charming moments, deadly secrets, and wondrous exploration of the world around them. The Narrator sets the stage, plays the parts of the supporting cast, and helps the players tell their characters' stories.

You may have big ideas about what you want to see happen in the story. Maybe you have some Narrator characters you want to introduce, like a villain or a helpful ally. Perhaps you always wanted to set a story in the human kingdom of Del Bar, with frosty mountaintops and dark woods.

These are all great ideas, but resist the urge to plan out the ending of the story. In *Tales of Xadia*, nobody knows how the ending will happen! The Narrator and the players are playing the game to find out. Who will triumph? Who will despair? Who will become the allies of the PCs? Who will fight them until the very end? The excitement that comes from not knowing the ending is what drives a lot of the game, so avoid trying to write the finale and let it be something you all discover along the way.

To help make that discovery, *Tales of Xadia* uses **scenes** and **sessions.**

Scenes

A scene is just like a scene in the TV show: it has a location, where things happen; it has characters, who interact in the scene in various ways; and it has a situation, which is the answer to "what is this scene about?" The Narrator sets up a scene—who's there, where it takes place, what time of the day it is—which is called **scene framing**.

Imagine a scene in Lux Aurea, where Amaya and Janai are looking at the devastation caused by the corruption of the Sun Forge. This scene is about Amaya and Janai at odds with each other about what to do next. The Narrator frames this scene, and then we see what happens: can Amaya convince her friend to abandon the city? Will Janai get Amaya to agree to help her set things right? This sounds like a contest.

Often, a scene involves an antagonist or danger of some kind. These scenes involve challenges. An example might be a scene where Callum and Ezran have to sneak out of the castle without attracting the attention of the Guard Captain, who's been told to find them both. The location is the castle grounds, and the situation is "Can the boys sneak out without being seen? What happens if they're discovered?"

As the Narrator, you don't have to overthink scenes. Scene framing can be as simple as, "Okay, you've arrived at the camp and the young High Mage of Neolandia is there, waiting for you. He looks worried, maybe even scared. What do you do?"

During a scene, you can usually resolve one or two tests, or perhaps a contest or a challenge. If there's more to the scene than that, consider switching over to another scene with different characters who aren't involved in the current one, and returning to the first group to continue the story with a new scene, possibly in the same place and with the same characters as before.

A scene is over when the Narrator decides that the situation or question in that scene has been resolved satisfactorily or that there's a great point to switch focus to another group. That usually means any contest is over and settled, or the characters have moved on from the location they were in, or a challenge has been overcome—but it can also mean there's a big decision to make and we're leaving it as a cliffhanger to resolve later. It's time to switch to the next scene and see what happens next.

Dramatic Order

When you're the Narrator and you're running a scene, you may sometimes wonder in which order things should happen. This is especially true when there are multiple PCs all doing something! Just like in any episode of the show, the spotlight shifts from character to character, with each of them resolving a test, or being part of a contest, or taking their turn in a challenge.

We call this the dramatic order. It can become something of a juggling act, more of an art than a science, but the best way to manage it is to shine the spotlight on a PC and ask the player, "What do you do?" This player is the dramatic lead. Based on what that player says, maybe you roll dice for a test, or maybe they initiate a contest. If you presented a challenge when you framed the scene, maybe they're the first to take it on. Once their test, contest, or turn in a challenge has been resolved, switch to a different dramatic lead PC and repeat until everyone has had their go.

If a NC in the scene has their own motivations and goals, they should get their own turn in the spotlight as a dramatic lead. Give the players the option to go first, even if the NC is particularly fast or aware, unless you've framed a scene as an ambush or surprise reveal. The NC is part of the dramatic order, and players can choose for the NC to go next once they've had a turn. Challenges always take their own "turn" last, after everyone involved in the challenge has taken a turn.

It's good to think of the session as covering about the same amount of story content and scenes as a TV episode. At the end of every session, set aside some time for bookkeeping and managing growth of the PCs. This is when the players get a chance to make some minor changes to their characters to reflect experience or a change in temperament or outlook.

Narrator Characters

In *Tales of Xadia*, there are many characters who act as the supporting cast of the story for the PCs—the antagonists, friends, and neutral parties along the way. It's your job as Narrator to play all of these people, making the players feel as if there's a living, breathing world around them populated by individuals and groups who have their own goals, dreams, and obsessions.

Some Narrator characters (NCs) are just names, and they don't need game stats like PCs do. They're often little more than part of the location the scene is set in, and if they don't try to get in the PCs' way, they don't need to have traits. If you need to involve them, they might be part of a challenge or a test. When in doubt, assign them two or three traits— 6 , 8 , or 10 —and have them add to a test or challenge when they're in opposition to a PC or add to a PC's dice pool if they're helping, just like stress and assets.

More important and active NCs have attributes, values, distinctions, specialties, and assets just like PCs do. You don't need to have as many of these traits as the PCs have; a NC might only have two distinctions, or no assets. But they must all have die ratings in the six values and the six attributes, at least one distinction that summarizes who or what they are, and the *Hinder* SFX attached to that distinction. Good examples of these NCs include the tracker Corvus and Gren, Amaya's friend and translator.

Sessions

A session is the length of play from when you sit down at your table (or at your computer desks) with your characters to play the game, to when you wrap up and take notes for next time. Most sessions last anywhere from two to four hours, sometimes longer! It depends on the group, and the time of day, or even how much you get done. Sometimes it's good to end a session after a big climactic scene, or you might end it with a cliffhanger or shock reveal that leaves everyone excited for next time.

Every session starts with the players getting a PP, in addition to any PP they had left from last time. You as the Narrator get a fresh pool of PP equal to the number of players. Then, you can either ask the group to do a quick recap of what happened last time and where you left off, or you might do that yourself. Some Narrators use the time between sessions to communicate this sort of information to the players via emails or chat.

Catalysts

A **catalyst** is a special kind of NC that's more pivotal than the others. They're the potential movers and shakers of Xadia, the sort of character that really drives the PCs to be great themselves, either in opposition to them or mentored by them. Examples of *The Dragon Prince* characters that could be called catalysts include Lord Viren of Katolis, the Archdragons, and Khessa, the Queen of the Sunfire Elves.

A catalyst has many of the same traits as an active NC— distinctions, values, specialties, and assets—but in place of their attributes they have a **catalyst trait die** that usually starts out as a 🔵8. Use this trait in any dice pool the catalyst puts together. During play this die steps up after some important or significant interaction with the PCs. The most common example of this is a contest, either in direct competition with the catalyst or with one of the catalyst's agents or proxies, or a challenge, with some scheme or problem that the catalyst has created for the PCs to deal with. Eventually the catalyst die reaches a 🔵12 and can go no higher, and at that point this NC is fully realized as either an ally of the PCs or a bitter foe.

A catalyst's values may also change as a result of a contest. Failing a contest steps down the value used in the contest, stepping up another value of the PCs choice. Succeeding in a contest steps up that value and steps down another value of the Narrator's choice. Alternately, the PCs might ask for the opposite to happen, especially if it's their goal to step up the catalyst's value. This represents PCs directly influencing the catalyst's views and feelings.

In some tales, PCs might spend an entire session never meeting a catalyst face to face while still engaged in a challenge against the catalyst's servants. The Narrator can always choose to frame a scene in which such a confrontation occurs, and adjust the catalyst's values and catalyst die to account for it, even though the catalyst was only present in spirit.

Narrators should feel free to create a catalyst whole cloth in the middle of a tale if the choices of their PCs seem to will one to life, or perhaps upgrade a minor NC to catalyst status.

The Narrator and Plot Points

The Narrator keeps track of plot points for their own NCs, who share a single reserve supply of them; at the beginning of the session, the reserve is either equal to the number of players or, if greater, it's the amount of (PP) left over from last session. This reserve is used to do the same things for NCs as players use them for.

Earning Plot Points as the Narrator

Narrators can add more (PP) to their personal reserve supply by:

- using their Narrator character SFX;
- giving in to contests with players;
- having players activate opportunities rolled on the opposition pool.

Spending Plot Points as the Narrator

Plot points can be spent by Narrators on their own NCs to do all the same things that PCs can do:

- activate SFX;
- create temporary assets;
- include more results or more effect dice;
- share assets.

Narrator characters don't tend to share assets very often. To do any of these things, the Narrator spends (PP) from their personal reserve of points.

The Narrator can of course give players (PP) to activate hitches or for good roleplaying, but these come from a limitless supply.

GLOSSARY

Asset
Helpful traits that you may include in your dice pool when appropriate.

Attribute
A trait set of basic areas of innate ability: Agility, Awareness, Influence, Intellect, Spirit, and Strength.

Beat the Difficulty
Getting a total that's higher than the difficulty set by the opposition's dice roll.

Botch
A critical failure. All your dice came up 1. Total zero. In addition to the normal result of the failed roll, the Narrator may also step up or add stress to the PC without giving the player a 🅿🅿.

Catalyst
A Narrator character who represents a powerful, influential, or pivotal character in the story and who might become either an ally or an antagonist depending on the choices of the PCs.

Catalyst Die
A trait possessed by catalysts that replaces attributes for all dice rolls. Starts at 🔵8 and can step up during play.

Challenge
A roll of the dice to overcome a problem, threat, or obstacle in as short a time as you can.

Character Journal
The place that holds all of your game stats and information.

Contest
A roll of the dice to settle the outcome of two or more conflicting goals set by characters in a scene.

Dark Mage
A magic-using character who invokes spells using the magic within creatures, usually killing them.

Dice Pool
All of the dice you get to roll when you make a test or engage in a contest or challenge.

Difficulty Dice
A pair of dice that represent how hard your test or challenge will be.

Distinction
A trait that represents a character's vocation, kindred, and quirks in the game and differentiates them from other PCs and NCs.

Effect Die
A die selected from one of the dice not used to generate a total, which is then used to represent how effective the outcome is. Usually the largest size die remaining.

Give In
When called to make a roll, usually in a contest, you instead choose not to roll and accept the consequences on your own terms.

Group
All of the characters that the players at the table are playing (in the tale), or all of the players and the GM (outside of the tale).

Heroic Success
A total that's 5 or more points higher than the difficulty set by the opposing roll.

Hitch
A die that came up as 1 when you rolled for a test, contest, or challenge. The Narrator may give a player a 🅿🅿 to turn a hitch into stress. Additional hitches in the same roll step up the stress.

Interfere
An interfering character spends a 🅿🅿 to enter a contest that's already underway, hoping to assist one of the contestants or beat both of them.

Narrator
The person who facilitates the game, presents the session, and plays the parts of every other person and thing in the world of Xadia.

NC
Narrator characters, which are characters run by the Narrator.

Outcome
What happens after the dice are rolled and all game effects are decided, shaping the direction the story takes.

Player Character (PC)
A character played by a player, one of the stars of the show.

Plot Point (PP)
A resource earned by getting invested in the game and taking risks and spent to alter the outcome of tests and contests, or to do other cool things.

Result
The number that comes up on any given die after it's been rolled.

Rune Mage
A magic-using character, usually an elf, who invokes spells through the use of runes empowered by a primal source.

Scene
A unit of time that basically covers a series of connected tests and beats in a story, usually in one location, and usually with one set of characters.

Scene Framing
When the Narrator starts a new scene by explaining when, where, and who is present in the scene, and often why.

Session
All the gameplay that takes place in one sitting around the table or online, roughly equivalent to an episode from a TV series in story length. Multiple sessions may be required to complete a tale.

Setting the Difficulty
Generating a total on the dice that indicates how difficult it is for the other side to succeed at what they want to do.

SFX
A special effect that allows a player to influence the story in some way.

Specialty
A trait that represents narrow areas of focus.

Step Down
Replacing a die with the next lowest die size, i.e., a 6 becomes a 4 .

Step Up
Replacing a die with the next highest die size, i.e., a 6 becomes a 8 .

Stress Die
A type of acquired trait that represents harm and hinders action. Includes AFRAID, ANGRY, INSECURE, CORRUPTED, EXHAUSTED, and INJURED.

Stressed Out
When one of your stress dice is stepped up past the 12 rating, you are no longer able to act in the current scene.

Tale
A story set within the World of Xadia, with a specific set of starting situations and one or more catalysts, but no fixed ending. Might take multiple sessions to finish.

Test
A use of the dice to determine the outcome of an objective or goal, opposed by difficulty dice.

Total
The number you get when you add at least two of your dice together after rolling your dice pool. Usually, your two highest rolling dice results added together.

Trait
Game stats that are rated by dice of various sizes, usually a name and a die rating, usually included in a dice pool, and belonging to a trait set.

Trauma Die
A form of longer-lasting, more serious stress die.

Value
A type of trait that represents deeply held beliefs or attitudes. Includes DEVOTION, GLORY, JUSTICE, LIBERTY, MASTERY, and TRUTH.