



STORY FORGE

ACT, ROLL, REACT, REPEAT



GAME MASTER HANDBOOK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.	4
SETUP	6
CHARACTERS.	12
GAMEPLAY.	20
GLOSSARY	36

HEY, THANKS!

Special shout-out to our families and friends for being patient play-test subjects, as well as Adam Davis, Adam Johns, and Sarah Roman for their professional insights on gaming and childhood development.

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INTRODUCTION

HAIL & WELL MET!

Story Forge is a simple fantasy role-playing game (RPG) for kids and players who are new to the genre. The premise of RPGs is cooperative storytelling: **players** create and act as characters in a world of adventures, puzzles, battles, and more, guided by a Game Master (GM).

RPGs are inherently beneficial for social growth. Working toward a common goal promotes communication, empathy, and impulse control. Relative to other RPGs, *Story Forge* is light on rules because the main goal is to provide a framework for positive social interaction and creative teamwork. **As GM, you will want to read through the handbook and prepare a few things before playing your first session.**

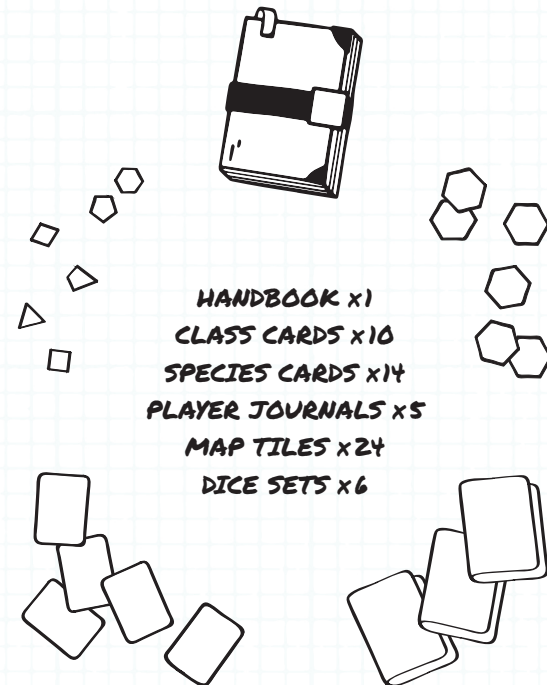


02 SETUP

PREPARE FOR ADVENTURE

Aside from the game components, all you need to provide for your game session is 1-5 players. For the most immersive environment, have everyone sit around a table and put away any personal tech.

Everyone needs a set of dice, and each of the players will also need a journal for tracking character progress, actions, and adventure notes.



CREATE YOUR WORLD

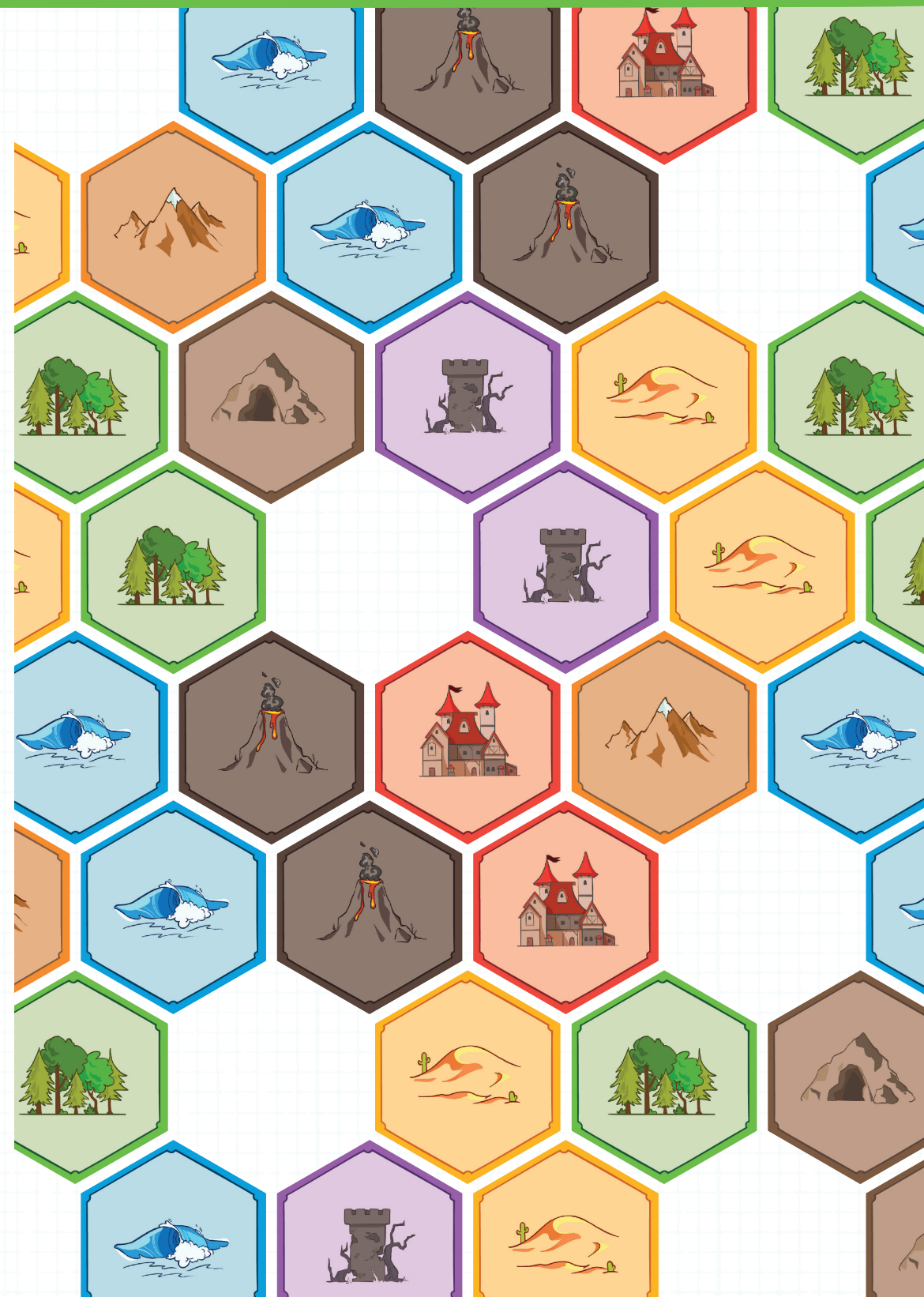
The first step of any new session is to imagine the setting and atmosphere: you are generating the world in which your players' adventures will take place. Every GM serves as the architect and referee of their game world. You can pull ideas from other games, create something original, or even adapt locations from your favorite books and movies.

When creating your world, think about the sort of things your players may encounter. Is the settlement they reach a village, town, city, or even a metropolis? Does it have a king, a president, a dictator? Is it technologically advanced? Other considerations include names, languages, cultural customs, government, other planes of existence, professions, notable historical events, and/or the prevalence of magic in society.

Story Forge includes a set of various map tiles you can use to help visualize your world. The terrain options include desert, water, forest, mountain, volcano, cave, settlement, and ruins. You decide how much in-game distance each tile covers, and in this way you can customize your map size.

ASK YOUR PLAYERS!

You can either design a map before you start playing or work with your players to build it out. Did any of your players' characters grow up in a sea-side city, or perhaps live in the mountains? The story you create with your players can help you fill in blank areas of the map as you go.





SHAPE YOUR STORY

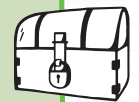
Adventures are ongoing stories: they can last for just one session or they can span over multiple meet-ups. In addition to **combat**, your game should incorporate opportunities for social interaction, exploration, and conflict in such a way that meets your players' specific needs. If you have a quiet player, for example, you can help them get into the groove of role-playing with light conversation. One thing to remember is that all good stories have a beginning, middle, and end, even if you're doing a single-session adventure.

The first scene of your story sets the tone and helps ease the players into role-play. Where are they? What is happening around them? How did they get there? Have they met before? Starting with an actionable scenario, such as combat or an escape, may be helpful for engaging new players.

If you play through an adventure over the course of more than one session with your players, you will need to establish how time works. Players have **action** limits that reset each day. Is a day equal to one session, or is it any time the players find themselves with a lull in the action and decide to have their characters go to sleep? The relative length of a day is up to you as the GM.

THE REAL PRIZE IS FRIENDSHIP TREASURE

A good adventure rewards the characters for their effort and accomplishments. Maybe the party finds a stash of treasure or potions, or someone gives them a powerful artifact. What would your players enjoy? Be creative!





03 CHARACTERS

PLAYER CHARACTERS

At the beginning your adventure, each player will imagine and create their own character. Characters are made up in two parts: one part game statistics, and one part imagination. A player-controlled character may also be referred to as a **PC**.

Have everyone consider their own character's **background**, personality, and appearance. Role-play will be easier and more fun if players know where their character came from, what motivates them, and how they present themselves to the world. If anyone is stuck for ideas, have them answer some of the prompts below for inspiration.

PUT YOUR BACK(STORY) INTO IT

What is your name? How old are you?

What was it like where you grew up?

What was your job before adventuring?

What is your family like? Your friends?

Who is somebody you care about deeply?

What makes you happy? Upset? Sad?

Why did you become an adventurer?

What are five words that describe you?

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

What is something you always wear or carry?

What are two things you're afraid of?

What hobby is important to you?

Do you have scars? How did you get them?

Describe your favorite outfit in detail.



CLASSES

Players will begin building their characters by choosing a **class**. Each of the five classes (Warrior, Defender, Ranger, Rogue, and Mage) has unique skills, **actions**, and weapons. Have the players consider their ideal strengths, weaknesses, and fighting style. Would they rather cast magic spells from a distance, or rush into combat with a battle-axe? Perhaps they prefer to sneak in the shadows or heal their teammates.

Each class has two cards: one with stats and weapons, and one with a list of actions by level. Players will keep their class cards during gameplay and store them in their journal.

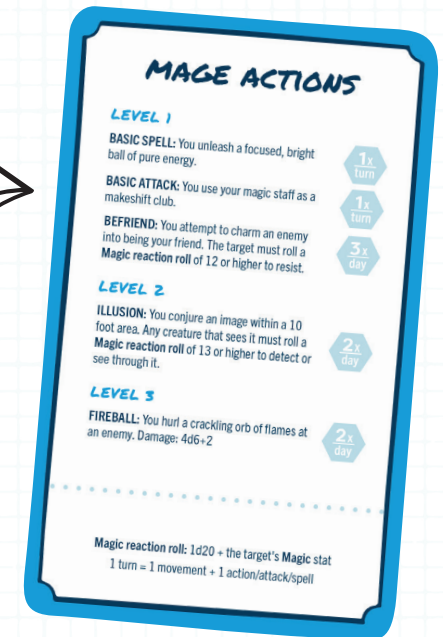


HEALTH: A character's energy reserve; players should keep track of temporary damage in their journals

ARMOR: A character's defense; the number an opponent rolls against when attacking your character, to determine if the attack hits

STATS: Strengths and weaknesses in five ability categories

WEAPONS: Unique gear for each class



LEVEL: Players start at level 1 and advance as they gain experience, keeping skills from previous levels

ACTIONS: Skills, attacks, or spells unique to each class

PER TURN VS PER DAY: Actions have limited use per turn or day

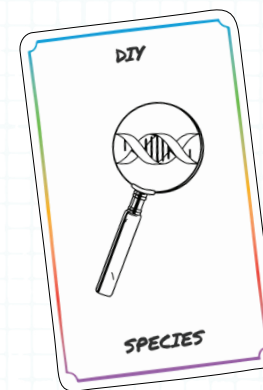


SPECIES

Next, players should choose a **species** for their character. Each fantasy race has a unique **perk**, or bonus skill, that can be used during the game. The six species include humans, moon elves, sun elves, orcs, fauns, and dryads. This choice contributes to a character's identity! It can help establish appearance, personality, or particular talents. Species cards provide art and general features for inspiration, but players should consider and describe any distinct traits they want their character to have.

FILL IN THE BLANK

If players would rather create their own species, they can use the "DIY" species card template. You should work with them to come up with a perk.



NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

A non-player character, or **NPC**, is a character played by the GM. They are an essential part of the game experience. Not only is joining the role-play a fun way for GMs to interact, it provides a creative way give the players goals or guidance when they aren't sure what to do. Think of what an NPC can do or say that would be useful to the party, whether it's a big clue to a mystery the players are solving or a small tip about where to find the local blacksmith.

Most NPCs only need one or two qualities to be memorable. Try describing something unusual about their mannerisms or appearance. Character voices are also highly encouraged! More detailed NPCs might be needed if they play a large role in your **campaign**, such as an ongoing antagonist or a mentor for your group. Consider their backstory, ideals, appearance, abilities, mannerisms, knowledge, and flaws. Perhaps they have a big secret they're keeping from the players. An NPC can even be a monster, and you should treat their character creation the same as you would a humanoid NPC.

An NPC doesn't need combat statistics unless you think your players might fight them. When you give an NPC stats, you can reference the classes and levels that are available to your players or you can make up your own. You should use the numbers -1, 0, 0, 1, and 2 unless you want the character to be much stronger or weaker than your players.

There is an optional template in the back of the book for creating and keeping track of your NPCs.

When it comes to social interaction, every character has a goal or motivation in mind. Maybe they want to avoid fighting, win someone's trust, or gain information. Players can learn real-life social skills from their interactions with NPCs. Not all encounters will go smoothly, and not every NPC needs to like or trust the PCs!

EXAMPLE NPC ROLES

<i>Bartender</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Sheriff</i>
<i>Criminal</i>	<i>Noble</i>	<i>Soldier</i>
<i>Innkeeper</i>	<i>Psychic</i>	<i>Urchin</i>



EXAMPLE INTERACTION TRAITS

<i>Angry</i>	<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Rude</i>
<i>Arrogant</i>	<i>Gullible</i>	<i>Suspicious</i>
<i>Curious</i>	<i>Honest</i>	<i>Quiet</i>





GAMEPLAY

HOW TO PLAY

Now that you have a world and a rich cast of characters, it's time to set the scene and let the players explore. Describe the characters' environment so they know where they are and what is going on around them. For example, if the story begins in a tavern: Does it appear well kept? How crowded is it? Is there anything on the tables? Are there any doors or stairs? Once the world is established, gameplay follows 4 basic steps: act, roll, react, and repeat.

ACT: The players, acting as their characters, describe what they want to do. There is no turn order to follow except during combat, so everyone contributes to the story in real time.

ROLL: If characters attempt to do something challenging, they roll dice to determine success or failure.

REACT: You control what happens in the world in response to players' actions and the outcome of die rolls. The players also improvise accordingly.

REPEAT: Continue acting, rolling, and reacting to move the adventure forward! The length of an adventure is up to you and your players.



KNOW YOUR DICE

Each player in *Story Forge* uses a set of six polyhedral dice, which have varying numbers of sides. The different dice are written as “d” followed by the number of sides: d20, d12, d10, d8, d6, and d4. When you need to roll, the rules will tell you how many dice and which type to use. For example, “2d10+2” means you should roll two 10-sided dice, add them together, and then add 2 to the total.



20-SIDED DIE = d20

12-SIDED DIE = d12



10-SIDED DIE = d10

8-SIDED DIE = d8



6-SIDED DIE = d6

4-SIDED DIE = d4



THE d20

Among all the dice, the d20 plays an important role. Does a character's attack hit or miss? Can they dodge an avalanche of rocks falling from above? Will an NPC see through another character's lie? When the outcome of a situation is uncertain, the GM or player should roll a d20 to determine whether the action succeeds or fails as intended. The three main uses of a d20 are **stat checks**, **reaction rolls**, and **attack rolls**.

To use a d20, roll the die and add the relevant modifier from one of your five class ability stats. Then compare your total to a target number. If your total equals or exceeds the target number, the roll is a success. If it does not, the roll is a failure. See pages 26-29 for more info and examples.



HOW TO ROLL

The players should roll their dice in plain view of everyone else. Sometimes you may need to encourage players not to be secretive with their rolls. If something interferes with a roll, such as the die falling off the table, have the player re-roll.

As the GM, you have the option to keep your rolls hidden from the players. Rolling behind a screen or folder allows you to fudge results if, for example, a player is about run out of health points and you want to change your result to a miss. Alternatively, if you roll in front of the players, they will know you're playing impartially. The drawback of this option is not being able to fudge the outcome as needed.

THE TWO TIMES A GM SHOULD ALWAYS HIDE THEIR ROLLS

- 1 If a character wouldn't know for sure whether they succeeded; ex. knowing if someone has seen through their lie
- 2 If a player shouldn't know what's going on; ex. an invisible NPC is nearby

WHEN TO ROLL

Any time a character attempts a task, you can call for a stat check and pick a number for it to succeed. Rolling dice can provide an element of randomness to keep things from becoming too predictable. Some GMs like to have players roll for a lot of things. However, it is recommended that you save the majority of rolling for combat. Instead of constantly making checks during gameplay, have your players describe their actions. Work with their creative solutions and reward imaginative ideas!

FAILURE = OPPORTUNITY

Only have players roll for something if it's ok for them to fail - and often it is! Letting players roll and fail can lead to new, interesting results.

If something your players want their character to do is impossible, don't have them roll for it; just tell them they need to come up with another solution. Similarly, if a task is so easy there shouldn't be any chance of failure, you can simply tell them they've done it. Remember: the dice don't run your game. Much like the rules, they're just tools to help.



STAT CHECKS

When a player wants to attempt an action, you can either choose to let them succeed without rolling or you can tell them to roll a stat check. Stat checks determine whether or not a character performs an action as intended, and each check is modified by the ability stat most relevant to the type of action. These can happen during social interactions and combat alike.

You can decide whether a player may re-roll a failed check, or whether other characters may help them with it. Depending on the situation, it may be a task a player could eventually succeed at with enough time, or it could be impossible once they have failed at it.

ABILITY STATS + EXAMPLES

STRENGTH: Physical force and athleticism;
ex. hit, push, pull, lift, carry

MAGIC: Supernatural power; ex. cast or
detect spells, read magic texts

CHARM: Social influence; ex. intimidate
deceive, perform, persuade

WITS: Intelligence and perceptiveness;
ex. investigate, reason, remember

AGILITY: Dexterity and reflexes; ex. jump,
balance, sneak, dodge, steal

STAT CHECK DIFFICULTY

VERY EASY = 1-5

EASY = 6-10

MEDIUM = 11-15

HARD = 16-20

VERY HARD = 20+



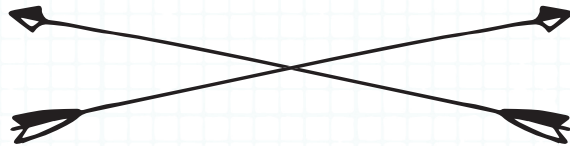
The GM decides the number needed for a stat check to succeed, which is called the difficulty class (**DC**). For example, if a player wants to search a room, you could have them roll a DC 10 Wits check to find a secret door, and a DC 15 Wits check to find the lever that opens it. In most cases, difficulty can be broken into the number ranges shown above.

If a character wants to try doing something that is in direct opposition to another character's efforts, you can have both players make a stat check. You decide whether they check the same ability stat or not. For example, a character trying to steal from someone would use Agility, and the character being stolen from would use Wits to see if they notice.

REACTION ROLLS

Stat checks can also be rolled by a player in response to something that has happened. This type of check is called a reaction roll. The reaction roll works like a reflex, giving the character a chance to avoid harm.

A reaction roll differs from a general stat check in that it is a response to another person's activity (versus a deliberate task a character wants to accomplish). If a bridge collapses under a PC, for example, you could have them roll an Agility check to see if they grab onto a ledge fast enough. Certain special attacks on the action cards specify when an enemy must make a reaction roll to avoid being hit.



ATTACK ROLLS

When a player wants to attack an NPC or a monster, they make an attack roll. The target number for a successful attack roll is the opponent's armor stat. Similarly, when an enemy attacks a player, they roll against the PC's armor stat. After an attack succeeds, then the player may roll for the damage.

If a player rolls a natural 20 (see also: critical success) on their attack roll, they may roll twice as many damage dice as normal. For example, on an attack that normally does $2d6+2$ damage, it will now do $4d6+2$ damage.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

As the GM, you determine the consequences for checks, attack rolls, and reaction rolls. This is usually straightforward: if a player's attack hits, they deal damage, and if someone fails a saving throw, they take damage. But there are lots of small narrative things you can do to make this interesting.

Describing *how* characters succeed or fail is more fun than just saying "you fail." In addition, make sure players only fail forward. This means failure doesn't lead to a dead end in the adventure. Instead, it is just an obstacle or setback that alters the situation. For example, did a PC fail to convince a guard to let them go free? Now they must escape from the authorities or break out of prison. Failure changes and shapes the story; it doesn't end it.

In *Story Forge*, there are critical successes and failures based on natural die rolls. A natural roll is the result before adding or subtracting any stat modifiers.

CRITICAL SUCCESS: When a player rolls a natural 20, their character automatically succeeds (in a spectacular way) at whatever they were attempting to do

CRITICAL FAILURE: When a player rolls a natural 1, their character automatically fails (in an actively detrimental way) at whatever they were trying to

Critical successes and failures are a chance to exaggerate results in your narrative! For example, if a character attempts to sneak into a house but rolls a natural 1 on an Agility check, they might fall down some stairs and alert the residents. Or, if a character needs information from a stubborn NPC and rolls a natural 20 on Charm, the NPC might give them extra clues.

COMBAT

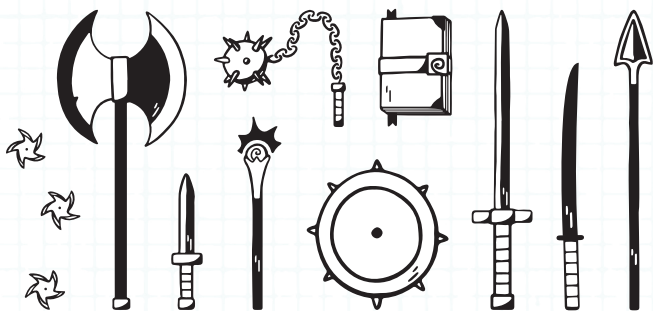
Combat, unlike social encounters, has more structure. It is separated into turns and rounds.

TURN: One action (skill, attack, spell, or perk) plus one movement (any motion described by the player and deemed feasible by the GM)

ROUND: A unit of time during combat that lasts until each player has completed a full turn; repeat until combat ends

Turn order is determined one of two ways. One option is to have everyone roll a d20 and take turns in descending order, re-rolling any ties. Alternatively, consider who would be closest to the fighting based on the scene and take turns clockwise around the table from there.

Players and NPCs may do other mundane things during their turn instead of taking an action from their card, such as opening a door, swallowing a potion, or handing an item to an ally. You can also have players roll stat checks during combat if they attempt challenging, non-fighting actions, like reasoning with an enemy or breaking down a door.



DAMAGE

Health represents a character's durability and energy reserve; a higher health number means they are tougher and harder to take down. When a character takes damage, the number is subtracted from their health. This has little to no effect on them until their health hits 0. Players can track temporary damage for their own character in their journal. If a player rolls a critical success on an attack roll, the player

If a PC drops to 0 health, they are knocked unconscious. They can regain consciousness in one of two ways: either they are healed and regain some health, or the day ends and all actions and health are reset. If the party decides to sleep or recuperate in the story, you can decide whether or not this rest period restores an unconscious party member. If so, you may also decide how many health points they regain.

In *Story Forge*, death is an optional game mechanic. You choose whether monsters and enemy NPCs are killed when they hit 0 health, rather than being knocked unconscious. This can depend on your goals for the story and players, as well as the players' maturity.



DICING WITH DEATH

If a PC is hit with enough damage to reduce their temporary health to -10, their character will die. Permanent death should only be used if a player asks for it or you are playing with an older, more serious group.

LEVELING UP

To level up, your players must complete at least five tasks/checkpoints. You can increase this requirement if you want to make it more challenging. Checkpoints include a combination of in-game and real-life tasks that focus on personal growth and interpersonal skills. You can use the ideas below to get started, and eventually create unique checkpoints based on your players' individual goals, strengths, and weaknesses.

IN-GAME CHECKPOINTS

- Reach a peaceful resolution to a conflict
- Help a teammate accomplish something
- Have a conversation with an NPC
- Use a character voice for a full session
- Finish a battle/solve a puzzle

REAL-LIFE CHECKPOINTS

- Pay a kindness forward
- Find something in common with someone
- Help clean up after a session
- Practice active listening
- Calmly work through a negative emotion

GM TIPS

- 1** The GM always has the last say in any question or dispute. If a question of rules comes up, make a fair decision to the best of your ability; you can always revisit the issue later.
- 2** Establish good table manners and habits from the beginning. How do you want your players conduct themselves at the table? This might include phone usage, punctuality, etc.
- 3** Encourage role-play and character voices, but don't force anything.
- 4** Use improv phrases like "yes, and" or "no, but" to progress the story without railroading players' ideas.
- 5** If you notice any of your players getting frustrated, stressed, anxious, or generally struggling to focus, try taking a subtle pause. For example, you can recap what the characters are doing or check in on health.
- 6** Players won't always be able to make it to a session. Set up expectations for what will happen to a PC if a player can't come. For example:

Assume the role of the PC yourself. Avoid doing any permanent damage or making significant changes.

Invent a reason for the PC not to be there, but leave a way for the character to rejoin the party later.

Suspend disbelief, and have the character disappear with no effect. They don't deal or take any damage. When the player returns, everyone acts as if the PC was always there.

SAMPLE GAMEPLAY

GM: The dirt path you're walking on takes a winding turn, and the lush forest you've been wandering through falls away. Up ahead, surrounded by deadened trees and a tall wooden fence, is a small town. The gate leading through the fence into the town appears to be tightly shut. There's a simple lookout tower where a guard might stand and greet travellers, but there's no one there. In fact, the entire forest is silent, and you don't even hear the sound of people coming from the village.

TRAVIS: *(playing Graven):* I want to look at the trees. Why are they all dead here by the town, but not back in the forest?

SAMMI: *(playing Lyra):* I want to go see if I can open the gate. I wonder if it's locked.

GM: Ok, let's start with Graven. You want to investigate the trees?

TRAVIS: Yeah, I want to see if there's any obvious reason for them all to be dead like this. It's pretty suspicious.

GM: Roll a Wits check to see if you notice anything.

TRAVIS: I got a 5.

GM: All you know about the trees is they're definitely dead. Lyra, roll a Strength check to try opening the gate.

SAMMI: I got a 14!

GM: With a mighty yank, you pull open the gate. It wasn't locked, but it was difficult to open because the doors are heavy and the hinges are rusty. Inside, the village is silent and looks abandoned. What do you do?

TRAVIS: I rush in!

SAMMI: I follow Graven.

GM: You guys rush into the village. As you make your way through the gate, Graven, you set off a tripwire. Make a Grace reaction roll!

TRAVIS: Ok. I got a 16!

GM: As you stumble over the trap, you notice a volley of arrows flying toward you! You tuck and roll, narrowly avoiding being pelted by the arrows.

TRAVIS: That was close! I want to look around the village.

SAMMI: Me too! I have my throwing stars ready, just in case.

GM: The village still appears to be empty. You see a few dirty, run-down shops: an inn, a general store, even a small blacksmith forge.

The GM rolls dice where the players cannot see them.

SAMMI: Oh no, why are you rolling dice?

GM: You'll find out! Lyra, you notice something flicker from the corner of your eye, but when you turn your head, you don't see anything...



GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

ACTION: Skill, attack, spell, perk, or other described activity (not to be confused with simple motion; see **MOVEMENT**)

ADVENTURE: A single challenge, often short enough to be completed in one session; often makes up one smaller piece of larger story with a beginning and an end, but may be able to stand alone

ARMOR: A character's defense; the number an opponent rolls against when attacking another character, to determine if the attack hits

ATTACK ROLL: A roll that decides whether or not an attack successfully hits a target

CAMPAIGN: A longer story told by connecting a number of shorter adventures (or sometimes, one single long adventure can be called a campaign); often requires more than two or three gaming sessions to complete

CLASS: The area of expertise, role, or job for a character; in *Story Forge*, the classes include Warrior, Defender, Ranger, Rogue, and Mage

COMBAT: When players engage in a fight/battle; this is when turn order comes into effect

BACKGROUND: The backstory or previous occupation for a character, usually a **PC** or **NPC**

DAMAGE: Any harm that comes to characters is expressed as damage; players should keep track of temporary damage in their journals

DIFFICULTY CHECK (DC): The minimum number a player must meet or exceed to succeed in an action

GAME MASTER (GM): The person running the game; serves as architect, storyteller, and referee; sets the scene and controls NPCs

HEALTH: A number used to track how much damage a character can take in combat before collapsing; damage subtracts from the total until a character reaches zero

LEVEL: Players start at level 1 and advance as they gain experience, keeping skills from previous levels

MOVEMENT: Motion used to get from one point to another, (not to be confused with using a skill, attack, spell, or perk; see **ACTION**)

NON-PLAYER CHARACTER (NPC): An in-game persona created and controlled by the GM

PERK: Unique bonus skill given to each species

PLAYER: The physical person playing the game; i.e. not the character they play

PLAYER CHARACTER (PC): An in-game persona created and controlled by a player

REACTION ROLL: Sometimes known as a saving throw; a check rolled by a player in response to something (most often, potentially harmful) that has happened

ROLE-PLAY: The act of taking on the role of a character; often involves speaking in first person from their perspective

ROUND: A unit of time during combat that lasts until each player has completed a full turn (see **TURN**); rounds repeat until combat ends

RPG: A game where the players control fictional characters that undertake quests in an imaginary world

SESSION: A period of time when the GM and players meet to play the game

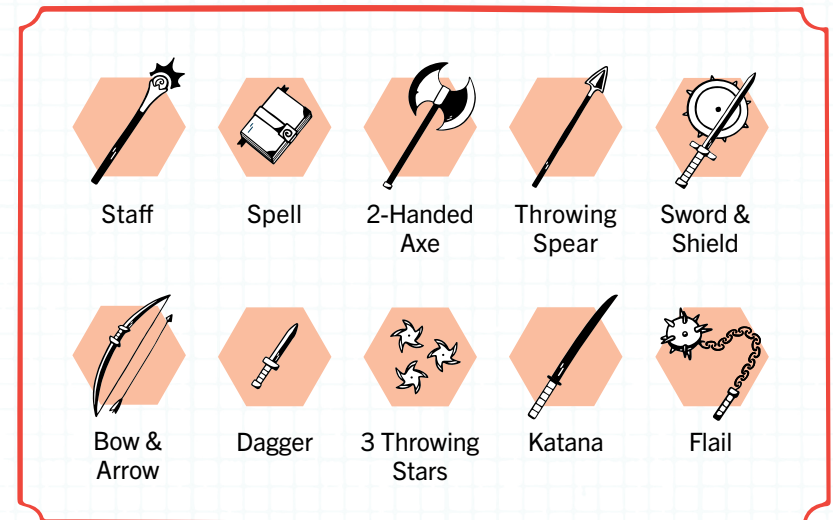
SPECIES: The biological makeup of a character; in *Story Forge*, the species include humans, moon elves, sun elves, orcs, fauns, dryads, and a create-your-own option; each species has a unique **PERK**

STATS: Strengths and weaknesses in five ability categories, which are Strength, Magic, Charm, Wits, and Agility

STAT CHECK: A roll that determines if a player performs an action as intended, modified by the stat most relevant to the type of action; these can happen during combat and regular gameplay

TURN: One action (skill, attack, spell, or perk) plus one movement (any motion described by the player and deemed feasible by the GM); turns add up to a **ROUND**


WEAPON: Unique gear for each class




PRINTABLE NPC TEMPLATES

NPC STATS

Name: _____ Species: _____



Health



Armor

Strength

Magic

Charm


Wits

Agility

Weapons & Damage:

NPC ACTIONS

LEVEL 1

BASIC ATTACK: Using one of your weapons, you attack an enemy. See weapons for damage. 

LEVEL 2

LEVEL 3

1 turn = 1 movement + 1 action/attack/spell

