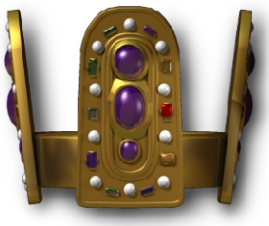
Blade & Crown



NJW Games

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Introduction

Blade & Crown is a role-playing game. You probably know what one of those is, right? This game is obscure enough that I suspect anyone who finds it already knows the basics of RPGs. But if not, write me e-mail at rachel_kronick@bladeandcrown.com and I'll happily explain for you.

There are lots of other fantasy RPGs out there, so why this one? Because, like so many others, I wanted my own perfect fantasy RPG, the one that would meet *my* standards. What, specifically, did I want in a game? A game that:

- Uses a moderate number of ten-sided dice for most rolls with a roll-high mechanic
- Encourages interesting actions and generates evocative detail naturally through the mechanics of the game
- Is 'realistic', in the 1980s sense of the term: relatively gritty, with deadly combat and a good (though not perfect) degree of historical feel
- Is immersive, helping the players get into their roles and helping the GM breathe life into the gameworld
- Approximates an early medieval level of technology and social structure, but isn't sexist or racist
- Assumes player characters are adventurous — meaning the system can't be so gritty and dangerous that no one would want to do anything interesting
- Tends towards more complete than less, with pre-existing rules to cover most common game situations
- Gives players, as well as GMs, some control over the narrative
- Presents magic that is mysterious, somewhat unpredictable and non-formulaic
- Allows anyone to learn any skill, but still has room for innate talent

Blade & Crown does not include a pre-designed game world. There are already many compatible game worlds on the market, and I didn't want to tie this game system too strongly to any particular world. Though there are many snippets of setting throughout the book, these are intended only as examples, not as canon. This system should hopefully work with any fantasy game world that is magic-rare and approximates early medieval European technology levels.

As with all games, it's important to remember that you and your group are the final arbiters of how things should work. Slavish conformity to the rules as written may result in a game that isn't very fun, or otherwise doesn't do what you want it to. Of course, I've tried to make the rules as good as I can, but you are the final judge of what works for you and what doesn't.

I hope you have fun with it!

Rachel Kronick
Minneapolis, 2012

Example of play

Three people are playing: Sam, who's playing Husid, a mage; Claire, who's playing Varika, a forester; and Terry, the GM. The two player characters are investigating an abandoned bandit hideout in the middle of a forest. They suspect it may contain an important book stolen from their patron, Countess Liran.

Terry: "This is clearly a camp. There are a few lean-tos scattered around, and a few different fire circles. The ground is very muddy."

Claire: "I want to see if I can find any tracks in the mud."

Terry: "The mud is pretty fresh, but there are all kinds of animal tracks, leaves, twigs and other stuff on the ground, so you get no modifier overall. You can use Tracking and Perception."

Claire: "My Tracking is 2 and my Perception is 2, so I roll 4 dice total. Plus the Variation Die." *She rolls four ten-siders and one twelve-sider, the Variation Die.* "I got a 2, 4, 5 and 9. My highest roll is 9, so I did it."

Terry: "What did you get on the Variation Die?"

Claire: "Oh, yeah, the twelve-sider. It was a 7."

Terry: "In this case, the 7 means something about time... Let's say that you do it with speed. You manage to find the tracks surprisingly quickly."

Sam: "So where do they lead?"

Terry: "They seem to go out of the camp in three directions: north, southeast and south."

Sam: "Which ones seem most recent?"

Claire: "Can I tell?"

Terry: "Yeah, it's easy for you to tell. The most recent ones go south."

Claire: "Can I tell *how* recent they are? Like, days or hours?"

Terry: "That'll take a skill roll."

Claire: "Same skill and characteristic?"

Terry: "Yep, but this time, it's harder — you have a -2 modifier."

Claire rolls the dice: 4, 6, 10 and 10, with a 12 on the Variation Die.

Claire: "I got two 10s, so that makes an 11, right? With the -2 modifier, I still have a 9, which is a success. And my Variation Die was 12."

Terry: "A 12 on the Variation Die means you get a high-quality result. You not only know when they left — three days ago — you know that there are three or four sets of tracks."

Claire and Sam argue for a few minutes what to do with this information, but decide to search the camp more before following any tracks.

Sam: "Can you describe the camp a little more?"

Terry: "Sure. There are about a half-dozen lean-tos, with about three fire circles. There's one big pile of sticks and twigs for fuel. You see a few broken clay jars scattered around; they smell of liquor. A little way off into the woods, there's a refuse pile."

Sam: "Is there any sign of our lady's book?"

Terry: "What are you using to search?"

Sam: "I don't have Foraging or Concealment or anything, so I guess I'm just using Perception. My Perception is 1."

Terry: "Okay, it's not a trained-only task, so you can attempt it without a skill."

Claire: "I'm going to try, too. My Perception is 2, and I've got Foraging 1."

Terry: "Okay, both of you roll."

Claire rolls her dice; the dice come up 2, 4 and 4, so her roll result is 5. Her Variation Die reads 8. Sam rolls his one ten-sided die plus the Variation Die. On the D10, he rolls an 8, and his Variation Die comes up 2.

Sam: "I got an 8, and my Variation Die was 2."

Claire: "I only got a 5, and 4 on my Variation Die."

Terry: "It was standard difficulty, so Sam, you got a Stalemate. You do it with style, though, from your Variation Die result. So... You don't find the book, but you do stir up several ominous pieces of something curled and burnt — maybe parchment — from the fire pit."

Claire: "Oh crap, don't tell me they *burned* the book?"

Sam: "Can I narrate something stylish to get a +1?"

Terry: "Sure."

Sam: "I stab one of the curls with my knife and give it a quick sniff, then say 'Bandits are such poor critics'." *Claire and Terry laugh.*

Terry: "Okay, Sam, that turns your 8 into a 9, which is a success. You notice that the charred bits are too thick to be pages. Maybe they're wood shavings? Claire, you didn't find anything."

Claire: "Huh, wood shavings? Well, at least they aren't the book. Anyway, I think it's time we were going. This trail won't last forever."

Sam: "You're right. Let's head out."

Terry: "You follow the trail to the south for an hour or so. Varika, roll Tracking + Perception again to keep the trail, and maybe notice something weird."

Claire rolls 4D10 again, plus the Variation Die. The results come up 3, 5, 6 and 7, with an 8 on the Variation Die.

Claire: "Crud, I only got a 7. Even if I narrate it, that'll only take it up to a Stalemate. Wait, I haven't used any Traits yet! I'm "Driven (To restore my family's good name)", and I know that finding these bandits is the best way I have right now to prove my family's worth. My Driven Trait is rating 2."

Terry: "Sounds good."

Claire slides over two glass beads, representing the rating of the Trait. She then rolls 2D10, which come up 1 and 9, so her final roll result is a 9.

Claire: "Yes! My Drive got me a success."

Terry: "Good. You manage to follow the trail, even through a small stream. And now, you notice that there are fewer sets of tracks — like someone has split off from the group you're following. Also, you notice that up ahead, the tracks curve off the road."

Sam: "So do we back-track, or keep following the main group?"

Claire: "I don't know. Why would one person split off? Maybe they know we're following them? And why would they go off the path, unless — maybe they're setting an

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ambush!"

Terry: "Very good. You figured it out. You'll get a +1 modifier to avoid their ambush. Both of you, roll Awareness + Perception."

Varika's Awareness and Perception total 4, while Husid's total is 3, so Claire rolls 4D10 while Sam rolls 3D10. Claire gets 3, 4, 6 and 9 on the ten-siders, with a 5 on her Variation Die, meaning her roll result is a 9. Adding the +1 modifier for figuring out the ambush, she gets a 10 total. Sam rolls 4, 7 and 8 on his ten-siders, with an 11 on his Variation die, for a roll result of 8. He adds +1 for Claire's insight and gets a 9.

Terry rolls the Sneaking + Agility of the bandits. Their roll results are 6, 8 and 9. Because they are attempting surprise, only the lowest of their results counts.

Terry: "You saw through their ambush. Claire, your 10 is four points better than the bandits' worst result, so you get a critical success. Sam, you've got a regular success — you weren't surprised, but you didn't get the drop on them, either. Since you figured out the ambush, do you want to encounter them close up or further away? You guys decide the encounter distance. You couldn't see the tracks turn off until you were about 20 yards away, so I'd say that's the maximum distance."

Claire and Terry confer, deciding that they want to take advantage of Varika's bow and Husid's magic, so they declare the encounter to start at the 20 yard mark.

Claire: "Oh yeah, what does my critical success in detecting the surprise do, again?"

Terry: "Here, it means you have a +1 to your Initiative Phase this round. Speaking of which, what is everyone's Initiative Skill + AGL?"

Claire: "Initiative skill 1, AGL 3, so mine is 4 total. +1 for this round, makes it 5."

Sam: "I don't have Initiative skill, so it's just straight AGL for me. I've got a 2 in that."

Terry lays out a combat map, showing the bandits' positions, about 20 yards away from the PCs, and points out that they're either in trees or trying to be hidden behind bushes.

Terry: "We'll label the bandits A, B and C."

The bandits' Initiative Phases:

Bandit A (the leader): AGL 2 + Initiative 1 = Initiative Phase 3

Bandits B and C: AGL 1 + no Initiative skill = Initiative Phase 1

So the overall Initiative Phases this round are:

Varika (5)

Bandit A (3)

Husid (2)

Bandits B and C (1)

Terry: "Time to declare combat stances and Primary Opponents, starting with lowest Initiative Phase, as usual. The bandits were supposed to be attacking you from ambush, so B and C declare Bold, and they're both targeting Varika, since she looks more dangerous. Husid?"

Sam: "I declare Cautious. We still don't know what they're armed with, and I need to get some magic ready. My Primary Opponent is the lead bandit."

Terry: "Okay, the lead bandit declares Aggressive, since he's really sure of himself, and he's also focusing on Varika. Claire, what are your declarations?"

Claire: "I declare Defensive, and I'm focusing on the lead bandit."

Terry: "Okay, and you get to take the first action, Varika."

Claire: "I ready an arrow. Wish I could take advantage of the surprise by doing something flashier..."

Terry: "The lead bandit is next. He's going to drop out of the tree and start running towards you."

Claire: "They know we detected their ambush?"

Terry: "Well, you stopped walking and drew your bow, so it's pretty clear."

Claire: *Laughs.* "Okay, I accept that."

Sam: "Does Bandit A need to roll to drop out of the tree? And is he at a penalty, since both of us declared him as our Primary Opponent?"

Terry: "You're right, he needs to roll. Neither of you have a weapon ready, though, so you're not actually opposing his maneuver."

Terry rolls the lead bandit's Climb + AGL to see how he does on dropping out of the tree. The bandit has a Climb of 1 and an AGL of 2, so Terry rolls 3d10 (plus the Variation Die, as always). The results come up: 1, 1 and 1!

Sam: "Hah, all ones! That's a Mishap! Does he knock the wind out of himself falling out of the tree?"

Terry: "Yes, that sounds good. He's knocked down, which will mean he'll have to maneuver against you guys to get up, if you have a weapon ready next round."

Claire: "And I will, you better believe it."

Sam: "My turn. I have a great idea, but I'm not sure if I can do it."

Terry: "Well, tell us."

Sam: "I want to say that I had enough time to cast Gift of Arbor. The tree that Bandit A fell out of? I want it to bend over, pushing him into the ground."

Claire: "Great idea!"

Terry: "Yeah, that's too good to say no. You should still roll to make sure the spell casting works, though.

Sam: "Okay, Life Magic 3 + AUR 2 means I roll 5 dice."

Sam rolls his five ten-siders. He gets 4, 6, 9, 9 and 9, meaning a roll result of 11. He applies at -1 modifier for the magnitude of the spell, giving a final roll result of 10.

Sam: "Success!"

Terry: "Yes, you got the spell off just as the bandit fell to the ground."

Sam: "Or maybe my spell made him fall. Magic is mysterious that way."

Laughter.

Terry: "Now for the other two bandits. They're pretty scared by the tree suddenly oppressing their leader, so I'm going to have them make Composure rolls."

Terry has them roll CMP, getting roll results of 8 and 9.

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Terry: "They're both a little shaken, but they're not running away or anything. They get out from behind their bushes and are moving towards you. Neither of you declared them as your Primary Opponent, so they've got free movement. Neither one has Running skill, so they move four hexes towards you. Now they're 16 yards away. They also pull out their hand axes. Nobody's hurt, so there's nothing to do on Phase 0. New round."

Claire: "I don't have the +1 Initiative Phase this round, but I'm still first."

Sam: "Yeah, and we don't need to worry about the lead bandit for a while, either."

Terry: "The Initiative Phases stay the same, yes. Declaration of stances and opponents: Both B and C are Cautious, since they're a little freaked out. They're both declaring Varika as their Primary Opponent."

Sam: "I'm Cautious, and I'm declaring B — the one on the left."

Terry: "The lead bandit is Defensive, but also being held down by a tree. I say his Primary Opponent is this century-old elm on top of him."

Claire: "They won't be within range this round, so I'm going Aggressive. I declare C, on the right, as my Primary Opponent."

Terry: "And your action, Varika?"

Claire: "I shoot C."

Terry: "Roll your Bow skill + PER. The bandit is going to dodge."

Varika's Bow + PER is 5, so she rolls 5D10 plus the Variation Die. Her roll result is a 6, with a 2 on the Variation Die. Because of her Aggressive stance, she adds 4 to her roll result, giving a 10. Bandit C has a Dodge skill of 1 and AGL 1, so Terry rolls 2D10 and gets a roll result of 7.

Terry: "Your result is higher, so that's a hit. And your Variation Die result means it's a hit in the right leg. Your total roll result is 10, his roll is 7, difference of 3... What's the damage factor on your bow?"

Claire: "It's 8."

Terry: "3 averaged with 8 is 6, so it's 6 points of initial damage. His leather pants stop 2 points against piercing, so 4 points penetrate. His TGH is 1, so 3 points go through. He's a disposable NPC, but a relatively good one, so he's still standing. As for the lead bandit, he's still being squashed by a tree, so Husid, it's your Initiative Phase."

Sam: "Hmm, I don't have any weapons, so I think I'm going to try to distract Bandit B."

Terry: "What's your distraction?"

Sam: "The bent-over tree is behind them now, right? So I yell, 'Watch out, my pet tree is coming for *you*!'"

Terry: "Excellent. Roll Rhetoric + ELO. He needs to notice that the tree isn't actually coming for him, so I'll roll PER + CMP."

Husid's Rhetoric and ELO are both 2, so Sam rolls 4D10. The roll result is a 10. Terry rolls Bandit B's PER + CMP, which total 2, and gets a 7.

Sam: "10 to 7, that's a regular success. I got a 7 on my Variation Die — can I narrate it to take it to an 11?"

Terry: "Sure."

Sam: "Okay, 7 is Quantity, so as I yell it, I hold out my fingers like all the limbs of the tree reaching down to grab him."

Terry: "Sounds great. Okay, it's now an 11, so you get to designate his Primary Opponent next round and the round after."

Sam: "I will, of course, make his Primary Opponent the tree."

Claire laughs.

Terry: "Now for the bandits' actions. They're running forward again. Since neither of you have a weapon ready against them, they're still in free movement."

Claire: "Crud. Maybe I should keep my arrow nocked to keep them from moving...? Nah."

Terry: "They again close by four hexes. They're only 12 yards away now. Now it's Phase 0. The bandit leader is trying to get up, but I say the tree is stronger, so he's still pinned."

Sam: "Good tree!"

Terry: "No one else has to recover from unconsciousness or whatever, so it's onto the next round. Everyone's Initiative Phase is the same, right?"

Claire: "Mine is."

Sam: "So's mine. Is Bandit C's Initiative Phase lower, though?"

Terry: "No, he doesn't take damage to specific stats, since he's a mook. His AGL is still 1."

Sam: "Okay."

Terry: "Time to declare stance and Primary Opponents. The bandits — those not pinned by elm trees, that is — are both Defensive. They're starting to think their ambush isn't going to work out. The one on the right declares Varika as his Primary Opponent."

Sam: "And Bandit B is declaring the tree as his Primary Opponent, per my distration. I'm declaring the one on the right, and I'm Cautious."

Claire: "I'm declaring Bandit B — thanks, Husid, for making him such a nice target. But I have to use this round nocking another arrow. I'm Defensive. So my action for the round is just readying my bow."

Terry: "Okay, the head bandit is again struggling with the tree. I'm going to give him a roll to free himself, since he's starting to wiggle out of the branches. But he's at a -2 modifier for difficulty. If he had any Contortion skill, he could use it here. He doesn't, though, so it's straight up AGL."

Terry rolls the two dice ten-siders, getting an 8 roll result.

Terry: "He gets a stalemate. He's starting to wiggle his way out, but he's still pinned, for now. Husid, your action?"

Sam: "Can I try to distract Bandit C?"

Terry: "It's not a new trick, but I guess they might still fall for it. I'm going to give the bandit a +1 modifier, though, since you've already tried it."

Sam: "Ooh, difficult. Well, it's worth a try."

Sam rolls a 9. Terry rolls an 8 for the bandit.

Sam: "Great, another success!"

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Terry: "So C is going to be paying attention to the tree next round, but for now, he's still focused on Varika. And he's charging. Varika, you've got him as your Primary Opponent, but you don't have a ready weapon, so it's free movement again. He closes by another four hexes."

Claire: "Crap, they're going to be within axe range in a little bit!"

Terry: "Nothing significant happens on Phase 0, so it's a new round. Initiative Phases stay the same, relatively, so time for the bandits to declare. B and C are both distracted by the menacing tree now, and they're both Cautious — trying to run away from the tree more than towards you, now."

Sam: "I'm going Defensive. I don't have much left to do but argue. My Primary Opponent is B, I guess."

Terry: "The lead bandit is still trying to get out from under the tree, so he's Defensive, and his Primary Opponent is still the tree."

Claire: "My Primary Opponent is C, and I'm going Aggressive again. I'm still the first one to act, right?"

Terry: "Right."

Claire: "Then my action is, I shoot C."

Terry: "You're Aggressive, so you get a +4 to your roll result. You get a +1 for him not having you declared as his Primary Opponent, but that gets subsumed under the +4."

Sam: "Aw, waste of a good distraction."

Claire: "Well, now they can't attack us, either, if they decide to throw their axes."

Terry: "The bandit is going to be dodging. Go ahead and roll."

Claire rolls a 9 on her 5D10, and get an 11 on the Variation Die. With her +4, her final roll result is 13. Terry rolls a 7 total for the bandit's dodge.

Terry: "The difference is 6. Since that's 4 or higher, it's a critical. That'll add 4 points to your initial damage. What's your bow's damage factor, again?"

Claire: "8."

Terry: "Average 8 with 6... that's 7. Add 4 to that... 11 points initial damage."

Sam: "Wow, that's a lot."

Terry: "Your Variation Die was an 11, which is a chest hit. He has leather there, too, which stops 2 points. His TGH is 1, so out of 11 points, 8 get through."

Sam: "Ow."

Terry: "He was already down 3 points, and he's a disposable NPC, so he can only take 8 points. He's dead."

Claire: "Yes!"

Terry: "And I'm ruling the other one, B, is starting to feel like banditry might not be the best career for him... I'll have him make a Composure roll."

Terry rolls 1D10 for the bandit's CMP, getting a 7. It's a failure, meaning his CMP has gone down to 0.

Terry: "He's pretty freaked out. Looks like he's ready to run away."

Claire: "We have to take him down before he can warn the other bandits that we're coming."

Terry: "Next up is the lead bandit, who's still trying to get out from under the tree. I'll roll his AGL again."

Terry rolls 2D10 and gets a roll result of 6.

Terry: "He's still pinned. He's making progress, but he's snagged on one of the big branches."

Sam: "Now it's my Initiative Phase. I'm going to yell at Bandit B to surrender rather than run away."

Terry: "Sounds good. Roll Rhetoric + ELO; I'll roll his CMP + WIL to resist your argument. Of course, his CMP is now 0, so he's only got one die to roll."

Sam rolls his four ten-siders for Rhetoric + ELO, getting a roll result of 9 and a variation die of 8. For the bandit, Terry rolls a 6.

Sam: "That's a success, but I want to make it a critical success. Can I narrate something about quantity to get a +1?"

Terry: "Sure."

Sam: "I say, 'I am in league with all the trees of the forest! You cannot escape us!'"

Claire: "Ooh, good."

Terry: "Yes, that gives you a +1, making it a critical success. His CMP goes down by 2, to -2. Bandit B is visibly trembling. Since he's afraid to do anything, and the bandit leader is snagged on a tree limb, I'm going to say we're out of combat, unless you two want to do more shooting."

Claire: "Well, I was thinking of shooting one of them in the back, but I guess now we've got a couple prisoners."

Sam: "Can we bring Bandit B over to the tree and tie him up?"

Terry: "Sure, he's compliant at this point. You have rope, right?

Claire: "Yep, I've got standard adventuring gear."

Terry: "Okay, you tie the one guy up. He's kind of whimpering now. 'Trees are gonna get me,' he says."

Sam: "Now, let's get down to interrogating them!"

Claire: "Let me make sure the bandit leader isn't going to get away first. Can I tie him up, too?"

Terry: "Sure. Are you going to keep him under the tree, or free him?"

Sam: "Let's keep him under there. Just tie him to the branches holding him down."

Claire: "Okay, I do that. Now let's get to asking the questions."

Sam: "I'm just going to ask the leader, straight out, where the Countess' book is."

Claire: "Wait, let me help. I'll lean on the tree a little bit, push the branches into him, so he feels the full weight of our questions."

Terry: "Hah! Good. Okay, you do that, and he's feeling the pressure. At first, he's pretty strong and doesn't answer. But when you 'press' him, he finally says, 'Look, I don't know where it is! I don't know what she did with it!'"

Sam: "I look him right in the eye and demand to know who 'she' is."

Terry: "He says, 'The Countess! After I gave her the book, I don't know what she did with it!'"

Claire and Sam look at each other, wide-eyed. If the bandits gave the book back to the Countess, that means she's been working some sort of scheme on them. This casts everything in a new light...

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How to play: the basics

How to roll the dice

You get dice to roll primarily from two things: your characteristics, and your skills.

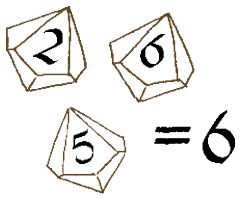
Which characteristic and skill are appropriate for the task you want to do? This will usually be obvious — AGL and Climbing if you want to scale a rock face, for example — but sometimes it may be something else. You and the GM will figure this out.

What was your total of characteristic and skill? Roll that many D10, plus the Variation Die (a D12). The Variation Die doesn't affect your total; it just gives flavor to your roll.

Take the highest roll you got on the D10. This is your total.

You're trying to sneak past a guard. This uses Sneaking + AGL (Agility). Your Sneaking is 1 and your AGL is 2, so you get three dice to roll.

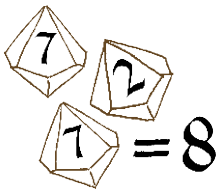
You roll the three dice, and they come up 2, 5 and 6, so your roll result is 6.



If you got multiples of the highest roll, each additional die showing that number gives +1.

You're seeing if you notice a strange shape in the sky. The GM says it'll use Awareness + PER (Perception). You don't have any Awareness skill, but your PER is 3.

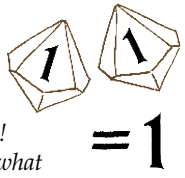
You roll the three ten-siders and get 2, 7 and 7. The extra 7 makes your roll total 8.



If you roll all 1's, though, they don't add up. Instead, you get a mishap. This is also true if your roll result after modifiers is 1 or less.

You're trying to convince a guard to let you into the city for free. The GM rules this would use Rhetoric + ELO (Eloquence). Your total here is only 2 dice.

You roll, and they both come up 1 — a mishap! The guard is probably pretty angry at you for what you accidentally implied about his ancestry...



Using Traits

Characteristics and skills aren't the only things you get dice from. Sometimes, when it's dramatically appropriate, you can use your Traits, too.

Traits are parts of your character's personality that can be helpful or harmful.

Among your other Traits, you are Driven (To Seek Revenge against the evil Baron) 2. On the positive side, your drive to get revenge may give you that last little bit of motivation to get over the wall, or give your words more power when you're arguing against the Baron's policies, or make your sword hit especially well, among many other possibilities.

On the negative side, your drive may for example cause you to ignore wise advice, jump into encampments of the Baron's men or distract you while you're trying to climb back out of the Baron's castle.

Mechanical or narrative, helpful or hurtful

You can use your Traits mechanically or narratively. If you use a Trait mechanically, it adds or subtracts dice from the pool you roll equal to its rating. If you use it narratively, you get to describe how it helps or hurts you in an appropriate way.

You can use Traits to help yourself or to hurt yourself. Helping yourself means making your life easier, while hurting yourself means making your life harder (but usually more interesting and exciting, in ways that make the game more fun).

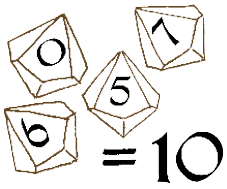
You can decide to use a Trait before or after you roll. This means that you can, for example, use a Trait to save yourself after rolling badly.

Using Traits to help yourself

When you mechanically use a Trait to help yourself, you add dice equal to its rating to your total pool. Of course, doing so must make sense within the story.

You're trying to scale a castle wall. Your AGL is 2 and you don't have any Climbing skill, so normally you'd have 2 dice. But you also know that the evil Baron lives in the castle, and you're Driven to Seek Revenge: 2 against him. You decide to use your Trait, and the GM agrees it makes sense. You now have 4 dice to roll.

You roll, and get a 5, 6, 7 and 0, so your roll result is 10. Looks like the drive for revenge propelled you over the wall.



Using Traits to make your life harder

Once you've used a Trait positively, you can't use it again right away. Before you can use it again positively, you must use it or another Trait negatively. Using a Trait negatively means using it in a way that makes your life more difficult.

Mechanically, this means that you subtract dice equal to your Trait's rating from your pool.

Let's say that, in addition to being Driven, you are also Curious 1. As you are picking a lock in the Baron's chambers, you decide to use this Trait negatively, declaring that you're distracted by a fancy bauble sitting on a table. Normally, you'd roll 4 dice for your lock-picking attempt, but because you're Curiosity has gotten the better of you, you only roll 3 dice.

Traits can also be used narratively, to describe things without using dice. This can mean choosing a dangerous path, doing something foolhardy, attracting unwanted attention, etc.

Later, you are exploring the Baron's castle. You come across a map that seems to show the Baron's plans to invade the Queen's lands. Proof that the Baron is planning such a heinous act would be extremely valuable. But you decide that your drive to get revenge is too strong, state that you're using your Trait negatively, and neglect to pick up the map. The GM agrees that this is an appropriate negative use of your Trait, and it is now reset and ready to use positively again.

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Tracking Traits

How do you remember what Traits have been used and what haven't? You'll use some kind of tokens, such as glass beads, candies, paper clips or whatever your group decides on. At the beginning of a session, you should have tokens equal to your character's total ratings in Traits. When you use a Trait positively, give the GM tokens equal to the rating of the Trait you used.

> *You decide to use your Driven Trait to give you 2 extra dice to roll. You give the GM 2 tokens to show this.*

When you use a Trait negatively, the GM will give you tokens equal to rating of the Trait you used.

> *On your way out of the Baron's castle, you notice a trapdoor leading into the bowels of the castle. At this point, you should probably be leaving — the guards are alerted and searching for you — but you decide to check out the trapdoor anyway. The GM agrees this is a negative use of your Curious Trait, and gives you one token back.*

Modifiers: Changing your roll result

Some things can make your roll better or worse. What makes your roll better? Here are some of the things that might help:

- Evocative descriptions. Describe what you're doing in a cool, original way, and you can get a bonus to your roll.
- Good equipment
- Being on a horse
- Having the gods on your side
- Your reputation as a noble and kind person

What could make your roll worse? There are lots of possibilities:

- Muddy ground
- An especially tough lock
- Carrying too much stuff
- Doing it hastily
- Shooting something really far away

There are many more possible modifiers to your roll. The GM will usually sum them up for you.

> *You're trying to rescue your friend, who has just fallen over the side of the ship. The GM rules that the tossing waves and your friend's near-drowned state make it pretty hard to do, so you have a -2 modifier.*
>
> *You roll the dice, which come up 3, 7 and 9. Normally you'd have a 9, but because you have a -2 modifier, your roll result is 7 — not a success.*

Apply the modifier to whatever comes up on the dice. Remember, modifiers always change the roll result, not the number of dice you roll.

With modifiers, it is possible for your roll result to go below 1. For most purposes, we treat any die result of less than 1 as 1.

Did you succeed?

You want your roll result to beat the target number. Usually, this means you're trying to get better than an 8, but if you're rolling against someone else, you want to beat their roll.

There are actually five possible levels of success or failure; we'll get into this more in the Tasks section, starting on page 32.

Wait, what's the Variation Die for?

You've been rolling a D12 along with all those D10s, right? What does it do?

The Variation Die gives a general guide to the effects of your roll. Not how well or poorly you did, but where your shot landed, how long it took you, or what you looked like as you did it.

Most of the time, the Variation Die's results can be divided into four:

1-3	Style: Describing how you looked while doing it.
4-6	Time: Describing how long it took, or how long it lasts.
7-9	Quantity: Describing how much effect it has, or how much it required.
10-12	Quality: Describing how thoroughly it worked.

In other situations (combat, casting spells, etc.), there are specific meanings for each of the results on the Variation Die. We'll explore those more when we get to them.

You can always get a +1 modifier to your roll if you use the Variation Die to describe how your action worked.

> *While trying to save your friend from drowning, you get a roll result of 7 — unsuccessful. But you also got a 5 on the Variation Die, normally indicating Time. You describe your effort: "Several times, I think I have a good grip on him. But each time, my grip fails because his clothes are too wet and slippery. Only after many minutes and being nearly soaked to the bone do I finally haul him up on deck." For this, you get a +1, turning your 7 into an 8 — a Stalemate, or near success. The GM says that yes, you are nearly soaked to the bone — and your friend doesn't respond when you call his name. Perhaps he is beyond rescuing...?*

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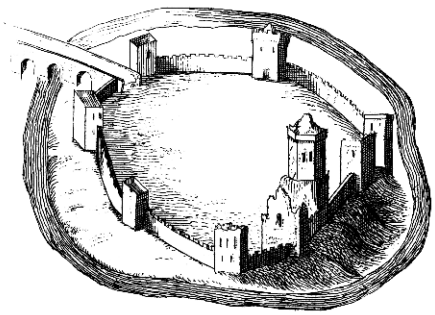

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