

How Story Arc Works

What Is Story Arc?

Story Arc is a narrative RPG that uses a degree-of-success, roll-under, multiple-icosahedral (20-sided die) system to decide chance-based events. It was developed by Limestone Publishing, LLC.



Character Construction

Attributes & Skills

- **Attributes** define a character's fundamental competencies. These range from 1 to 8.
- **Skills** (or Skill Clusters) define a character's learned abilities, and range from 1 to 18. These clusters contain Sub-skills that help define the scope of the larger skill cluster. Each **Spell** or spell-like ability is considered an individual skill.
- Attributes and Skills have a **Rating**, the number used in dicing after modifiers have been applied.

Idiosyncrasies

Characters may have abilities or qualities that are not quite normal skills, called idiosyncrasies.

- **Skill** idiosyncrasies (aka Special Abilities) are skills that do not fit neatly into any other category, and which may be unique to a character.
- **Boosted Sub-skills** (aka Mastered Skills) are sub-skills in which a character has focused their development.
- **Spell-Like Abilites** are magical, but do not usually have Add-on Effects, nor can they be augmented. They still do require Mana to operate and are subject to Threshold negatives.
- **Static** idiosyncrasies are unique character qualities. They are not usually considered skills to be rolled on, rather helping to define who and what a character is.

Dicing

All non-trivial actions that characters perform require a character to pair an Attribute with a Skill and make a Skill Check roll. These rolls are constructed and resolved in the following manner:

- **Attribute:** Use the current Rating as the number of icosahedra to roll.
- **Skill:** Use the current Rating as the target number for each die. If the rolled number is equal to or less than the Skill Rating, a Degree of Success has been achieved.
- **Bungling:** Critical failure results when a roll contains no degrees, and at least one 19.
- **Critical Success:** Any die showing a 20 is counted as two zeros, and thus as two degrees.

Example Rolls

Attribute: 4, Skill: 8, so any rolls of eight or under are degrees:

- 7, 11, 14, **8** = 2 degrees
- 10, **20**, 12, 14 = 2 degrees
- 9, 19, 11, 11 = Bungle (no degrees, and one 19)
- 1, 10, 19, 17 = 1 degree (1 degree, overriding the 19)

Degrees of Success

An action's success on a roll is gauged by the number of degrees a roll generates:

- **Bungle:** Some nasty thing happens to the character.
- **0D - Failure:** The action fails.
- **1D - Partial Success:** The action is accomplished in a mediocre, unsatisfying fashion.
- **2D - Complete Success:** The action is more-or-less accomplished successfully.
- **3D - Amazing Success:** The action is very thoroughly and satisfyingly accomplished.
- **4D (or more) - Phantasmagorical Success:** The action is accomplished beyond the reasonable expectations of the average character.

Skill Check Modifiers

The GM may assign a Bonus to a roll, that amount is added to the Skill Rating, making the target number higher, and easier to roll under. The converse is true for a Negative, the Skill Rating being. If a skill is reduced to zero, further negatives will carry over to reduce the number of dice to throw.

Renaissance Points

These may be spent to influence die rolls, and may be declared before or just after a roll, before the GM describes the results of the roll. Spending a Renaissance Point will add one Degree of success per, and can turn a Bungle into mere failure. These may be replenished during play at GM discretion.

Thresholds

Thresholds are a major concept in Story Arc, defining things like "hit points" and "spell points". As a given threshold is depleted, a Threshold Negative may apply to some or all rolls the character makes. Thresholds are controlled by relevant Attribute Ratings, such as:

- Endurance defining the Wound Threshold
- Intelligence or Willpower typically defines the Mana Threshold, although this may be variable.
- Concepts like Fatigue and Sanity are dealt with in a similar fashion.

Wound Threshold Example

If a character has a 4 in Endurance, this translates to a Wound Threshold that has 8 wound boxes. Wounds are recorded by tallying up the total degrees of all wounds within the Wound Threshold. Once enough degrees have been tallied that the indicator above is negative, appropriate Skill Checks will be modified by that amount.

Wound Threshold: 4	OK	OK	OK	OK	-1	-2	-3	-4	KO
Wounds	A	A	A	B	B				

- Current Wounds: A) -3 stomach laceration, B) -2 arm sprain
- Current Negative to All Activity: -1

Combat

Initiative

When a Combat Round (or a Contested Action between players) breaks out, players and NPCs involved will make Initiative Rolls. Highest results goes first, ties represent simultaneous actions.

Attacking with Weapons

Weapons aid in attack, and this is expressed as a Weapon Modifier. This value is added to the appropriate Skill Rating when that weapon is used in an attack. So, if a character's Skill Rating in Melee is 4 and the character is using a weapon with a modifier of +2, the character's Skill Rating would effectively be 6. A weapon that is enchanted or "Plussed" may have additional modifiers to skill ratings or attributes.

Defense

A character is protected from physical attacks by Armor, Dodging or Parrying.

Armor Benefits & Penalties

Armor effectively absorbs incoming combat damage. If a character wearing "+2 Thick Rubber Slab Armor" receives a -3 Slashing Wound, The character would receive only a -1 Slashing Wound. The downside to armor is that it reduces effective Dexterity. Wearing the aforementioned armor will reduce the Dexterity Rating by 2 for all applicable rolls.

Dodging & Parrying

Degrees of success on these actions, considered "Defense Degrees" may be spent to reduce degrees of incoming attacks. A player may spend any number of Defense Degrees they currently have to remove that amount of Attack Degrees. Unspent Defense Degrees will persist until the current round of combat has finished.

Suffering Defeat

When a character's Wound Threshold tally extends into any "KO" space, a character becomes incapacitated. The character is thoroughly defeated and will be dealt with by the GM, though not necessarily killed.

Casting Spells

Magic-using characters in Story Arc are not limited by memorization, but by their Mana Threshold and Casting Checks. When a spell is cast, a player pairs the character's spellcasting Attribute and the Rating of the chosen spell as would happen for any other Skill Check. The spell's Difficulty describes the number of degrees required to successfully cast the spell.

Mana Drain

Most spells have a "Mana Drain" associated, which is the drain on the caster's mystical reserve of the swishy-floaty whatever that allows them to cast spells. This is drained by any attempt to cast a spell, successfully or unsuccessfully.

This drain is recorded in the Mana Threshold. A caster may still perform spells even if they have a Threshold Negative, just as one might perform physical actions at a negative while wounded.

Add-on Effects

When the degrees rolled on a Spell Check are greater than the Difficulty rating of the spell, the surplus are considered Enhancement Degrees. These may be spent to make the spell more powerful, by spending them on Add-on Effects.

Standard Spell Augmentation

Many spells can benefit from a widely used magical technique, known as Standard Spell Augmentation. This allows the caster to magnify the Base Qualities of their spells by 50% (a factor of 1.5) for each Enhancement Degree spent.

Spell Components

In general, components are not required to cast a spell, but make casting easier. When used, they are consumed magically by the spell, and the user need not take mana drain for that casting.

The Amazing Blue Spot on the Wall Spell

Difficulty: 2, Mana Drain: 1

Base Effect: This spell will create a circular blue spot on a wall visible to the caster.

Base Qualities:

- Magnitude: 1 Spot
- Distance : 8'
- Size: 6" diameter
- Duration: 30 minutes

Add-on Effects:

- +1: Blue spot is 1' in diameter.
- +1: Blue spot may be cast up to 16' away.
- +1: Blue spot lasts for an additional hour.
- +1: Blue spot is green.
- +4: Blue spot is permanent.
- +8: Blue spot may explode at caster's will, dealing 8 degrees to all targets in an 8' radius.

Spell Components: 1/4 of a crayon

Style of Play

Action Description

We encourage player agency in describing what actions their characters undertake, and also *how* those actions are performed. Not just successful actions, but failures as well. A gamemaster can set the stage and describe ramifications of unknown elements in the story, but the players are the stars.

Let's Play Together

We seek to foster collaboration and creativity between players, but sometimes characters interfere with each other's actions or goals. We would not insist that this never occur, but remember that the agency of your fellow players is key.

A more inclusive approach is have players come to an agreement beforehand to go take the story in that direction. Some may argue that this is 'metagaming' or 'table talk', but we find a lot more satisfaction in games when character conflicts don't become player conflicts.

If a character has a secret, it does not *have* to be a secret to the other players. When players have some understanding of overall character goals, we find it leads to satisfying stories about characters.