

Dragonlance Basic Rules

*Abridged from material written by Steven Brown and Steve Miller for the Fate Deck;
based on the original Saga game design by William W. Connors.*

Presented here is a basic version of the Saga rules in the Dragonlance: FIFTH AGE boxed set. Players familiar with that game will note some differences (particularly in the rules governing magic). Feel free to use the version that appeals to you more.

To play, you need the deck of Fate Cards, found in the *Fate Deck* (TSR #9565) or the *Dragonlance: FIFTH AGE* boxed set (TSR #1148).

Basic Terms

Listed below are a few terms you need to be familiar with to understand the Saga rules.

- **Fate Cards:** The 82 cards with the FIFTH AGE logo on the back. These cards, collectively known as the Fate Deck, are the foundation of the Saga rules.
- **Character Cards:** The 18 brown "leather" looking cards representing heroes from the Fifth Age of Krynn.
- **Hero:** A main character in an adventure scenario. Players always roleplay heroes in Saga games.
- **Character:** Any individual in a Saga scenario other than the heroes (including monsters). Characters can be either friends or foes but are always controlled and roleplayed by the Narrator (see below).
- **Scenario:** The basic plot of a Saga game. Often scenarios come as published adventures sold in book and hobby stores, but experienced roleplayers enjoy writing their own original scenarios.
- **Narrator:** The player who guides the other players through the scenario, roleplaying the characters the heroes meet. The Narrator is the final judge on rules questions.
- **Abilities:** A number and letter pair that defines an individual's abilities in a Saga game. Abilities and their use are fully described later in these rules.
- **Action:** A hero's attempt to do something in a scenario, such as climb a wall or cast a spell. Fate Cards are played to determine a hero's success or failure at an action.
- **Suits:** One of several traditional card-playing terms used in the Saga game rules. The Fate Deck features nine suits instead of the four found in a normal deck of playing cards. These suits are defined later in these rules.
- **Hand:** The assortment of Fate Cards players have available to use for attempting their heroes' actions in the game. The card a player chooses to play from his or her hand determines whether the hero succeeds or fails at the action.
- **Trump:** Another traditional card-playing term. A card is considered trump when its suit is directly linked to the type of action for which it is being played. The effects of trump cards are described later in these rules. A *trump bonus* allows any card played to serve as trump, regardless of suit.

Roleplaying with the Saga Rules

The best way to learn to play with the Saga rules is to read these pages, then dive right in and

play. To begin, separate the Character Cards from the Fate Cards. Have players choose Character Cards to serve as their heroes for this game. Each player reads the description on the back of the Character Card to get acquainted with the hero. The Narrator puts all extra Character Cards away for now.

To begin play, the Narrator shuffles the Fate Deck, then deals each player a number of cards equal to his or her hero's "Hand," found under the "Reputation" heading on the back of the Character Card. Once everyone has a full hand, play may begin.

The Narrator begins by describing the setting in the scenario, telling the players where their heroes are and what they see. Next he or she should ask the players, "What do your heroes do?" Based on their answers, the Narrator may call for the heroes to attempt actions, as described in these rules. This pattern is repeated until the scenario reaches its end, with each player speaking and acting in the role of the hero and attempting actions in keeping with the hero's description.

As you read these rules, keep one of the Character Cards handy for reference. The front of the card shows the hero's name, picture, and ability ratings; the back provides a general description of the hero's personality, gear, and background.

Abilities

Heroes have eight abilities to define who they are and what they can do. Agility, Dexterity, Endurance, and Strength are the Physical abilities; Reason, Perception, Spirit, and Presence are a hero's Mental abilities.

An ability rating consists of a *score* (the number) and a *code* (the letter). The score defines a hero's natural talent in a particular ability, while the code is a measure of how much training he or she has received in the skills associated with that ability; for instance, the skill of swordfighting is associated with Strength. (Very minor characters in a scenario may not have codes listed.)

Some heroes may have a number in parentheses following their Reason or Spirit ratings. This is their total number of *spell points*; these points show that the hero can cast some types of magic spells.

Other Hero Information

The back of the Character Card tells more about a hero. Demeanor defines how the hero acts outwardly, and nature describes what he or she is really like deep down. Reputation measures how well known the hero is (and determines the size of the player's hand), while social status indicates the hero's economic class (and regulates how much money he or she has to spend). The weapon and armor entries list the hero's favored gear. The paragraphs in the lower half of the card describe the hero's background and goals. They also mention any special abilities he or she may have (such as magical aptitude or acute senses).

Hero Actions

At the start of the game, the Narrator deals each player a number of Fate Cards equal to the size

of the player's hand. Only players maintain hands of cards-the Narrator does not need one for the characters he controls.

Once play begins, players will want their heroes to attempt actions, based on the scene at hand. There are two main types of actions:

- **Unopposed actions:** An action is *unopposed* when the hero does not face resistance from a character. The only factor governing its success is the hero's own skill.
- **Opposed actions:** An action is *opposed* when a character resists the hero's effort. To succeed, the hero must overcome the character's relevant ability.

Performing Actions

Simple actions automatically succeed. However, when a hero attempts a complex or risky action, use the following sequence to determine the outcome:

1. **Declaration:** The player announces that his or her hero will attempt an action. Occasionally, the Narrator will inform a player that the current situation dictates that the hero must attempt a particular action.
2. **Action ability:** The Narrator decides which ability the hero must use to attempt the declared action; this is the *action ability*. Each ability has an associated suit in the Fate Deck, both of which are linked to a particular type of action as follows:

Shields (Agility): Acrobatics/dodging missiles

Arrows (Dexterity): Fine manipulation/missile combat

Helms (Endurance): Stamina/melee defense

Swords (Strength): Raw power/melee combat

Moons (Reason): Intellectual tasks/sorcery

Orbs (Perception): Awareness/resisting sorcery

Hearts (Spirit): Willpower/mysticism

Crowns (Presence): Leadership/resisting mysticism

3. **Action difficulty:** The Narrator estimates how hard the action ought to be for the hero-that is, decides on a *difficulty rating*. The general relationship between the difficulty of the action and its difficulty rating is: easy (4), average (8), challenging (12), daunting (16), desperate (20), impossible (24).
4. **Play a card:** The player selects one card from his or her hand and lays it face up on the table. If the suit of the card is linked to the ability being used (for instance, a Hearts card for a Spirit action), the card is considered trump, and the player flips over the top card of the Fate Deck, laying it next to the card just played. The player then draws a new card from the deck and adds it to his or her hand.
5. **Resolution:** The player adds the hero's action ability score and the face value of the card(s) on the table. If that total, or *action score*, is equal to or greater than the difficulty rating, the action succeeds.

Example: *Ironhawk, a human hero, is trying to climb a moss-covered tree. The Narrator decides this is a challenging Agility action (difficulty rating 12). Ironhawk's player lays down the Eight*

of Swords and adds its value to his Agility score of 6, generating an action score of 14. Since this score is higher than the difficulty rating, Ironhawk climbs the tree.

Opposed Actions: When a hero attempts an opposed action, Step 5 above differs slightly: The player's action score must equal or exceed the action's difficulty rating *plus* the score of the ability the opposing character is using to resist the action (called the *opposition ability*).

Action Format: Published Saga adventures use a standard notation format to describe a hero action: *difficulty rating + action ability (opposition ability)*. So, lifting a large rock might be an *average Strength* action, while holding a door shut a foe trying to break in might be an *average Endurance (Strength)* action.

Combat

Many hero actions involve fighting. The Character Cards list what weapons the heroes own but, of course, they may pick up other weapons during their travels. It is up to the Narrator to decide whether they are able to use them, based on their relevant ability codes (discussed later in these rules). Generally, the more damaging a weapon is, the harder it is to use.

There are two types of combat in this game:

- **Missile combat:** When combatants use bows, crossbows and similar weapons, they are engaged in *missile combat*. As they draw closer to their enemy, they may use thrown missile weapons like spears and daggers.
- **Melee combat:** When the combatants draw close enough to attack with hand-held weapons like swords, axes, and maces, they engage in *melee combat*. Fist fighting falls under this category, too.

Combat Sequence

Combat consists of a series of attacks and counterattacks. Use the following sequence of actions until one side is vanquished or runs away:

1. **Surprise:** At the start of combat, the Narrator must decide, based on the situation, whether one of the sides has surprised the other. If one side is surprised, the other side is allowed one free attack (or counterattack) without fear of response.
2. **Hero attacks:** If there is no surprise, every hero can perform one attack action. In missile combat, this is an *average Dexterity (Agility)* action. In melee combat, it is an *average Strength (Endurance)* action. If the action succeeds, the player totals the hero's action ability score and the damage rating of the weapon (listed on the Character Card), if a weapon is used. The enemy then totals the defense rating of his or her armor and shield. Subtract the total defense from the total damage; any remaining points the enemy will suffer as wounds in Step 4.
3. **Hero defends:** Simultaneous with the attack, the hero defends against the foe's counterattack. The Narrator does *not* make this assault; instead, every hero simply performs a defense action: an *average Agility (Dexterity)* action in missile combat, or an *average Endurance (Strength)* action in melee. If the action succeeds, the hero has parried the attack. If the action fails, the player totals the defense ratings of the hero's

armor and shield (listed on the Character Card). The Narrator then adds the foe's opposition ability score to the damage rating of his or her weapon. Subtract the total defense from the total damage; any remaining points the hero will suffer as wounds in Step 4.

4. **Assess wounds:** A character can sustain a number of wounds equal to his or her Endurance score before falling unconscious. After that, any further wound dealt the character in a subsequent attack will kill him or her. Heroes suffer damage differently, however. The player of a wounded hero must give up cards from his or her hand with a total face value equal to or greater than the hero's number of wounds. These discards cannot be replaced until the wounds are healed. When the player's hand is empty of cards, the hero is unconscious, as described above.
5. **Resolution:** If the battle continues, return to Step 2. If one side is defeated or decides to withdraw instead of fighting on, combat ends.

***Example:** Ironhawk engages a bandit (whose ability scores are all 5) in melee combat. His player attacks with a Seven of Shields and adds his Strength score (7) for a total of 14. The difficulty is average (8) plus the bandit's Endurance (5), for a total of 13. The attack succeeds. For defense, Ironhawk's player lays down a Four of Helms. Since Helms are trump for melee defense, the player flips the top card of the deck, the Eight of Moons, adding both values to Ironhawk's Endurance (6) for a total of 18. The difficulty (8) plus the bandit's Strength (5) add up to only 13. Ironhawk is unscathed. The unarmored bandit suffers 12 wounds from Ironhawk's Strength (7) plus his weapon's damage rating (+5). The villain falls unconscious.*

After Combat

At the close of the battle, one group of combatants has bested the other. But before the scenario can continue, there are a few loose ends to tie up.

Healing: After almost every battle, some or all the heroes will be wounded. How quickly they recover from these wounds will greatly affect their future adventures. When a hero's hand has been restored to its full size, the hero is completely healed.

- *First aid:* Immediately after the battle ends, a hero may receive basic medical attention. If any other hero succeeds at an *average Dexterity* action to give first aid (bind the wounds to avert the immediate threat), the hero recovers enough for the player to regain one card for his or her depleted hand.
- *Natural healing:* Time heals all wounds. However, it does so very slowly. For every week that passes during the adventure, a wounded hero recovers one card through natural healing.
- *Magical healing:* Those skilled in the mystical magic of healing can heal a hero instantly and completely. As a rule, giving one card's worth of magical healing requires a *challenging Spirit* action from the hero using the magic. (Details of this and other aspects of magic appear in the next section.)

Spoils: As the adage says, "To the victors go the spoils." After any battle, the slain or unconscious foes will have some valuable equipment. The heroes may do with these items what they want, but the players should remember that they are playing heroes, not thieves. Most

published scenarios will list the important items to be found after a battle, though the Narrator can always adjust this list to suit the needs of the game.

Magic

Heroes with Reason or Spirit ability codes of "A" or "B" have the skill necessary to cast magical spells. There are two forms of magic in this game, *sorcery* and *mysticism*. The *schools* of sorcery or *spheres* of mysticism a hero knows (if any) are mentioned on the back of the Character Card or on the hero description sheet. These do not change during play.

Sorcery

Sorcery draws upon the magical energy left over from when the world was formed from primordial chaos. It can affect only inert matter and the elements; it cannot directly affect living things. Heroes with high Reason codes have been trained in the use of sorcery. The art of sorcery is divided into eleven schools: aeromancy (spells of air and wind), cryomancy (spells of cold), divination (see the past or future or detect the unseen), electromancy (electrical magic), enchantment (make magical items), geomancy (spells of earth and rock), hydromancy (spells of water), pyromancy (spells of fire), spectramancy (spells of light and illusion), summoning (magical transport), and transmutation (changing matter).

Mysticism

Mysticism draws upon the power of life and the spiritual energies of its practitioners. It affects only living or once-living beings. Heroes with high Spirit codes have been trained in the use of mysticism. Mysticism is divided into nine spheres: alteration (shapechanging powers), animism (talk to, control, or mimic plants and animals), channeling (raise or lower Physical ability scores), healing (heal illnesses or wounds), meditation (raise or lower mental ability scores), mentalism (telepathy), necromancy (cause magical injury and create undead creatures), sensitivity (read auras), and spiritualism (talk to spirits and create undead spirits).

Wielding Magic

Creating spells under the Saga rules is left to the imagination of players and the discretion of the Narrator. A hero can attempt to create any magical effect using the schools and spheres he or she is familiar with. Remember, heroes cannot cast spells from schools and spheres they do not know.

Casting a spell is the same as any other hero action. The player declares what effect the hero will try to create, then plays a card from his or her hand to determine the spell's success. Using sorcery requires a Reason action, while wielding mysticism calls for a Spirit action. The Narrator assigns a difficulty rating to every spell. The more complex, intense, or long-lasting the spell effect, the harder it should be to cast. As a general rule, no spell should have a difficulty rating of less than 8.

Example: Ironhawk uses his skill in pyromancy to make his sword burn like a torch for ten minutes. The Narrator might decide this is an average Reason action. If Ironhawk wanted the sword to burn for thirty minutes, the action might become challenging. If, however, he wanted the torch to burn for an hour and work even while under water, the spell would likely be daunting or even more difficult.

Spells that target characters are always opposed actions unless the character is a willing subject of the spell or unable to resist. Sorcery is opposed by the target's Perception, while mysticism is resisted by the character's Presence.

A spell action is resolved like any other hero action. If the action score is equal to or higher than the difficulty rating (plus opposition ability score, where applicable), the spell succeeds. A failed action means the hero's spell simply doesn't work.

Spell points: Heroes cannot use magic indefinitely. Spells need energy to power them. That power comes in the form of *spell points*. Every time a spell action is attempted, the caster must spend a number of spell points equal to the difficulty rating of the spell. The caster must spend these spell points whether the spell succeeds or fails. If the hero doesn't have enough spell points to power a spell, it fails automatically, no matter how high an action score the player may generate.

Heroes begin each day with a full complement of spell points. They also recover spent spell points at a rate of 1 point per hour. Heroes who know both sorcery and mysticism recover 2 spell points per hour-1 point for each discipline. *Note:* Reason spell points can be spent only on sorcery and Spirit spell points only on mysticism.

Resisting Magic

When a character tries to cast a spell at a hero, that hero's player may attempt an *average Perception (Reason)* action to resist sorcery, or an *average Presence (Spirit)* action to avoid mysticism.

Notes on Magic

Magic can be a challenge for players in a Saga game. It requires them to be creative and invent new and fantastic applications for their heroes' magical abilities. In the beginning, the Narrator may need to help players along, suggesting possible spells or helping them become familiar with the capabilities of the different schools and spheres. After a while, they will have a better feel for the magic system and become more innovative on their own.

Later, magic becomes problematic in a different way. In theory, a hero who knows the right schools (or spheres) and has the right cards can do almost anything in a scenario. However, magic is in the game to advance the story, not to allow the heroes to circumvent it. If the spells the heroes cast threaten to derail the story, the Narrator should invent a reason why they fail to work correctly. Do not over-use this power, but do not allow ultra-powerful magic to ruin a good story, either.

Hints for Narrators

Narrators should keep in mind a few additional concepts as players attempt actions in the game.

Mishaps

One suit of the Fate Deck has not been discussed yet: the Suit of Dragons. Dragons represent misfortune and can have dire effects on heroes' actions. If a hero plays a card from the Suit of Dragons and the action fails, some sort of mishap has occurred, such as an injury (loss of a card)

or just embarrassment. It is up to the Narrator to interpret the situation and decide exactly what the mishap is and how bad the situation becomes.

Ability Codes

In many ways, heroes' ability codes are more important than their scores. A hero may be strong as an ox, but without proper training he or she can use only the most basic of weapons. Narrators should make sure that heroes do not consistently perform actions that are beyond their capabilities. The general relationship between code, capability, and level of training in skills related to the ability is as follows:

- A (expert): Fully trained in associated skills.
- B (advanced): Trained in most associated skills.
- C (journeyman): Trained in common associated skills.
- D (beginner): Trained in basic associated skills.
- X (novice): No training in associated skills.

Other Tips

Finally, here are a few things every Narrator should keep in mind during a Saga roleplaying game:

- Only *heroes* attempt actions! No one ever need play cards for a character.
- Be colorful with your descriptions. You are painting the scene for the players, describing all the things their senses would tell them. The more artfully you do this, the more everyone will enjoy the game.
- You and the other players are working together to create a story; you are not adversaries (even though the heroes and some characters might be). When the heroes succeed, you do too!
- Saga roleplaying is supposed to be fun! These rules are guidelines only, so never let strict adherence to them spoil your game!