



Theatre of the Dice is the **Character-Leaning Prep & Play TTRPG Ruleset** built for games that thrive on imagination, personality, and narrative immersion. The system rewards creativity and character over mathematics and tactical balance. It's best suited for adventures emphasizing roleplay, interpersonal relationships, mystery, or performance, such as character-driven journeys and improvisational storytelling. Consider using an adventure created with Jeri Shepherd's "*Create Your Own 1-Page RPG*" workshop or one of her *Domainian Dungeons*, but the flexible structure allows it to support any adventure type or setting, from lighthearted fantasy to deep space opera, to terrorizing horror. Storytelling and collaboration take center stage. *Theatre Of The Dice* comes in the full polyhedral dice set and the D20-only single die variants.



The Prep

Players

Gamemasters

SURVIVAL



Description: This is the overall health as it begins, diminishes, and heals throughout the adventure. Survival is not guaranteed.

- **Starting Health:** Roll 1d20. The result is your total Health.
- **Wear:** Players could experience a wear to their starting health through injury, exposure, or exertion.
- **Recovery:** Short rests last 1–2 rounds, long rests last 3–4 rounds, per gamemaster discretion.
 - Short Rest = Roll 1d20; recover Health equal to half the roll (rounded down).
 - Long Rest = Roll 1d20; recover the full roll in Health, up to maximum Starting Health, or with bonus Health if determined by gamemaster based on narrative circumstances.

ACTION



Description: Players are able to think, move, do, and speak in each round of play on their turn. Doing means to specifically engage the player's collection (of skills, gear, or weaponry).

- **Thinking:**
 - Choose one mental *Focus* to define your character's reasoning or expression style.
 - *Insight* (perception, reading emotion, creative intuition)
 - *Reason* (logic, deduction, calculation)
 - *Presence* (charisma, influence, conviction)
 - When a player's action align with a chosen focus, the player can roll with +2 for a Skill used during the Doing phase of Action.
- **Moving:**
 - All characters can move freely unless encumbered.
 - They are either near (melee) to something or far (ranged) from it.
 - The gamemaster may require 1 round of play to close the distance for Doing.
 - Encumbrance: Roll with Burden (roll two d20s, take the lower result) when encumbered.
- **Doing:**
 - When attempting a task or attack, roll 1d20 + any relevant bonuses against a Target Number:
 - Easy = 8+ Moderate = 12+ Hard = 16+ Epic = 20+

COLLECTION



Description: In any given turn, besides thinking, moving, and speaking, a player can choose to use one aspect of the collection (skills, gear, or weaponry).

- **Skills:**
 - Choose two areas of capability. Related rolls gain Benefit (roll two d20s, take the higher result).
- **Gear:**
 - Begin with one item tied to your background or personal story. Its use may provide a Benefit roll.
- **Weaponry:**
 - Begin with one weapon to deal the following Harm:
 - Light weapon = roll 1d20, divide by 4 (rounded up)
 - Standard weapon = roll 1d20, divide by 3 (rounded up)
 - Heavy weapon = roll 1d20, divide by 2 (rounded up)
 - On a natural 20, the attack may cause additional Harm at gamemaster discretion.

PARAMETERS



Mindset: Like your players, you'll have to get imaginative in Theatre of the Dice. Here is a suggested framework to help you along the way.

- Consider preparing three encounters:
 - One roleplay
 - One environmental
 - One combat
- Assign Target Numbers according to importance or tension:
 - Easy = 8+
 - Moderate = 12+
 - Hard = 16+
 - Epic = 20+
- Encourage a "describe first, roll second" approach to play.
- Reward creative or cinematic storytelling with Benefit (roll two d20s and take the better result) or impede the journey with Burden (roll two d20s and take the worse result) when the backstory works against the player.



IT'S ABOUT THE THEATRICALS!

Theatre of the Dice is a the Character-Leaning Prep & Play TTRPG Ruleset. It encourages playfulness and imagination more than a strict set of tactics or mathematics.

Player's should not ask "Can I do something?" Instead, they should describe how they plan to do something and the gamemaster determines what's needed to accomplish it.

Add additional theatricals in the following ways!

- **Flavor:**
 - Players choose three words that capture tone, mood, or persona related to their characters.
- **Fun:**
 - Any imaginative action is rollable if the table and gamemaster agree it fits the character concept.
- **Flair:**
 - Once per session, allow players to narrate a flourish or dramatic moment to gain Benefit (roll two d20s, and take the better result).

Available as a Single Die Variant (d20)

Visit: www.RedWritesBooks.com



The Play



SUMMARY OF DICE USE

- All rolls use 1d20 (sometimes more than one).
- Benefit: roll two d20s, keep higher.
- Burden: roll two d20s, keep lower.
- Target Numbers: 8+, 12+, 16+, 20+.
- Health, Recovery, and Harm are all scaled from the same d20 base, maintaining simplicity and balance.



ROUNDS IN PLAY



In each round, on a player's turn, players may: *Think, Move, Do, and Speak* in any order they choose.

- **Player Order:** At the start of an encounter, all players roll 1d20; highest acts first each round.
 - Gamemasters can determine if one player order roll is made for the full adventure, or a new roll is made before each major encounter.
- **Thinking:**
 - Use Insight, Reason, or Presence for cognitive or persuasive actions.
- **Moving:**
 - Players change between near and far range.
 - Gamemasters may require a player to close the distance in order to save their *Doing* for a successive round.
- **Doing:**
 - Players can use ONE element of Collection (skill, gear, or weapon). Roll 1d20 + any relevant bonuses to resolve based on a gamemaster-determined difficulty rating.
- **Speaking:**
 - Dialogue with fellow players and verbal reactions to the unfolding scenario are always allowed.

Gamemasters may, at their own discretion and for any logical narrative reason given, remove a player's ability to *Think, Move, Do, or Speak* for the following durations:

- Permanently
- For a determined or rolled-for number of rounds
- Until a specific recovery is achieved or rolled-for

COLLECTION IN PLAY



Players may use only one aspect of their Collection (skill, gear, or weapon) each round. Skills, Gear, and Weapons should remain the same as those chosen during *The Prep*, but it is up to the gamemaster whether they must be communicated ahead of time or only tracked by the players.

- **Skills**
 - May provide Benefit (roll two d20s, take the higher).
- **Gear**
 - Expended after 3 uses.
- **Weapons**
 - Weapons deal Harm as follows:
 - Light = roll 1d20 divided by 4 (round up)
 - Standard = roll 1d20 divided by 3 (round up)
 - Heavy = roll 1d20 divided by 2 (round up)
 - Natural 20 = possible extra Harm per gamemaster discretion.

SURVIVAL IN PLAY



Wear to a player's starting health could occur in combat, when encountering a hazard, or at the gamemaster's discretion as fits the narrative. Defensive actions could prevent some Wear.

- When attacked, roll defense using any relevant Skill or Focus.
 - Use narrative to describe how the skill is relevant to the defense.
 - Gamemaster approval or general table consensus (at gamemaster discretion) determines whether the argument is worthy of the Skill or Focus application.
 - A player may also use *Moving* as part of defense, but then cannot move during the next round.
- Injuries, Illness, and Incurred Harm will continue to reduce Health until it is at 0, or unless a player rests to recover some or all of the original Starting Health.
 - Number of rounds required for a short rest (restore 1d4 of health) or a long rest (restore all health) are determined by the gamemaster.
 - At 0 Health, the player narrates their final moment unless an ally uses a round of play to stabilize Health at 1 by rolling a 12 or higher on 1d20.



REMEMBER THE THEATRICALS!

Theatre Of The Dice is character-leaning, so LEAN IN!

- **Flavor:**
 - Stay true to the three character-defining words in both success and failure.
- **Fun:**
 - Keep the world playful; imagination drives every roll.
- **Flair:**
 - Once per session, a player may seize brief narrative control of the scene for dramatic effect, and possibly earn Benefit, based on gamemaster discretion.

Prep & Play Rulesets are minimalist systems designed for maximum imagination and accessibility. Each uses a simple two-page format: Page 1 (*The Prep*) helps players and gamemasters build characters and set expectations; Page 2 (*The Play*) guides how the adventure unfolds at the table. There are rulesets for your preferred method of play including: character-leaning for those who love roleplay; world-leaning for those who pay more mind to their settings than the rules by which they will play through them; and rule-leaning for the min/max players who enjoy digging into the mechanics to find tactical advantages. Every ruleset can be played with the full polyhedral dice set or a single die variant. While each ruleset is adaptable to any genre, tone, or story imaginable, consider using an adventure created with Jeri Red Shepherd's "Create Your Own 1-Page RPG" workshop or featured in her *Domainian Dungeons*! See her site for more info!

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