

# **Project: Sage**

**Game Design Document V1**

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## Goal

Project: Sage is a light text-based RPG that is intended as a lightweight project that our small team of developers can reasonably create a demo in a short timeframe.

## Premise

Project: Sage takes place at a magic school in a fantasy city with a 1980's level of technology. Sage, the game's main character, is attending a house party with a group of their friends. Each of these friends are fellow attendees of Selnarch Academy, a magic school where students can learn one of eight disciplines of magic. Sage has studied magic that allows them to see the future, and receives a vision of the death of one of their other friends. The player must then attempt to solve the mystery and stop the murder before it happens. The player must deduce the identity of the murderer, determine their plan, and stop it before the events of the vision are played out.

The game plays out similarly to a visual novel, where the story will be presented in a series of text blocks, where the player may influence the story through dialogue options. When the player selects an option with any risk attached or effort required, an attribute test will be made. In an attribute test, the player will roll a pool of dice composed of the relevant attribute and additional dice from items and circumstantial bonuses. The player will succeed if they reach or exceed the target number, and may exert themselves to secure higher chances of succeeding in exchange for permanently reducing the value of the relevant attribute. The player can experience multiple endings that can be reached depending on the choices they make and the results of their attribute tests.

## **Pitch**

"Project: Sage" is a text-based RPG where the player takes the role of a student at a magical academy in an 80's-style fantasy setting who sees the future of a grim event at a private party her friends are going to, and must avert the future from occurring. Players build pools of dice representing attributes, items, information, and circumstantial bonuses to accomplish tests and challenges.

## **Inspiration**

Working Game Title - Project: Sage

Mechanical Influences:

- Numenera - the exertion system of skill tests is inspired by numenera's system which allows players to spend points in their characteristic pools in order to reduce the difficulty of tasks.
- Overlight - The dice pool system of this game is loosely inspired by Overlight's dice system, where the player builds a pool of dice composed of their virtues (ability scores) and relevant skills. Additionally, the idea of wealth as an attribute came from this system.

Narrative Influences:

- Clue - the narrative of the game originally stemmed from the idea of "fantasy Clue" where the main character would be using magic to solve a murder mystery.

## **Mechanics**

The game's mechanics revolve around a skill test system similar to those in most tabletop role-playing games. When the player character is met with a narrative

obstacle, they will be allowed to roll a skill test in order to attempt to overcome the obstacle.

In order to complete a skill test, the player must build and roll a pool of dice, composed of attribute scores, equipment, relationships with NPC's and circumstantial bonuses. If the total of all dice rolled meets or exceeds the target number of the test, the player succeeds.

Additionally, the player has the ability to exert themselves during any test, which allows them to triple the number of attribute dice rolled during the test, but at the cost of permanently reducing that attribute's score by 1 (in order to compensate, there will be many opportunities to increase the player character's attributes).

## Attributes

The player character has four primary attributes. While effectively similar to classic attributes from RPGs (such as strength, intelligence, and charisma), these attributes are given a new spin to represent moment-to-moment skills. The four attributes are as follows:

- **Energy:** represents the PC's moment-to-moment physical energy. Used to perform physical activities; replenished by resting and eating.
- **Knowledge:** represents the PC's knowledge and mental handling of the setting and situation. Used to recall knowledge and perform tasks of wits; may be replenished by gaining new information.
- **Influence:** represents the PC's general influence over other characters in the setting. Used to curry favor with NPCs; replenished through pleasant social interaction.
- **Wealth:** represents the player's current level of funds. Used to make purchases, bribe NPCs, or otherwise spend money; replenished when gaining money.

Every attribute has a related dice value, which scales as such: d4 -> d6 -> d8 -> d10 -> d12; each attribute will have a starting value of d6, with the lowest possible value being a d4, the highest a d12.

## Inventory

During the game the player can collect items, evidence, and information that will be added to the player's inventory. This can include consumable and persistent items, pieces of evidence, clues, and information. Typically, items will add additional dice to the player's dice pool during an attribute test; an energy drink might be consumed to add a d6 to an energy test, while a clue about a character's whereabouts during an event might add a d8 to an influence test to read the character's intentions.

In order to add a bonus to a test, the player may open their inventory after initiating the test but before rolling it. Selecting an item from the inventory will allow the player to add its relevant dice value to your roll, if applicable.

## Relationships

Each of the major NPC's in the game will have a relationship scale that represents that character's favor towards the player character. Since each character is narratively an established friend of the player character, each character's relationship with the PC will begin at "friendly." If the player chooses to act favorably toward an NPC, their reputation will increase to "trusted," and if they choose to inversely act unfavorably toward an NPC, their reputation may decrease to "untrusted." While this scale will typically unlock dialogue options or adjust dialogue responses, being at any point on the scale may give the player a circumstantial bonus on an attribute test.

## Art Style

In order to stay in line with the 80s style of the narrative, Project: Sage will have a strong vaporwave visual aesthetic. Its vibrant neon color palette will evoke the feelings of the era and match with the mix of technology and magic that is prevalent in the setting; as a result, desaturated colors should be almost entirely avoided.

Project: Sage will also feature almost entirely pixel-art graphics. While games in the 80s generally featured 8-bit and 16-bit graphics, we will be reaching more for a 16-bit aesthetic, though the focus will be more on achieving the general 80s aesthetics than that of its games specifically.

To lean into the themes of future-seeing and divination, each character will, instead of a typical portrait, be personified as a card from a tarot deck. While still following the general vaporwave and pixel art aesthetics, the tarot cards will also be drawing inspiration from the Rider-Waite Tarot for their aesthetics.

## Challenges

The largest challenge for our team is that each member of the team is a full-time college student, which along with us all working part-time means that our ability to focus our efforts on the project is very limited.

In terms of game-design specific challenges, the largest challenge to determine is how to make our dice systems feel good. In any chance-based game, from games inspired by tabletop RPGs like *Baldur's Gate* and the digital *Pathfinder* games, to tactical games like *XCOM*, players tend to be very picky about chance. While the exertion mechanic should make dice rolls feel better in that players may choose to artificially increase their chances of succeeding on tasks they really want to, further playtesting will determine whether the mechanic is sufficient, or if the players feel incentivized to use it.

## **Timeline**

Our current plan is to develop a playable tech demo by the end of May 2026, in order to receive player feedback from a wider audience, and to further market our game to potential players.