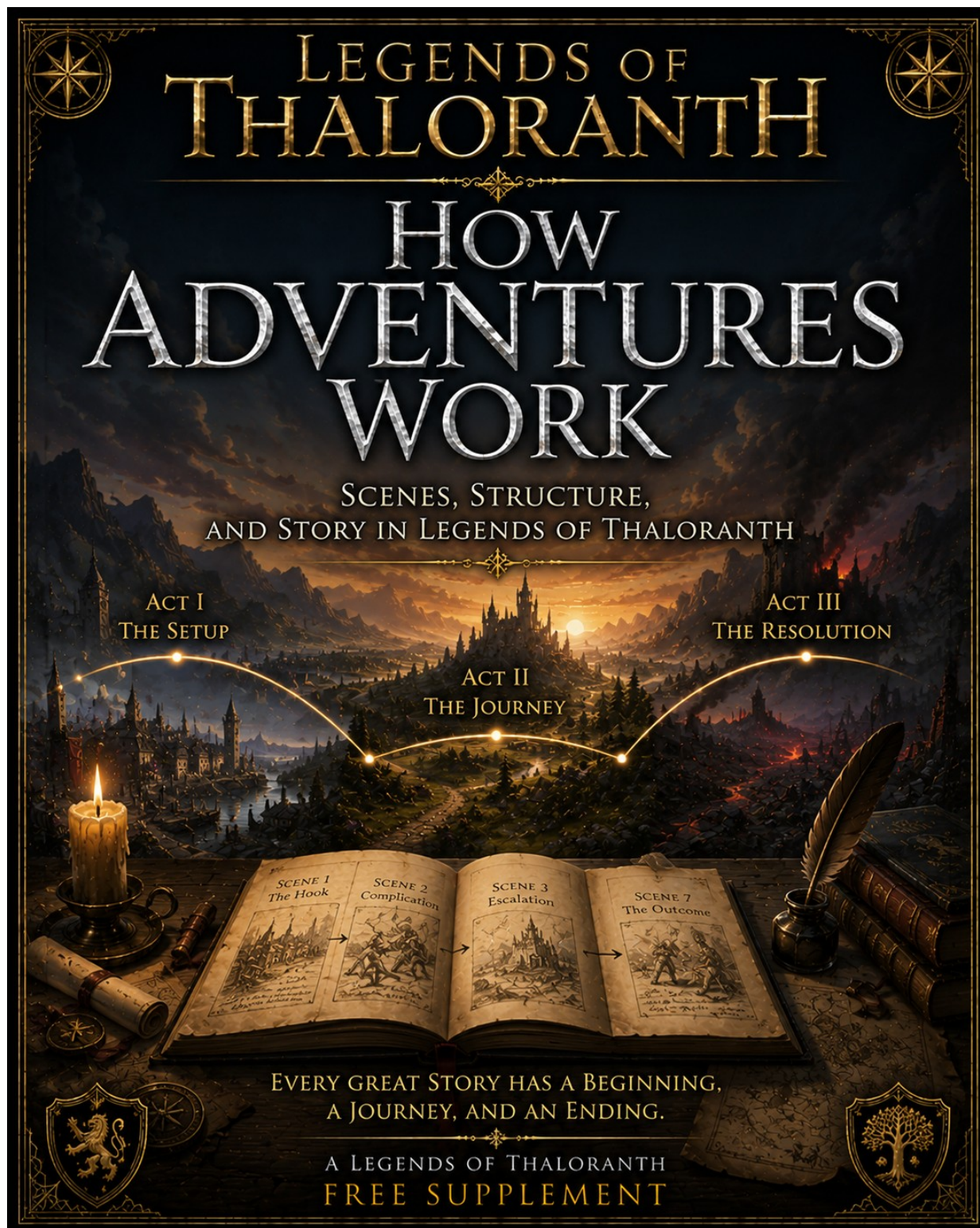




HOW ADVENTURES WORK

Scenes, Structure, and Story in Legends of Thaloranth

A Legends of Thaloranth Free Supplement

This guide introduces the adventure structure of Legends of Thaloranth: what a scene is and how it works, how scenes build into the three-arc adventure framework, the three adventure formats available, and what a session of LoT actually feels like at the table. The complete adventure design framework, scene construction, preparation for improvisation, the adventure planning template, and the campaign arc structure, is documented in the Game Master's Guide.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Adventures as Dramatic Units.....	3
What a Scene Is.....	4
What Makes a Good Scene.....	4
Scenes and Experience.....	5
Scene Construction.....	6
The Situation.....	6
The Challenge.....	6
The Consequence.....	6
Scene Types.....	7
Combat and Action Scenes.....	7
Social and Political Scenes.....	7
Exploration, Investigation, and Discovery Scenes.....	8
The Seven-Scene Arc.....	8
The 21-Scene Adventure.....	9
The Three Arcs in Detail.....	10
Arc One: Establishment (Scenes 1–7).....	10
Arc Two: Escalation (Scenes 8–14).....	11
Arc Three: Resolution (Scenes 15–21).....	11
Adventure Formats.....	12
The One-Shot.....	12
The Cliffhanger.....	13
What a Session Feels Like.....	14
Every Character Has a Moment.....	14
Social Encounters Are Real Encounters.....	14
The Adventure Lands Somewhere.....	15
Experience Is Earned, Not Awarded.....	15
Where to Go Next.....	15
The Game Master's Guide.....	15

Getting Started with Experience Points.....	16
The Player's Guide.....	16

INTRODUCTION: ADVENTURES AS DRAMATIC UNITS

The playwright had been writing for the theater of Radia for twenty years. She had produced tragedies, comedies, political satires, and at least one piece that the Council of Lords had tried to suppress. She had opinions about structure.

“Three acts,” she told her student. “Not because the gods decreed it. Because an audience needs to arrive somewhere, travel somewhere, and land somewhere. Without those three movements, you have a scene. A scene is not a story.”

She looked at the draft on the table between them.

“This is seven scenes. Where does it land?”

The student looked at his work for a long moment.

“I’m not sure.”

“Then neither will your audience.”

Most roleplaying games treat adventures as collections of encounters. You clear the dungeon room by room. You follow the investigation lead by lead. The session ends when you run out of time, not when the story lands somewhere. What happens at the table is

determined by what the GM prepared and which direction the players happened to go, and the relationship between those two things produces whatever it produces.

Legends of Thaloranth treats adventures as dramatic units. Not a collection of encounters, but a structured story with a beginning that establishes the situation, a middle that complicates and develops it, and an end that delivers consequences that feel earned. The structure is not a constraint on what happens at the table. It is the framework that makes what happens at the table feel like a story rather than a sequence of events.

This supplement explains how that structure works: what a scene is, how scenes build into the seven-scene arc that is the fundamental unit of adventure structure, how three arcs combine into a complete adventure, and what the different adventure formats look like in practice. It is also, for a prospective player or GM, the most direct answer to the question: what does it actually feel like to play this game?

WHAT A SCENE IS

A scene is a unit of meaningful change. Not a location, not an encounter, not a time period, a unit of change. Something is different at the end of a scene than it was at the beginning. That difference is what makes it a scene.

This definition matters more than it might first appear. In a system built around encounter-by-encounter progression, a scene ends when the combat is resolved or the NPC conversation concludes. In LoT, a scene ends when something has changed, when information has been revealed, a decision has been made, a relationship has shifted, a threat has materialized or been addressed. The change is what makes the scene real.

A scene can be long or short, intense or quiet, combat-driven or entirely conversational. What it cannot be is static. A scene in which nothing changes is not a scene. It is either a passage between scenes, travel, rest, recovery, or it is setup for the scene that follows, in which case the two should probably be combined.

What Makes a Good Scene

The GMG identifies three qualities that distinguish scenes worth playing from scenes that should be summarized or skipped entirely.

Something is at stake. Not abstractly, but specifically. The party is trying to get information from someone who has reason not to give it. The fight is happening in a location where the outcome matters beyond the fight itself. The social encounter is with someone whose reaction will change what options are available next. Stake is what makes the outcome of the scene matter to what comes after it.

Multiple approaches are possible. A scene with only one correct path is a skill check, not a scene. If there is only one way to succeed, there is no decision to make. A strong scene supports direct confrontation, negotiation, investigation, technical problem-solving, and avoidance as genuine options, each leading to a different outcome. The players' choices shape the scene rather than the scene shaping the players' choices.

The outcome connects forward. A scene that does not affect what comes next is orphaned from the adventure. Every scene should produce something, information, a relationship change, a new threat, a resource gained or lost, that the subsequent scenes build from. The scenes that players remember are the ones whose consequences showed up later in unexpected ways.

Scenes and Experience

Each completed scene earns the characters one XP. This is the connection between the adventure structure and the advancement system: the unit of change is also the unit of growth. A character who has been in seven scenes has earned seven XP. A full adventure of twenty-one scenes produces twenty-one XP.

The XP-per-scene design is not accidental. It ensures that every scene, combat, social, exploration, investigation, quiet character moment, produces the same mechanical advancement. The system does not privilege combat or any other scene type. What matters is that the scene was real: something changed, something was at stake, and the characters engaged with it.

SCENE CONSTRUCTION

Every scene is constructible from three elements. The GMG requires these three elements for every scene in an adventure, and the discipline of building scenes this way is what separates adventures that work from adventures that drift.

The Situation

The situation establishes what is happening and why the characters are here. It should be communicable in two or three sentences. If you cannot describe the scene's situation concisely, you do not yet understand what the scene is doing in the adventure. The situation is not backstory, it is the immediate circumstance that the characters walk into.

A good situation is specific. Not “the party investigates the warehouse” but “the warehouse appears empty but the door has been forced from inside, and the dock workers who were supposed to unload it last night haven't been seen since.” The specificity is what makes the situation a scene rather than a location.

The Challenge

The challenge establishes what the characters must do and what stands between them and doing it. The challenge is not always an opponent. It is sometimes information that must be assembled from partial evidence, a relationship that must be navigated carefully, terrain that must be traversed under time pressure, or a decision that must be made with incomplete information.

The challenge should be genuinely uncertain. If the outcome is predetermined, the scene is not a challenge, it is exposition. Characters should be able to succeed or fail, and both outcomes should produce something the adventure can use.

The Consequence

The consequence establishes what changes based on how the challenge resolves. Success and failure should produce different consequences, and both should connect forward to subsequent scenes. A scene whose outcome has no effect on what follows was not worth playing as a scene, it should have been summarized and the party moved on.

The consequence is also where the adventure's living world quality is maintained. NPCs who were present remember what the characters did. Institutions that were affected

respond. The party's reputation shifts in ways the system tracks. The consequence is the mechanism by which the adventure becomes part of the campaign rather than a standalone event.

SCENE TYPES

Adventures in LoT distribute scenes deliberately across three types. The distribution is not a rigid quota, it is a structural target that ensures the adventure provides meaningful moments for every character and every skill investment.

A full 21-scene adventure targets roughly seven scenes of each type: seven combat or action scenes, seven social or political scenes, and seven exploration, investigation, or discovery scenes. An adventure that defaults to any single type produces an uneven experience where some characters are consistently central and others are consistently peripheral.

Combat and Action Scenes

Combat scenes are physical confrontations, chases, escapes, and any scene where the primary challenge is physical. They draw on the Zones and Action Points framework, favor characters with combat Path investment and physical stats, and produce VP costs, resource expenditure, and the specific weight of violence in a system where it is genuinely dangerous.

Varying the specific demands of combat scenes is as important as including them. Two combat scenes can require completely different skill investments if one takes place in a fortified position that rewards defensive strategy and one takes place in a crowded market where collateral damage is a real concern with reputation consequences.

Social and Political Scenes

Social scenes are negotiations, interrogations, formal encounters, faction meetings, relationship conversations, and any scene where the primary challenge is interpersonal. They draw on the NPC Attitude system, the Obligation Economy, and the Institutional Reputation framework. They favor characters with Social stat investment and social skill depth, but they are not exclusively the province of social specialists.

Every character can participate in social scenes because social scenes are not solved by a single Persuasion check. They are navigated through understanding what NPCs want, finding the approach that works for this specific person in this specific context, and building or drawing on the relationship capital that the campaign has accumulated. A Fighter whose Intimidation is the right tool for this moment is as central to a social scene as a Diplomat.

Exploration, Investigation, and Discovery Scenes

Exploration and investigation scenes are searches, research, information-gathering, environmental navigation, and any scene where the primary challenge is understanding something, a location, a situation, a person, a document. They draw on Investigation, History, Lore, Survival, and the full range of knowledge skills. They reward analytical thinking and character-specific knowledge investments.

These scenes are where the adventure's information architecture is revealed. The party does not arrive at a LoT adventure already knowing what is happening. They discover it, scene by scene, through the specific questions their characters are positioned to ask and the specific answers their skills allow them to extract. The investigation scene is not the prelude to the real adventure. It is the adventure.

THE SEVEN-SCENE ARC

The seven-scene arc is the fundamental unit of adventure structure in Legends of Thaloranth. A complete dramatic movement, with a beginning, a development, and an end that changes something, can be accomplished in seven scenes. This is the structure that governs one-shots, and it is the building block from which full adventures are assembled.

The seven-scene arc follows a natural dramatic progression:

Scene One, Hook. The situation is introduced. The characters encounter the problem for the first time. Two things must happen in this scene: the apparent situation must be communicated clearly, and the characters must have a reason to care about it. Everything that follows depends on that reason.

Scene Two, Development. Information is gathered and direction begins to form. The characters learn more about the situation than the hook revealed, which opens questions without yet answering them.

Scene Three, Obstacle. The first meaningful resistance appears. Not the climax, the first indication that whatever stands between the characters and their goal is real and capable of pushing back.

Scene Four, Complication. The situation becomes more difficult or layered. A second faction appears, a hidden motive becomes visible, a time constraint is introduced. The situation the characters thought they understood is more complex than it looked.

Scene Five, Discovery. New information or truth shifts understanding. Not all complications are reversals, sometimes the discovery is that the situation is worse than feared, sometimes it is that an apparent enemy is more nuanced, sometimes it is that the answer was available all along if the right question had been asked.

Scene Six, Confrontation. The central challenge is faced. Not necessarily a fight, a difficult negotiation, a critical decision, a climactic revelation. Whatever form the adventure's central challenge takes, this is where it is engaged directly.

Scene Seven, Resolution. Consequences are established and the path forward is revealed. The aftermath of the confrontation, the world's response to what the characters did, the seeds of what comes next.

The structure is not rigid. Scenes may expand, contract, combine, or shift in tone depending on what the table produces. A single scene may contain tension, action, and resolution simultaneously. What matters is that each scene advances the situation and connects forward to the next, and that the seven scenes together create a complete dramatic arc with a beginning, a middle that develops and complicates, and an end that lands somewhere.

THE 21-SCENE ADVENTURE

A full adventure in Legends of Thaloranth consists of 21 scenes organized into three arcs of seven scenes each. Each scene earns one XP, which means a complete adventure produces 21 XP, enough to represent meaningful character advancement across a complete dramatic unit.

The three-arc structure maps directly onto the three-act dramatic framework: establishment, escalation, and resolution. Each arc has a specific function, a specific set of obligations to the adventure's dramatic arc, and a specific way of closing that sets up what follows.

Arc	Scenes	Function	Closes With
One, Establishment	1–7	Establish the situation, the stakes, and the characters' commitment to the central challenge.	A complication that reveals the situation is not what it appeared to be.
Two, Escalation	8–14	Develop the complications, deepen the stakes, drive toward the confrontation. The adventure's most varied arc.	The most significant reversal, the moment when the full scope becomes clear and the cost becomes real.
Three, Resolution	15–21	Drive toward the climax, deliver the central challenge's confrontation, close with earned consequences.	Two aftermath scenes where the world responds to what the characters did.

THE THREE ARCS IN DETAIL

Arc One: Establishment (Scenes 1–7)

The first arc's seven scenes do three things: establish the situation, establish the stakes, and commit the characters to engagement with the adventure's central challenge.

Scene one is almost always an entry point, the characters encounter the situation for the first time through a job offer, a discovery, an unexpected event, or a request from someone they have reason to trust. This scene needs to do two things efficiently: tell the characters what the apparent situation is, and give them a reason to care about it. The apparent situation will develop and complicate over the next twenty scenes. The reason to care needs to be established now, because everything that follows depends on it.

Scenes two through five develop the situation, introduce the key NPCs, establish the environment in which the adventure takes place, and begin generating the questions the characters will spend arcs two and three answering. These scenes are distributed across types: at least one social scene, at least one exploration or investigation scene, and combat positioned where the fiction demands it rather than at predetermined intervals.

Scenes six and seven close the first arc with a complication that changes the apparent situation. The characters have learned enough to understand that the situation is not what it looked like at the start. The complication should raise the stakes, introduce a new dimension of the challenge, or reveal information that recontextualizes what came before. Arc one ends with the characters understanding what they are actually dealing with, which is rarely what they thought they were dealing with when they started.

Arc Two: Escalation (Scenes 8–14)

The second arc is where the adventure does its most demanding work. Seven scenes to develop the complications introduced at the end of arc one, deepen the stakes, and drive the characters toward the confrontation that arc three will deliver.

Arc two should contain the adventure's most varied scene distribution. A major social encounter that tests the characters' relationships with the NPCs they have established. An investigation or exploration sequence that reveals the information the climax will require. At least one significant combat encounter that raises the cost of continuing. And the moment, somewhere in the middle of the arc, when the characters understand the full scope of what they are dealing with.

The arc two complication, which closes scenes eleven through fourteen and opens the path to arc three, should be the adventure's most significant reversal: the moment when a character the party trusted reveals a different agenda, when the situation expands beyond what anyone anticipated, or when the cost of the adventure becomes viscerally real. This reversal should feel earned by what came before, not imposed from outside the fiction.

Arc Three: Resolution (Scenes 15–21)

The third arc drives toward the climax, delivers the confrontation or resolution the first two arcs have been building toward, and closes with consequences that feel earned.

Scene fifteen opens arc three with the characters having absorbed the arc two reversal and now committed to a specific course of action. The path to the climax is clear even if the outcome is not. Scenes fifteen through nineteen escalate toward the climax through a focused sequence that tests the specific capabilities and relationships the adventure has developed.

Scene twenty is the climax, the adventure's most significant encounter. The boss fight, the final negotiation, the discovery that resolves the central mystery, or whatever form the adventure's central challenge takes at its culmination. The climax should feel like the culmination of everything that came before it, not a set piece that happens to be at the end.

Scenes twenty and twenty-one are the aftermath. They are not epilogue, they are active scenes in which the consequences of the climax unfold, NPCs respond to what happened, and the characters engage with the result of their choices. The aftermath is where the adventure's meaning is made explicit, where the world is seen to have changed in response to what the characters did, and where the seeds of future adventures are planted. Do not rush the aftermath. It is as important as the climax, and at some tables, it is more memorable.

ADVENTURE FORMATS

The 21-scene full adventure is the standard format, but Legends of Thaloranth supports two shorter formats designed for specific purposes.

Format	Scenes	XP Earned	Best Used For
Full Adventure	21	21 XP	Primary campaign arcs. Complete dramatic units with full three-arc structure.
One-Shot	7	7 XP	Introducing new players, exploring campaign corners, standalone experiences.
Cliffhanger	5–7	5–7 XP	On-ramps to larger campaigns, between-session hooks, deliberate incomplete endings.

The One-Shot

A one-shot is a complete adventure resolved in a single session: one arc of seven scenes with a beginning, a middle, a climax, and a resolution. It uses the same three-element scene construction as a full adventure but compresses the dramatic arc into a single unit.

One-shots work best when they have a clear, contained premise communicable in a sentence, because the seven scenes available do not allow for extended establishment. A specific problem, a specific location, a specific set of characters with a specific reason to be together. The premise should be understood immediately so the scenes can focus on developing and resolving it rather than explaining it.

One-shots serve multiple purposes in a campaign context. They introduce new players to the system without the commitment of an ongoing campaign. They explore corners of the world that the main campaign touches but does not develop. They provide complete standalone experiences that can be enjoyed without investment in an ongoing narrative. For a prospective player who wants to see what LoT feels like before committing to a longer game, the one-shot is the right entry point.

The Cliffhanger

A cliffhanger is a one-arc adventure of five to seven scenes that ends without resolution, an open conclusion that leaves the central challenge unresolved and the stakes heightened. It is designed either as a standalone experience that invites the players to want more, or as an on-ramp to a longer campaign that uses the cliffhanger's unresolved situation as its starting point.

The cliffhanger's dramatic arc is deliberately incomplete. It establishes a situation, develops it through the middle scenes, drives it to a crisis point, and stops there. The crisis is not the climax. It is the moment that would precede the climax in a full adventure, the point of maximum tension before resolution becomes possible.

Running a cliffhanger requires committing to the incompleteness. The temptation to resolve the central tension, to give the players a clean ending, should be resisted. The value of the cliffhanger format is precisely that it leaves something unfinished. The players should leave the table wanting to know what happens next, and that wanting should feel genuine rather than manufactured. A cliffhanger that resolves its central tension is just a short adventure.

WHAT A SESSION FEELS LIKE

For a prospective player or GM, the structure described above might sound more formal than what they are used to. In practice, it produces a specific quality of experience that is worth describing directly.

Every Character Has a Moment

The deliberate distribution of scene types, combat, social, exploration in roughly equal measure, ensures that the adventure is not dominated by any single type of character. A session of LoT is not a session where the fighters handle the encounters and everyone else waits. The fighter is essential in combat scenes. The diplomat is essential in social scenes. The scholar is essential in investigation scenes. The character whose specific capability is the right tool for this moment gets their moment, and that moment is structured into the adventure rather than left to chance.

This matters most in parties with diverse character builds. A classless system produces genuinely diverse parties, characters whose capability profiles are different enough that they actually need each other. The adventure structure is built to make that need visible and satisfying rather than incidental.

Social Encounters Are Real Encounters

In many RPG systems, social encounters are skill checks that either succeed or fail before the adventure continues. In LoT, social scenes are full scenes with situations, challenges, and consequences. They last as long as combat scenes. They are as strategically interesting as combat scenes. And their outcomes affect the adventure as meaningfully as combat outcomes.

The NPC attitude system, the Obligation Economy, and the Institutional Reputation framework all operate in social scenes. An NPC is not simply a check to be passed, they are a person with a want, a fear, a line they will not cross, and a secret that might change everything if it comes out. The party's approach to a social encounter, and how they handle the NPC's responses, produces consequences that propagate forward through the adventure and the campaign.

The Adventure Lands Somewhere

The most distinctive quality of a LoT session is that it ends somewhere. Not “we ran out of time” but “we arrived somewhere.” The seven-scene arc structure guarantees a complete dramatic movement with a resolution, or in the cliffhanger format, a deliberate incompleteness that creates genuine wanting. Either way, the session has a shape.

This is the playwright’s point. Three acts. Not because the gods decreed it, but because an audience needs to arrive somewhere, travel somewhere, and land somewhere. Without those three movements, what you have is a scene. A scene is not a story.

A session of Legends of Thaloranth is a story.

Experience Is Earned, Not Awarded

At the end of each scene, the characters earn 1 XP. Not at the end of the session, not when a major enemy is defeated, not when a predetermined milestone is reached. One XP, per scene, for being present and engaged in a moment where something changed.

This design produces a specific relationship between play and advancement. Growth happens because the characters showed up and participated in the scenes the adventure provided. The fighter who spent the session in combat scenes and the diplomat who spent it in social scenes earn the same XP, because both were doing the work the adventure asked of them. The system does not reward any particular approach to play. It rewards playing.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

The Game Master’s Guide

The complete adventure design framework, including the full scene construction methodology, scene type distribution guidance, the adventure planning template in Appendix D, the hooks and entry point catalogue, preparation for improvisation, pacing management across sessions and between sessions, and the campaign arc structure that connects individual adventures into sustained narratives. For anyone who wants to run LoT rather than just play it, the GMG’s adventure design chapter is the destination.

Getting Started with Experience Points

The XP freebie in this series covers how the one-XP-per-scene design connects to the advancement system, what XP can be spent on, when it can be spent, and why the immediate-spending design makes growth feel like what it is. Understanding the advancement system gives the scene-based XP award its full significance.

The Player's Guide

The resolution system that governs what happens within scenes, how checks work, what difficulty classes mean, when to call for a check and when to narrate the outcome. The social encounter chapter covers the NPC Attitude system, the Obligation Economy, and the Institutional Reputation framework that make social scenes as structured and consequential as the adventure framework treats them.

The complete adventure design framework is documented in the Legends of Thaloranth Game Master's Guide, available as part of the Legends of Thaloranth Core Line at thaloranthpublishingllc.com.

Legends of Thaloranth is published by Thaloranth Publishing, Roanoke, Virginia • thaloranthpublishingllc.com

© Keith Burns and Thaloranth Publishing. All rights reserved.