# The Westfarian Isles Role-Playing Game

## Note from the Author

This book describes the rules of a game. In the game, you and your collaborators assume the roles of inhabitants of the Westfarian Isles, which is an assortment of independent kingdoms entangled in a shifting state of war, peace, stability and uncertainty, and located in the mountainous coastal region known elsewhere as The Faen.

These rules were published in Westfarian Year (WF) 701, and so I would humbly recommend that you consider focusing on or around that time period when you play this game, since the rules governing nature and magic in this region (I have written and published the rules while travelling the highways, roads, and trails of the Isles for the past twenty-six years now) have been and appear to continue to be in a state of unusual flux; for example, by the time WF 751 rolls around, few if any of the rules for spell-casting and machinery might still apply, though of course, no one is likely to know that for sure, except perhaps for the crows.

I hope the simulated scenarios and adventures you create using these guidelines will provide inspiration and insight into your own travels, in your own world, in your own time.

-Q.F.C.

## Note from the Editor

This is a Role-playing game (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing_game>). Specifically, one set in a somewhat-light-hearted fantasy genre, where magic is very real, though often elusive. Although the author recommends you set your Westfarian Isles campaigns in or around that region, at a (more-or-less) specific moment in time, you should feel free to use these rules to run adventures in the world setting of your choice or creation, in whatever time periods are the most exciting to you and the friends you choose to play it with.

Although the author appears to have been commissioned to write these game rules in order to guide players through the simulation of personal, environmental, and random interactions (the reasons of which are unclear to me), you and your gaming friends should consider this book a set of guidelines only, and modify them as desired. It’s all about the experience. We hope you have a great time playing Westfarian Isles RPG, wherever and whenever you happen to be.

### Sub-note from the Editor

These rules have been heavily streamlined. Although I generally enjoyed reading the original, unedited version, which measured about 505 pages once the appendices, glossary, personal commentary, sidebars, analytics, and diagrams were included, I found the game was difficult to make time for, in practice. I believe that might have something to do with the Faen’s 28-hour day and standard 4-day week / 4-day weekend cycle, which essentially ensures the typical, privileged inhabitant of *that* world has, on average, about twice the leisure time available them than the typical privileged inhabitant of *our* world (and easily 3 times that of the less-privileged ones), in the early 21st century. I wanted to bring the spirit of the Isles RPG to gamers who would like to get into the core of actual gameplay and storytelling more quickly, since we’re all busy people these days, in one way or another. I hope I have managed to strike a good balance between the best hopes and intentions of both the author and the player\*. *As of 2018 ESY (Earth-Standard Year), I have lost contact with the author, though I cannot say if it is because he has taken great offence to my edits (I have some reason to think this might be the case), or if he has simply moved on to other things. I hope that, wherever he is, he appreciates my reasons for needing to boil this stuff down somewhat. I take full responsibility for any degradation in user experience that might have inadvertently resulted from this aggressive editing approach. I truly believe that, had the author lived in out time and place, he would agree with much of it.*

## A note on Inspiration

This game owes much of its inspiration to other games that have come before, and the friends that I played those games with. I began my RPG hobby, as many did in the 80’s, with Dungeons & Dragons. In my twenties, I fell in love with the Lion Rampant RPG called Ars Magica, an have taken additional bits of inspiration (both about game mechanics as well as themes and scopes) from games such as Paranoia, Cyberpunk, Mouseguard, and many others. Ars Magica continues to be my personal favourite, probably because it came closest to letting my particular group of friends tell fantasy stories in a way closest to our own hearts – it did for us what the best RPG systems do – provide inspiration and guidelines, and lots of room for interpretation. This rules revision owes much of its soul to an attempt to capture the story-first feeling of that most excellent system.

It’s sometimes hard to know where our best inspirations come from, but I believe we are all capable of synthesizing complex ideas from the immense body of knowledge and experience we accumulate as we move through our lives. This means some personal works of ours might be intended to happen sooner, while others are best left until later, because they wait patiently for us at the intersection of experiences and wisdom, that are still in our future. If you feel uninspired today, just wait until tomorrow; perhaps something you’re going to do in the meantime will trigger your next inspired thought. Role-playing games, like other forms of collaborative art, are meant to help keep the practice of inspired thought alive in our population, by engaging groups of friends to approach it as a collaborative venture. Look to your own unique experiences and insights, and then those of your friends, and you will find stories there – ones that will propel you forward toward more inspirations and more insights. And around it goes!

## Players

When you see the word ***player*** in this book, it refers to each of the people who sit down together (usually, though standing is obviously permitted) and play the Westfarian Isles RPG, for a few hours, now and then. Maybe the players play the game a couple of evenings a week, maybe they only play it once or twice a year, it doesn’t matter – when they are playing the game, they are called players.

The player is *not* a character in the game, they are the human *pretending* for a time to assume the role of a character. Players are aware they are playing a game, while the characters they play (almost always) do not know they are in a game at all. It’s like reading an adventure book, except the book is being shared by a handful of friends who are all reading it at the same time, while all taking turns writing the story as they go. Sometimes things happen in the story that are the result of random rolls of dice, so even the players don’t always know exactly where the story is going. The story can start and finish in a single sitting (2-4 hours in a typical length for RPG sessions), or the story can continue for weeks, months, or even years, as an episodic series of sessions. It’s a lot of fun, regardless - trust me!

## Characters

The Westfarian Isles are filled with *characters*. Remember, characters are controlled by the players and some dice rolls. Characters live in the collective imaginations of the players playing the game. Some characters are Human, some Human-like (in the Faen, this is sometimes called Humankin, a very Human-centric term, coined, almost certainly, by some Human), some Animal, some Monstrous, some Constructed, and some Fey. Some are combinations of one or more of these, either inside or out. All have magical natures, since the Faen is a place bound together by magic in all respects. Many characters know they are magical, many don’t. Some think about it a lot, others just take it for granted, and never give it a second thought. Some approach magic and their own natures as one in the same, and are instinctual about it. Humans are especially good at ignoring the magical nature of things (including themselves), because they invented Reason, which is a powerful and disruptive force they are always struggling to control, and part of the reason (grammar is sometimes ironic) the Isle kingdoms, which were once connected by land, are now separated by waterways, since the Seas have come knocking at the kingdoms’ doors, with some complaints to lodge on behalf of the natural world.

Classification is useful up to a point, but can also get in the way, after another point. In the Westfarian Isles RPG (which for brevity we’ll just call the Isles RPG), any entity that has a lifeforce, however temporary, can be thought of as a character. Given that, in the Faen, books can have opinions of their own, and Mountains can feel itchy when Wizards burrow tunnels through them to live and work in, almost anything can, at least for a time, be considered a character.

Luckily, as a player in the game, you are fine to ignore most of the potential characters inhabiting the world, until your own character encounters them in person, or maybe hears about them in the third person, from another character.

## Reason and Magic

Magic in the Faen is the force of Nature that Reason has yet to fully classify and control. Some Human invented Reason {possibly an accident}, or was perhaps granted it, though for what purpose, only the crows know. This happened so long ago know that nobody bothers to try and find its origin. It is sometimes referred to as the Cleaving – the moment Magic became constrained by a force nearly its equal – that of the conscious and frenetic thought or mortal men. Magic does not suffer excessive poking and prodding – it is, after all, a lifeforce of its own, and prefers to do its own thing, without being bothered for frivolous purposes. Where scrutiny and experimentation occur, Magic often (though not always) chooses to withdraw and flow elsewhere. It is like water that way, which reacts to attempts to contain it, without concerning itself much with the reasoning behind the attempts. It simply moves forward toward a more stable arrangement, trusting in the energies of the world to keep it flowing about, where it is needed. {All of this is conjecture, obviously; I worry if I go into it in greater detail, the magic inherent in this book will grow agitated and move into a different one, perhaps a romance novel, or short work of speculative fiction.}

## The Role of Crows

In the Faen {it is unclear whether this applies more generally, elsewhere}, it is believed that crows see truths which others do not. Some believe crows can affect the course of things with their own minds, for their own reasons, and for reasons of others they interact with. This belief, which ranges from old-wive’s tales in some parts of the Isles, and near-scientific “knowledge” in others, gave rise to the popular Westfarian adage, “only the crows know”, and similar statements.

Gods

You might be wondering about the role of gods in the Isles. Gods are often talked about as either creative forces, destructive forces, or both, but are generally considered to be above the mortal struggles of those below (or above, or whatever). There are nonetheless many, many belief systems at play in the Isles, and it is best to leave the whole topic for gradual revealing over time, perhaps in the form of special, Isle-specific manuals.

## Player Roles

Broadly speaking, there are three general kinds of character in the Isles RPG that players can assume the role of. Some players will play one type of character, and some will play others.

### The Storyteller

The Storyteller (or ST for short) is a special kind of character in Isles RPG – Usually, one of the players at the table will play the role of the Storyteller. The Storyteller does not appear directly as a mortal character in the story, but is essentially an omnipresent character who is telling a story (in present or past tense, their choice), that is centered on the adventures of several Heroes (who are controlled by the other players at the table). When the Heroes make decisions in the game, the Storyteller makes up how the world – that is, the environment, the other inhabitants, the forces of destiny and politics, the weather, etc. – react to those decisions. Sometimes, the Storyteller will decide to leave the exact results of these Hero-world interactions to the whim of dice rolls – this keeps the whole thing exciting and mysterious to everybody, including the Storyteller, and also mimics the inherent unknowability of things – mystery, serendipity, destiny, tragic bad luck, twists of fate, and so on. The story unfolds as a conversation between the Storyteller, the other players at the table, who all assume the roles of Heroes, and the whims of random chance.

## The Player-Character (PC)

The players at the table who are not playing the role of Storyteller play the roles of heroes in the story, and are called Player-Characters (or PCs), because they are characters assigned to specific players in the story. PCs are characters of the fantasy world who have recognized at least some of their own heroic nature, and have decided – or are on the verge of deciding – to venture off the more well-traveled roads walked by most inhabitants of the world, and instead pursue their true destinies along less trodden paths. This decision often leads these heroes along journeys into the unknown, and into conflict with other characters and forces. Sometimes, a PC will know they are a hero from the moment they set out on their first adventure, and other times, a PC won’t know they are a hero for many years after they’ve set out – their story becomes, in part, the story of how they come to realize their own Heroic nature.

## The Non-Player Character (NPC)

Characters in the game world that show up briefly or periodically, but are not controlled by one player all the time, are considered Non-Player characters (NPCs). The Storyteller will very often assume the role of NPCs in the service of telling the story – for example, she might assume the role of a guard or tavern owner, when the PCs encounter those characters during their travels – but the Storyteller does not think of these characters as *her* characters - they are independent spirits with their own motivations and lifepaths. Sometimes, the other players at the table may be given the opportunity to play NPCs for a short time by the Storyteller. The Storyteller always gets to decide when another player should temporarily assume the role of an NPC, and is encouraged to do so periodically. Players who are offered NPCs to play are encouraged to do so (it provides a nice break from playing their main character, which they will be doing a lot of), but are not obligated to do so, if they’re not comfortable doing it. Each gaming group will work out for themselves how NPCs will be handled.

Campaigns

When the player group decides to play the game over several sessions, with each session continuing the story from the last session, that series of sessions is called a campaign. You can think of an individual game session (2-4 hours of playing the game with your friends on a Tuesday evening, for example) as either a short story, or as a chapter of a larger story. If the story plays out in one session, it’s a short story. If it plays out over several sessions, it’s a campaign. The campaign is like the book, in this analogy. It can even be fun for the Storyteller and Players to divide their campaign into acts, or “books”, with the entire campaign playing out over time like a trilogy or some other epic work, but of course, that’s all up to them.

Whether the story you tell while playing the game is short or long, it is going to be a collaboration of the imagination of the Storyteller, the imaginations of the Player-Characters, and the fickleness of random chance, expressed using dice rolls at various times in the story.

## Game Rules

### Basic Rules

There are core rules to the game, and then many optional ones, that increase the complexity and nuance of those core rules. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of which rules will be used in the game, and which might be added later on, when the gaming group is comfortable with those, and wants to add complexity. The Storyteller is encouraged to consider the opinions of the other players when deciding what rules to use, which to ignore, and which, if any, to modify to their own group’s tastes.

### Advanced Rules

Advanced rules can make the game more interesting and challenging, but also increase the game’s complexity when added. The players should agree on which optional rules they are planning to use before beginning a campaign. They are also encouraged to consider adding or removing advanced rules to the campaign, if things aren’t working as well as they could, but should not do so in the middle of a session – wait until the session end to bring up rules modifications.

### House Rules

All rules should be considered open to modification, if the players all agree. Rules that differ from those presented in the book, when they are discussed and agreed to by all of the players, are called House rules. The group should probably make a written note of their house rules (if they choose to play with them), but as long as all the players understand and agree to them, that’s the main thing.

## Basic Rules

Storytelling

A role-playing game is a collaborative storytelling activity. One of the players assumes the role of the Storyteller during each session. Some groups might prefer to have the same player be the Storyteller for the entire campaign, while other groups might prefer taking turns in the Storyteller role. When the Storyteller changes, the group should decide whether they are playing the same campaign, or a different one, with different heroes (PCs) and its own storyline.

At the beginning of each session, the Storyteller should tell the other players some of the backstory, to give everybody a clear idea of where their characters are, what’s been going on, and at least some idea of the options available to them. Then the Storyteller asks they players, as a group, what they’d like to do.

Basic

Abilities

An Ability is a thing your PC has, that lets them break the rules of the basic game in some way.

New PCs start with some Abilities. They can learn more Abilities as they go adventuring.

There are two types of Abilities : Partial Abilities and Full Abilities.

Whenever your want to use a Partial ability, require that you spend one Mana point each time you want to use them.

When your PC wants to try something while on an adventure, they should ask the Storyteller if they can. The Storyteller then should decide how likely it is that their PC will succeed, by picking from this chart

Definitely 3+

Probably 5+

Maybe 7+

Unlikely 9+

Nope 12

The description on the left is how likely the Storyteller thinks it is that the Character will succeed at doing the thing they’re trying to do. The number on the right is the amount the Player has to roll on 2D6 to succeed.

Example: If Sam wants her character Mystifuss the Magician to climb a rope really fast, to avoid being seen by Goblins,

Full Abilities just work whenever you need them to.

Every time you activate a Partial Ability, you earn 1 Ability Point for that Ability. Once you earn six Ability Points in an Ability, it becomes a Full Ability!

Challenges

A Challenge is also a thing your PC has, that can sometimes make things harder for you.

Whenever you have an encounter a situation where one of your challenges makes things harder, you get 1D6 Mana.

Types of Luck

Dumb Luck

Instant Luck

Humble Luck

Extra Luck

Random Luck

Lovedone Luck

Advanced

Pain Resistance : You feel pain, but it doesn’t inhibit your ability to do things.