The West Wind

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Introduction

The West Wind is a fantasy role-playing game about shared creation of a story, and exploration of interesting worlds. It involves joint narration between players and their Gamemaster, and rules that are intended to create games about exploration, travel, and rest, as much as about fighting and warfare. In other words, it is about "The Journey." It is heavily, and unabashedly, inspired by The Lord of the Rings above all else, and the goal is to allow a game that in some ways approximates that *kind* of tale: an epic sweep, but an ultimate focus on the characters and the difficulties they must go through as they take part in larger themes.

This set of rules should describe everything you need to do to play: it aims to provide not just mechanics, but also some ways of structuring play and of approaching the game in general. Throughout it, there is a running example of play that should help in this regard.

Players Roles

There are two kinds of players, like many role-playing games: one gamemaster, and multiple "regular" players. The power structure between the GM and the players is a little different from most games though, since TWW is a very cooperative game. In particular, it is not the GM's role to create the world and the story by himself: everyone has a hand in everything.

The non-GM players have something of a dual role. On one hand (to use a film analogy), he is an actor, and on the other a writer and set-designer. Each player controls one single character who is part of the story, and by definition will play a significant part in it. In his actor role, the player controls this character's actions, reactions, and dialog, and attempts to make fit his conception of the character. At the same time, the player is also directing other events in the world quite apart from his character: setting up scenes and defining the world in ways that create an interesting and compelling story. Obviously, the line between these two roles is not at all so clear, and they blend together most of the time. A player may direct his character to do something because it seems appropriate for the character, or appropriate to the story, for instance. Similarly, a player can use his power to change the story to help along his character, or he can hinder him, in the interests of drama. Of course, the player's goal is fun: fun through exploring the world (by creating it and seeing what everyone else creates), and fun through telling a good story.

The GM is much more like a player in TWW in some other games, but still does many things differently. His first, but most minor, role is as arbiter and organizer: making sure that play goes along smoothly by clearing up disagreements, managing mechanics, choosing one person to speak next, and so on. His two other tasks are more important. Firstly, instead of controlling a single character, he takes possession of all of other people and entities in the world whom the characters might meet. He acts out responses, describes events, and initiates conflicts against the party. In this sense, he is a puppet-master, with many little puppets. His final role is like the lead-director or lead-writer: just like a player, he helps designs the world and the story. But his "lead" designation does not imply that he has more authority over the story or can over-rule anyone else. In fact, it should mean that he does less of the real designing, and instead has the task of bringing all the elements together, of filling in where his co-designers left off, and giving them little ideas for inspiration. While the GM will be much more likely to plan out specifics in terms of mechanics before the game starts, he should ideally bring not much more than any individual player to the story: most of his design during play is taking up the slack when everyone else is out of ideas.

Creation & Dissention

Invention and introduction of ideas is a key part of TWW, and something that everyone will have a hand in. In TWW, precedence is always given to new ideas: when someone proposes something, it naturally becomes part of the shared story and world. If other players think that it is out of place or does not fit, they should raise their objections and discuss them. Some kind of consensus should be reached, with the GM helping to arbitrate. A majority rules philosophy is not a bad one, but the game is not about voting on proposed changes: most anything proposed should be allowed to happen, even if other players have to alter their conception of the world to accommodate it.

Staging the Game

The first step to take in playing The West Wind is one of planning and preparation. This involves the entire group, and goes beyond just "generating characters." It is called "staging" and the point of it is to establish essentially what the game will be about: who the characters are, what their role is in the story, what themes will be explored, and what the world is basically like. Agreement and mutual understanding are particularly essential for this part of TWW, and if a group does not have it, play will be much less likely to go smoothly.

The process of staging is made easier with a critical tool called the staging diagram. This is a visual schematic that shows everything of importance in the story. How it is constructed will be described below.

The Basics

TWW is inherently a game about travel and adventure, and so every game of it will feature these elements, but there is still a lot of leeway. Players should begin by discussing

the vague nature of the world and the kinds of themes that might be addressed. By "default" a TWW game will probably take place in a Medievalesque world, with knights and castles and lords, and so on, but this does not have to be the case, and other kinds of human cultures can serve as useful springboards; the game could be set in a place like Imperial China or Persia, or among some Viking-like people. If anyone has ideas for background cosmologies (how the world was formed) which might have some impact on the game, now is also the time to bring it up. You might postulate that there is a powerful race whose members are always reborn; or demons that walk the earth in human disguise. Note though, that there is no great need to define much of anything at this point. It is useful to have certain basics established so that everyone is "on the same page," but even so, the bulk of the world will be hazy and undefined when play begins.

Addressing the themes of the game is a choice left even more up to the players. A theme (properly called a "story theme") is any kind of issue that will tend to arise in the course of play to be addressed: it could be philosophical, moral, dramatic, historical, or religious. There are no mechanics of any kind that deal with story themes in play, much less force them to arise: rather, it is left up to players to keep them in mind. Agreement about what themes should come up, or whether there should be any, is good to have from the start though.

The Problem & The Party

Once some basic facts about the world itself are established, there needs to be a drive for the story itself. This is known as "the Problem." The Problem is whatever ultimately motivates the characters of the party to work together, and determines where they go and what they try to do. Often, the Problem is large, obvious, and grandiose: like a horrible ancient evil that threatens the land in some way. But Problems can also be smaller in scale, more immediate, and more directed at one particular character: like a summons to the royal court for unknown reasons. Especially given this, the Problem does not have to be fixed, but can shift and grow in importance as the party find out more (by addressing the Problem as it stands). So once a character who is summoned to court gets there, he might then learn that there is in fact a horrible demon threatening the kingdom.

Along with the creation of the Problem must come the creation of the party: that is, all the characters making it up, and reasons for their coming together. Probably the first ting to address is whether the problem relates to any particular character more than the others. If this is the case, then that character is the "Lead." He is acknowledged to be the general center of attention, and having one tends to make party coherence easier. It is not necessary to have a Lead, often good for the story. Note though, that since the Problem can change, so too can the Lead (of course, the suitability of this will depend on your story). The Lead, obviously, should be made with particular care, and with significant ties to the Problem.

The rest of the party should also be created at the same time, with each player making one character. Connections to the Problem, the Lead, and other characters are of the utmost importance, along with the basic description of who a character is: his profession, personality, etc. Party members should be made so that they fit into the story, and so that they can work together – though some amount of inter-party tension is not inappropriate either.

Finally, you must decide in what start the party begins: where is everyone, and who is with who? The party does not need to be fully convened when play begins, even though the players, as writers, have predetermined that they will meet up. So, play might begin with none of the party members in contact, or a few isolated groups that each get pulled together somehow. Usually, this meeting-up process will take a session or two of play, and after that the party will generally be whole.

Rachel, Mark, Barry, and Alicia are sitting down to play The West Wind, with Rachel being the gamemaster. Sitting around Rachel's dining table, she spreads out a great piece of paper.

Rachel: Okay, how should we begin? What's the goal; what's the problem?

Barry: Hm…I want something less political and that will involve ancient cities and magic and that sort of thing.

Mark: Alright, how about: there's a great cataclysm beginning in our kingdom -- earthquakes, floods…and the sages say that there's an ancient city where our ancestors came from, and it may hold the secret.

Alicia: But there's also a war going on, or just about to: one of our enemies is mustering an army to attack us, so that's distracting everyone, and not everyone believes in our quest; some think the earthquakes foretell our destruction at the hands of the enemy.

Rachel: So they have religious bearing too….Okay, so who are you, and why have you been sent on this kind of quest?

Barry: Well…We'll need a warrior. I want to play the young warrior son of a major magnate of our capital, maybe even the king's son or something. I would rather stay home and prepare for the war, but my father has asked me to go on this quest, and I'm really dutiful, so I agree.

Mark: Maybe you're the king's second son or something, and while he knows he ahs to send his first son to war, he doesn't want to endanger you too much – maybe you're too young.

Barry: Yeah.

Alicia: And I want to be a courtly young maiden with a strong personality. I have healing magic in my bloodline, so I'm destined for that, along with a political position of power, but I like my freedom: I like riding and hunting a lot. So I plan to dutifully be what my kingdom and demands, but I'm not exactly rushing towards my fate either.

Rachel: Cool, cool. Okay, Mark? Any ideas?

Mark: My character will be a young man who's been getting special training from some sort of magical sage-type. Really old magic, all tied in with nature and creation. It's away from mainstream religion for sure, but this guy is really old maybe not exactly human, kind of like Gandalf. So I'm recognized as his current pupil, and he's sent me on this quest to help out: the kind or whoever wouldn't refuse him, and I'm a good person to have along anyway.

Rachel: Okay, so you all have been chosen for this quest by someone else basically. Interesting.

The Staging Diagram

The staging diagram is a graphical representation of the story and all the major elements in it, so that everyone can easily see what it going on. Get a large piece of paper and in one corner draw a circle and in it write down the Problem, with an illustration if possible. At the other corner of the paper, write the names the characters in close proximity.

Adding in Elements

If the characters could just march on over a achieve their Goal, there wouldn't be much of an adventure, or much of a story. Thus, the next thing to do is add major elements to the story which may potentially complicate the party's journey. These elements may be helpful, harmful, or neutral in character, but should affect the story in some way. Even things which are not grandiose or connected with the Problem directly serve as good elements: one character's aging father who needs to be taken care of, huge swamps that exist somewhere, a wise king's court, a magic glade, etc. None of these elements will definitely come up during play, and the diagram is not a map of what will happen – much less a linear plot. The diagram merely identifies major elements of the story which have already been established, so they can be played off of and worked with later.

Each person playing should take his turn coming up with an element to add to the diagram. For each one, write it into place with a box around it. Place it closer to other elements if it will come up physically or chronologically nearby. Draw lines to link together any elements which have very strong connections such that the party's interactions with one will affect the other. For instance, the wise king's court is linked to the Princess, who holds great magical power.

Rachel starts out the Obstacles Diagram by writing in the characters' names and the final goal of "Eliminating the Earthquakes." It's a pretty broad goal, with no definites, but that's fine. She hands Mark her pen, and he draws in "reach ancient city Terronchil" a little ways from the final goal. Everyone nods, and he passes the pen on.

Barry: Well, the enemy is certainly going to be sending agents against us to try to stop us. Maybe some special little task forces kind of like our own…if they know we're important. We'll have to stay hidden. I'll write enemy agents here.

Alicia: And we have the whole enemy armies to contend with too. Maybe they won't be a problem, but we might run into them. I'll put them here off to the side.

Rachel takes the pen and draws in some "wastelands" in front of the Terronchil. She suggests to mark that his master might have had a rival or enemy at some point: he likes the idea, and adds in his tutor's nemesis "Bralitan." Barry decides to put on an ally then, so writes in some friendly military outposts. Alicia draws a little picture of an eagle and a mountain and describes a mountain they will probably have to travel near, which has huge man-eating eagles inhabiting it. Rachel thinks this is enough, and since no one else really has any more ideas, they stop.

As Play Goes On

As the story progresses, more items and more linkages will be added to the diagram, and some may be removed: when an enemy is ultimately defeated for instance, his name can be crossed off or erased from the diagram. Obstacles that are not "defeated" per se, but merely avoided, can be treated similarly. The same goes for allies who die or whose relationship to the characters changes. The essential point of play, when looking at the diagram, is that more and more obstacles will get removed, as the characters get closer to achieving their goal. Get a colored marker or pen of some kind and draw a short line to begin with. As play progresses, extend the line so that it touches each obstacle they encounter; sometimes it might double back on itself as they face something more than once. When Allies intervene in a conflict involving an obstacle, draw a line (perhaps in yet another color) from them to the obstacle. It is important to remember that the diagram does not represent physical space though, and even closeness between two elements is very relative

When most all the obstacles on the diagram have been dealt with or circumvented, the game can proceed to its climax: the one last, final obstacle that need be overcome before the goal can be achieved. When that obstacle too has been defeated, the game has finished; having run its course: see the appropriate section at the end of this document.

Characters

While the generalities, and background of a character – in terms of the plot – are worked out in Staging, there are specific elements that will mechanically define a character during play. First, make sure to write down everything that was decided in Staging, including the character's basic place in the story, personality, background, and personal version of the Goal. The following elements should then be defined.

Attributes

Attributes are the things that set your character apart from others. Principally they describe what he is good at, what he knows, and so on, but also the very nature of the character, in terms of what tends to happen to him, regardless of his own skills. Each

attribute is rated with a number, usually from one to eight or so. These should total a number agreed upon in Staging – potentially the GM will simply assign you one. Ten points would be typical. Below is the standard list of attributes which should be useful to work from, but if an attribute your character needs is not on the list, feel free to make it up – try to maintain a similar scope to it though.

Standard List of Attributes

Fighting / Combat:
Archery:
Hunting & Fishing:
Riding / Husbandry:
Path-finding:
Boating & Navigation:
History:
Heraldry:
Arcane Studies:
Horsemanship:
Stealth:
Great Strength:
Acrobatics:
Great Endurance:
Ancient Lore:
Leadership:
Nobility / Courtliness / Grace:
Charisma / Friendship:
Keen Senses:
Small:
Large:
Negotiation / Diplomacy:
Strategy:
Performance / Singing:

Magic

Magic is a rare gift: an ability to influence the world through arcane knowledge and innate powers that is both powerful and dangerous to wield. Magical "spells," called disciplines, function almost identically to attributes, defining exactly what in the world the character can manipulate magically. There is similarly a standard magic discipline list.

<u>Standard List of Magic Disciplines</u>
Plant & Animal Communication
Communicate with Elemental Spirits
Mover of Earth
Mover of Water
Wielder of Flame

Themes

Themes are important dramatic elements that surround your character, and which you think should play a significant role in the story. They are not things which a character himself is necessarily aware of, much less actively promoting. Themes can be a sort of fate or "doom," just some way the character behaves, or some "moral" that the character might learn. For example, one character might be destined to be lord of his home city even though he tries to fight it; another character usually acts foolishly but is able to be courageous when he stops thinking about himself.

The most important thing to remember about themes is that they are "meta-game" and do not need to have a real justification inside the game world, though they can. Themes are for the benefit of the story, and hence the players, not the characters. Themes do not have to be

Values describe what your character holds morally important, in terms of his own behavior. Codes of conduct, formal or not, obligations, and strong senses of right are all included here. Anything that a character feels strongly about should be recorded as a value – no numerical value is needed. Although there is no limit as to how many you may have, try to write down at least three. They should guide your behavior in specific situations, but not be too narrow either.

Hope

Hope is a single pool that relates to a character's inner strength, attitude, and faith in the future (and particularly in the party Goal). Characters should begin with an amount of Hope appropriate to his personality and position in the story; often a character who has fewer points in attributes will have a correspondingly higher hope. A Hope of five would be typical.

Narration & Narrative Points

The West Wind is a cooperative game, and the players help to shape and define the world, and the story, as they themselves explore it. Beyond the staging process, a player can narrate at any time: he simply "jumps in," during a break in the GM's narration (or someone else's), and begins to describe something new. There are only two rules governing this power. The first is a shared sense of co-authorship and simple courtesy: narrate things that

are appropriate to what has come before, and which will not "mess up" someone else's idea – if you wish to make a drastic change, consult everyone and briefly outlining what you plan to narrate before you actually do it.

The second rule is the rule of balance: if you narrate something that is an obvious and direct benefit to the party – which includes a specific character – you are obligated to pay Narrative Points to do so. Reciprocally, narrating something overtly negative and harmful nets you Narrative Points, which you can spend later. The number of points gained or lost depends on the influence of the event (see the table below).

Narrative points can be gained from other sorts of narration as well. Rather than introduce negative events into the game, a player can also gain NPs by bringing in elements that play off of a one of the character's themes. This "element" could be an event, an addition to the story, etc. To properly be a "play off," the new element needs to bring that character to the forefront of the story temporarily, and there needs to be some advancement of, or question surrounding the theme. Such an introduction merits anywhere from one to five points, depending on how effectively the theme was used, and what its effect on the storyline is.

Finally, narrative points can also be gained by narrating a character's negative reaction to something. Hope is then directly exchanged for NPs on a one-to-one basis. (See the section on hope for more details).

Narrative points are part of a meta-game mechanic and are held not by a character but a player: if a character dies, the player's pool of NPs remains unaffected. Nonetheless, due to the strong connection between narrative points and hope, which is more directly imbedded in the story. Some character will cry out for the use of hope, while others will rely more on "luck," which might take the form of NP use.

Table: Use of Narrative Points

Points	Effect
4-7	Creating a new ally or removing an enemy from the Arc (i.e. staging diagram)
3-6	Creating an object of power
3-5	Introducing a recuperating scene
2-4	Introducing a sublime scene
2-4	Creating a special item that is a token or an artifact
1-3	Ending a negative scene
1-3	Making an ally appear (cumulative with calling a scene)
1-2	Introducing a positive battle, travel, or regular scene
1	Introducing a rest scene
1	Narrating a minor boon in a scene
-1	Narrating a minor problem in a scene
-1-4	Creating a mid-level obstacle, only indirectly relating to the main plot
-3-7	Creating a new obstacle directly relevant to the main Goal

Structuring the Game

Beyond the initial Staging process, the actual act of playing The West Wind has a structure of its own. It is broken down into recognized parts, where different things happen, and rules are applied in different ways. The most basic unit is the Scene. Scenes are specific places and times in which things happen, and where all (or at least some) of the player's character's interact with each other and the world. Most scenes are static in place and time: a field next to a castle, hereabouts on the map, at 9 PM. Sometimes, the time will change, and sometimes both will.

Introducing and Setting a Scene

Play will transition into and out of scenes, sometimes rapidly, several times during a play session. For a new scene to be entered, it first has to be "called for." Calling for a scene is, by default done by the GM, but a player can as well: assuming a lull in activity, or an appropriate moment, simply declare that you call for a scene by describing the very basics of what it will be and the context: principally where, when, who is there, why they're there.

If a scene is of obvious benefit to the party (and they sometimes are), Narrative Points should be spent, and *vice-versa*. The second step is to "set" a scene, by defining the specifics of it with an actual narration (rather than a short declaration): describe the place, the time, exactly where the characters are, and so on. Essentially, it's simply more detail, but it's also what the mechanics of play will be based off of later. Whoever sets the scene essentially creates its details for the rest of the group. The exactitudes of how a scene gets set up, and when and how it is called for, depend on the type of scene, and there are several. The definitions of the following are not always hard and fast, and may blend together, but should nonetheless be used as a general guide.

The Travel Scene

Travel scenes depict the literal journey the characters must go through: marching or riding down roads, trekking up rocky slopes, wading through bogs, and camping out in the middle of dense forests. Both time and place in a travel scene is variable, where each individual place is not so important: think of it as a room with the characters, and a scrolling backdrop depicting various bits of scenery.

The kinds of conflict that will arise will have to do mostly with surviving in the wilds, making good time, and finding the right way (or at least not getting hopelessly lost). Areas that are particularly dangerous, like swamps or frozen mountain tops, might require rolls where failure could easily result in a disability (see the section The Negative Results of Conflict). Provisions will often begin to run low, and characters may, if the road is long, hard, and unknown, begin to despair. Transition into other scenes is easy, as the party simply needs to run into something, or go somewhere interesting.

Initiating a travel scene requires, above all, naming the route that will be taken, or at least some general idea of the direction, or the intended goal. The kind of lands being traveled over should also be described, so that the kinds of relevant conflict are known. Obviously, the scenery will change in a travel scene, but if it becomes markedly different; say swamp instead of tundra, a new scene is technically called for – though nothing more than a brief narration of this change is necessarily required to introduce it.

The Rest Scene

he rest scene is a break between more active scenes, often interrupting a travel scene. Resting is not the same as recuperation (below), and there are not mechanical benefits for specifically it. Resting certainly does not have to be played out for every day of supposed journeying, nor even for every travel scene. Resting usually consists of the characters sitting around a campfire preparing food and discussing their immediate plans. Conflicts, if there are any, should be of a personal or inter-personal variety. Rest scenes are neither inherently good or bad for a party, but if they break the party away from an unpleasant travel scene, a narrative point should be spent.

The Recuperation Scene

Traveling and the other hardships of adventuring inevitably take their toll: characters lose hope, gain injuries and other disabilities, and run low on supplies. Recuperation scenes offer extended respites from the larger adventure: they are sanctuaries free from toil and danger. They can take many forms, but are usually places where allies or other friends take the party in as guests. They are cared for and provided with food, and given a chance to regain their strength.

As recuperation scenes are universally helpful, it costs several narrative points to introduce one. They should usually come during the bleakest hours of the party, so that all hope is not lost (mechanically and figuratively).

The Sublime Scene

A sublime scene contains some wondrous element that inspires hope in the characters (see rules for Hope in Play). Usually there is some super-natural element, like a fairy queen, but it might simply feature a place of great beauty and tranquility, like a crystal palace. Such scene are usually short, since there is little conflict to take place within them. Their only effect, is to increase all character's hope (or, at their discretion, narrative points instead). Often, they take place in the midst of recuperation, and introducing one always costs narrative points.

The Battle Scene

The battle scene is one particularly geared towards not just fighting, but war. That is, battle exists within the scene itself, independent of the characters, so that when they enter it, fighting is rages on all sides. The characters may be taking some part in the battle, or they

may be trying to avoid it, or get past it, or deliver a message to a leader for instance. Obviously, conflicts involving violence and fighting will be common, for self-defense if nothing else.

The initiation of a battle scene usually calls for an appropriate description of it, as usual, including who is fighting, perhaps why, who is winning, and what the exact circumstances of the fighting are (in terms of men or creatures involved, terrain, weapons, and so on). Use as much detail as seems appropriate and that the group will find interesting or useful. Deciding where the characters being – near what combatants – is also generally important. Generally, things in battle take on a more epic feel, and narrative and hero points should be used more freely. Mighty warriors should crush aside lesser beings, and lightning can come crashing down as the two sides clash. Ending a battle scene is nothing special. Sometimes the battle will be over when the characters leave, and a transition into an "aftermath" scene will be called for, and other times they will simply depart it in progress.

Regular Scenes

These are all other kinds of scenes not covered above. They may be action-packed, or consist mostly of dialogue. They are generic, and thus no special rules apply.

Moving Between Scenes

Sometimes the place (or even time) between two adjacent scenes will be the same, but there should still be a scene break because of a dramatic change in how things will play out: if nothing else, the distinction is made clear in everyone's minds. The distinction between two scenes can often be very blurry, and in some cases no real declaration is necessary.

Playing Through Scenes

Scenes are played through with a series of exchanges and monologues from the players and, to a lesser extent, the GM. Part of the process of declaring and setting a scene should have established what it plays in the overall story – even be it an indirect one – and suggest what the party's goals might be within it: if they've been captured, they'll need to get away somehow; if they've run across an obstacle, they'll need to get around. These kinds of difficulties are known loosely as "challenges."

Challenges are roughly synchronous with scenes, but sometimes span more than one or take up less than an entire scene (so that there is more than one challenge). They are not synonymous with conflicts, which are much more tightly defined. Rather, a challenge is something which poses a problem for the party, which they will try to overcome. There are three main varieties of challenge, and while they sometimes overlap, often they are distinct. Each kind of challenge fits into the story in a particular way, potentially advancing the party towards its goal in some fashion. Additionally the kinds of attributes that are more likely to be used will also vary.

Material Challenges

The difficulties entailed here often have to do with movement and exploration: the party's progress is literally being prevented. They thus also have much to do with travel. For example, an army that blocks the favored road is a material challenge, as would be an impenetrable castle wall, or the harshness of a dark forest. Although the characters do not have to approach a material challenge from a wholly physical mindset, it is likely that attributes dealing with action and the body will be employed. For example, sneaking around the army, climbing the wall, or hunting to stay fed in the wood. Travel scenes battle scenes, and regular scenes are more likely to feature material challenges. The successful resolution of a material challenge should be the ability to go new places, see new things, and get physically closer to the goal.

Challenges of Comprehension

The challenge of comprehension is often less physical, and more centered around mental abilities, knowledge, and morality. The problem which the party encounters is one that must stem from some lack of knowledge or insight. There is some question that is unanswered: Whom do we trust? Where do we go? What is this place? Often, these puzzles can be very vague initially, for a lack of understanding is indeed the premise. Attributes involving mental faculties commonly come into play, but so do values, for questions can be internal as well as external: Who am I? Why am I really on this quest? The moral of a challenge of comprehension is that greater understanding is (almost) always good, and a successful completion of one will always have a positive effect on the party's mission, even if it is not obvious.

Challenges of Interaction

This final sort of challenge is more straightforward than the last. Interactions revolve around social problems that arise to hamper the party. A king who does not with to allow free passage for instance, or a potential-ally that needs some convincing to be fully swayed. These kinds of challenges require social attributes. When successful, the party will tend to gain outside help with their goals; while a failure may indicate a loss of such aid.
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Conflict Resolution

An action is a formal event that is recognized within the rules. It is performed by someone, with some intent, and there is some way he is going about it. Many kinds of actions are so small and easy that they are not noted; formally this is called "actions without contest." If someone wants to stroll across the grassy field to talk to someone, and greet them in the process, it is technically an action, but no rules really need apply to it. In such cases, the

player narrates what he does, and the GM narrates the response of anything in the world, if there is any.

Actions that are significant, and actually accomplish something of note are very rarely without contest though: something opposes the character's will. This is called a conflict, and it must be formally resolved with the rules of the game. Its use has parallels to scenes: the initial action must be declared, and then the conflict must be "framed" with a brief narration describing the nature of it – usually by the GM, but players also may have a hand in it.

Framing a Conflict

The framing of a conflict requires several key things for mechanical uses: first, who exactly is involved; the general intent of the motivator of the conflict (that is, whoever initiated it), the circumstances of it, and the general methods being used by either side to achieve its ends. Usually, all these things have already been firmly established and no formal declaration of them is necessary.

The second stage of framing consists of transferring these ideas into mechanistic terms that will be used in the conflict's resolution. Mainly, this consists of determining what attributes are being brought into it. If a player is charging an enemy knight for instance, his fighting attribute will likely be used.

There is often some play between what attributes might be used in any given case. Sometimes, a character will have an attribute that is somehow related to what he wants to do, but does not seem to apply directly: he can still use it, but at a reduced level, depending on how applicable it is. (Half normal is a good starting place.) Two attributes can also be used simultaneously if both are highly applicable, but this should not be very common. Attempting an action with no relevant attribute dooms a character to failure in a real conflict; if it is an act that he could reasonably do, and nothing opposes him, he can do it automatically (like walk across a field).

The Resolution Roll

The ratings of the attributes being used are what count in the resolution. Each side takes a number of six sided dice (or any kind) equal to his attribute's rating and rolls them at once. Every die that comes up with an odd facing is counted as a "success." Each sides total number of successes is counted against the opposition's and whichever has more has won the conflict. The exact difference yields the "margin of success": more successes will produce a more favorable outcome.

Narrating the Results

At this point the victor is known, but the means of victory, and the effects on the story are still unclear: the conflict result needs to be narrated. Whichever side won gets this privilege, and can describe their own actual actions as well as those of his opponent, and the results of the whole ordeal. The effect of a resolution is always an advancement towards, or a recession away from, the party's goals for the scene – and perhaps by extension the story as a

whole. Narration is always done with this in mind, and in fact is quantified in this regard by being broken down in to "complications" and "achievements."

A complication is some kind of set-back the party or character must face to its immediate goals. If the goal for the scene was getting past a knight guarding a bridge, a complication would entail failure to do so and a defeat of some kind, making successive attempts more difficult. Achievements are just the reverse, and nudge the party towards its goal. A sufficient number of achievements or complications will likely end the scene, with the party either realizing its goal or being repelled or worse.

The exact number of complications and achievements that need to be narrated after a conflict depends wholly on the margin of success. In the most basic way of doing things, if the characters won, their margin directly translates into achievements. If they lost, the margin translates into complications (for them) which the GM narrates. A single achievement in the above example might warrant the knight being wounded and tired, but not yet defeated; while five achievements might indicate that he was badly hurt and then went tumbling into the water, leaving the way clear. Alternately, achievements and complications are totally balanced against one another, and so whoever is narrating has the option of freely adding on more of both if he so chooses. Thus, instead of having just one achievement, a player might choose to narrate four achievements along with three complications. When this is done, whichever result type there are more of obviously "wins out" and affects the party's goals on the whole, while the other introduces other, less important, problems. The difference is largely a semantic one, but it is useful to think about things this way.

Group Actions

Sometimes the entire party, or some portion of it, will want to work together. There are two ways this can happen: combined actions, and assistance. Assistance is the less common of the two, and is used when one character is decidedly performing the more important action while his friends with to back him up, but are not literally doing the same thing he is. The primary character declares his action and relevant attribute normally. The other characters do the same, but the dice they roll are said to be "donated" to the primary character. This does not mean that he rolls them: all dice pools are kept track of separately, and rolled by their respective players. All the successes are pooled together though for comparison against the successes of their GM. If the characters win, they all have a hand in narrating their victory: the primary character's player obviously takes center stage and does most of, describing what he does, but the other players narrate how the primary character was backed up and supported at odd intervals. Usually, the number of dice that can be donated are not as many as could be used otherwise; half is a good starting place, but it will vary depending on the situation.

For example, Derinus the skilled archer is attempting to fight his way to the enemy leader to kill him personally. He will be using his Fighting 5 attribute. His fellows want to protect him as he does this, and ensure he reaches his target. There are three other members of the party, with fighting attributes of 8, 4, and 3. Each one donates half (rounding down) of his

dice to Derinus' endeavor, for a total of 12. All are rolled, and the party succeeds by 2. Derinus' player describes Derinus wading through the battle, ignoring most enemies, and occasionally cutting one out of his way, as he marches on steadily. The other players jump in several times to describe how their characters see an enemy about to hit Derinus, but they intervene just in time, allowing him to continue on, an implacable eye of calm.

The second kind of group action is the combined action. Here, there is not one central leading figure, and all of the characters need to be attempting essentially the same thing. For example, they could all be trying to push a door down, or to hold down a struggling guard, etc. There is a sense that they are not just intertwining their individual actions, but really working as a single entity. Mechanically, combined actions are handled very much like assisted ones, only there is no restriction on dice being used. Again, all of them are rolled, and everyone narrates his part in the action – if they are victorious. If each character's individual effort is virtually indistinguishable from anyone else's, the party may choose to nominate a single player to narrate the whole success, if there is one (pushing down the door for instance).

Positive Results of Conflict

Victories and defeats in conflict can have small or large repercussions on the world at large. Exactly how big these repercussions should be is largely up to whomever is narrating, but there are certainly some guidelines: obviously, margin of success needs to be used here as well. With certain levels of achievement, it may be considered that narrative points have effectively been given out, but they must be spent immediately and within the given context. As a result, all the things that can be done with narrative points, can be done in a normal conflict resolution.

At lower levels of success, where the story itself might not be altered, it is more likely that simple changes in the scene will take place. These changes will usually be to the benefit of the player party, giving dice to them should they attempt certain things (for example, a victory might provide a tactical advantage in a battle, making subsequence combat rolls easier).

Negative Results of Conflict

When the characters lose out in a conflict – and thus have a negative margin of success – dice are given to their enemies in the next conflict instead. More important conflicts, or the last one in a scene, will produce changes that truly affect the story line. There is also a third option, which is similar to the granting of dice, but more long term: the disability.

Disabilities represent problems or infirmities that plague a particular character for a time: broken limbs, exhaustion, a magical curse, fear of evil spirits. When a failure is bad enough, the option to create a disability appears. The GM may then suggest that one should be acquired, but it is just that, a suggestion, and ultimately up to the player. If he opts not to take a disability, the GM will use other kinds of negative results. If the player does take it, he must himself describe what kind of disability it is and how it affects the character. All

disabilities are also rated numerically: each one should probably be between one and three points, depending on the severity of the failure.

The sum of a person's disabilities equals a number of dice that must be given out to his opponents in every scene. In each conflict, the player chooses how many dice to give out, but does not need to describe why exactly (that is, how the disability enters in). Only when the conflict is narrated – after the resolution roll – will this be decided. If a player fails to use up his disability dice in a scene, some complication should arise in the story, relevant to the disability, narrated by the player. (This is effectively like introducing a complication to gain narrative points, but without the point gain.) Disabilities are eliminated after recuperation scenes.

Ties

A conflict that results in a margin of success of zero is a tie or stalemate, and can be narrated by anyone – the GM should give the players the option of doing so. Whoever narrates can choose to describe it as a total stalemate, where both sides are equally matched and there is little real result, or he can bring in some number of achievements and complications, making the scene more interesting.

The following table equates margin of success with narrative points, and gives guidelines on the changes made in the scene. (The numbers in parenthesis next to NPs in the negative margin section are the suggested disability level, if one is used.)

Table: Effects of Conflict Resolution

Margin	NPs	Dice	Notes
6	3	7	Total victory – all conflict in the scene over
5	2	6	
4	2	5	
3	1	4	Solid victory
2	1	3	
1	0	2	Marginal victory
0	0	0	Tie / Stalemate
-1	0	-2	Marginal loss
-2	-1	-3	
-3	-1	-4	Solid defeat
-4	-2 (1)	-5	Disability may be used
-5	-2 (2)	-6	
-6	-3 (3)	-7	Total defeat – scene may end

Pacing and Ending Scenes

With very large margins of success (or failure), as stated above, the scene may be likely to end – or at least all conflict (in the technical and non-technical sense) may be removed from it. No table or rule can really dictate when this should happen though: it should instead be

decided like everything else in TWW, for the good of the story, and in agreement with the group's shared ideas about how things should go.

A very large and important problem might never be resolved in a single conflict, regardless of how good a roll the characters get, simply because it would be anti-climactic and inappropriate. It all depends on the group. If the players are having fun in a huge battle, let the battle play out over a whole series of conflicts, each one nudging the battle one way or the other, until it seems dramatically appropriate to end it. These decisions do not necessarily have anything to do with the theoretical amount of time consumed by the action: if the players are conversely uninterested in a battle, it might be resolved with a single roll, even though it takes hours of game time.

As a rough guide, a GM or his players might choose a number, for an approximate duration of the scene's conflicts. Every margin of success *for the players or their enemies* lowers the number. When it reaches zero, it may be time for the scene to end, or at least for all of the conflict in it to be over. A single total victory (or total defeat), with margin of six or more, also suggests this.

The Workings of Magic

Magic in the West Wind is a powerful tool for success and for crafting an interesting story. At its core, magic is only a minor variation on the attribute system, and functions similarly: it is really just an alternate, non-direct, way of achieving things that could have been mundanely. Functionally, in terms of conflict resolution, magic is handled just like attribute use, and (usually) one discipline is applied to a given situation at a time. The main differences lie in magic's scope, power, and dangers.

What Magic Does

As stated, magic usually does what might otherwise be done, but does so via indirect routes, which frequently makes it easier. It can also be applied to situations that would be far beyond the scope or power of a single person or action, however. Thus, the use of magic is mechanically divided into simple and advanced forms.

Simple magic does ordinary things, but does them more quickly, more powerfully, or more subtly than normal. Example might include breaking down a door with magic instead of forcing it with a strong shoulder; levitate a sword into one's hand instead of walking across the room to retrieve it; divining a trial through the woods; or reading someone's mind instead of talking the answer out of him. Advanced magic, is defined as magic which accomplishes something which normal men would never be capable of. For instance, people cannot know the future, but magic can; people cannot control the weather but magic can; people cannot talk with animals, but mages can.

Most of the time, simple magic will be used, because the mage will be operating at the same "scale" as the rest of his party members, dealing with the immediate situation. Advanced magic, on the other hand, often operates on much larger scales, affecting the story more broadly, but also more distantly. A wizard has to choose which method he will use when tackling a conflict, at the same time he decides exactly what magic discipline to use.

The dice that are rolled against a mage come from slightly different sources. Firstly, the relevance of the discipline to the situation may add opposing dice: up to three or so, after which point that discipline really cannot be used at all. Secondly, the very nature of the intended target, and the scene as a whole, may come to bear: extremely ancient and mysterious places would not be affected much, while a perfectly mundane field would, and a dark mysterious forest would lie somewhere in between. The more inherently magical a place or thing is, the more difficult it will be to work other magics on it. Additionally, some *places* may have a sort of quasi-intelligence, and either favor or disapprove of the would-be spell caster: in such cases, his magic can be aided or hindered, as required. Usually, mages have an easy time doing things when things are already easier, and a somewhat harder time doing things when the going gets rough (relative to their total power).

The Limitations of Magic

While magic is powerful and can be applied to nearly any conflict, there are certain ways in which it operates that limits its exact effects. Particularly when narrating conflicts involving simple magic, keep in mind that the end results, while spectacular and unusual, still should not advance the party's cause any farther than a normal action would have, as dictated by the margin of success. A marginal victory over a war-chief using magic, for instance, might wound or incapacitate him, just as a blow to head might have. Magic's limits are harder to understand when dealing with advanced uses. The key is to remember the framing of the conflict, in which the mage stated his general intentions: be carefully not to let the effects of the "spell" overflow beyond these bounds, or to allow the bounds to be too vaguely defined. "Influence the weather ahead of us" is fine, but "use divination to help us out" is too broad.

Despite these limitations, certain players may wonder if magic is "too powerful" and can influence the game too easily. The question is, too easily for what? Magic is an awesome force, and those who wield it have a stupendous ability to influence the world around them. There is no intended "balance" between magic-users and non-magic-users in The West Wind: having one or more in your game will change it. However, TWW is not really about character power, but player power – to help create the story – and a "weak" character does not interfere with this ability in the slightest.

Dangers in Magic-Use

Despite magic's awesome power, there are also drawbacks to using it as well. As with all conflict resolution, a failure means not simply a lack of progress, but real potential set-back as well. With magic, the "set-backs" are usually more severe, though not necessarily more obvious or immediate. Although the narration of successful or tied conflicts proceeds as per the normal complications and achievements rules, failure when magic is involved is usually worse, particularly for advanced magic.

With simple magic, complications resulting from a failure will usually be more immediate if nothing else. When narrating, a failure may most simply indicate that the mage failed to know a relevant "spell" or piece of critical knowledge or secret (maybe he could not recall the true name for a particular type of monster). Only occasionally should spells "fizzle" by being cast but failing to have a real effect; mages facing off against other mages or magical beings is probably the only appropriate situation. Spell "backfire" is also quite common, in which either the mage is himself jolted by a re-direction of the spell's raw energy, or the spell is somehow redirected to affect him or his party in a way it should not have.

With advanced magic, the situation gets only more dangerous. When a conflict involving it is failed, the number of complications is equal either to the margin of failure or to the original number of dice used by the mage, whichever is higher. (Usually, mages do not mix the use of attributes and disciplines, especially for advanced magic, but if this happens, only consider the dice from disciplines.) The results of a failure advanced magic spell, in addition to simply being severe, should be more long-term, and more likely to affect the whole story rather than just the immediate situation.

One of the greatest possible threats to a magic user, particularly when his spells fail, is that of ancient and malevolent creatures from the beginnings of time which, though normally left to lie, may be disturbed by unwise attempts at magic. Mages should be on the lookout for such things at all times – since it is a good plot device to add in for narration points – but especially in the case of botched spells.

Clearly then, mages must be careful in their application of magic. Even though it is powerful, they cannot afford to be to cavalier about its use. Thus, most mages learn to be prudent, and make full use of their abilities only when it is really necessary, and other times relying on more mundane skills.

Hope in Play

Hope, as stated, represents a character's inner strength and determination to achieve his ends. Hope fluctuates during play based on the events that transpire, and how the character reacts to them. It can also be used in various ways to achieve certain affects.

Activating Hope

Really, the hope rating is not a meter, measuring a character's current emotional state, but a pool of potential hope; of "inner reserves" that can be spent, or activated, to boost a character's determination and will at a particular time. Activating hope depletes hope by a certain amount. The result is that however many points are used, *twice* that many dice are gained in a particular conflict resolution roll. A suitable narration and justification for the use of hope should accompany it: obviously, it should not be spent casually, but saved for important situations.

Irian, a serpent-catcher is in the palace of a great king in his homeland, but the rest of his party lies in the king's dungeons because they are foreigners. His only chance is to convince the king's daughter to help him steel the key and free them. He is trying to win her affection to do this, but his Charm attribute is only 2. His player describes how Irian weeps for his friends' fate and prays for success in his room before setting his jaw and beseeching the king's daughter in all earnestness. He burns two hope points to get an extra four dice on the roll, for a total of six to set against her five (2 for being leery of strangers, and 3 for loyalty to her father). Irian rolls four successes, while the daughter rolls but two: a (slim) success!

Gaining Hope

There are many ways that a character can gain more hope to compensate for what he has spent. The primary method is to spend narrative points and thereby create a situation where something significant happens to the character. This event should inspire him, and reaffirm his faith in his quest, his sense of self, or simply improve his general world outlook. Thus, seeing the most fair and splendid lady ever, might cause a doubting knight to take up his lance once more. Every narrative point spent increases every affected character's hope by

one. Any character who is present, and who would reasonably react positively to the event can be considered affected.

Similar to the above method, there may naturally be places or people who have the affect of increasing a party's hope. Mystical beings and places are the prime examples, and these are called wonders. Wonders may certainly be narrated by a player, as above, but commonly they will exist as part of the world, and might be introduced by the GM. In this case, he will simply describe the event and distribute hope as necessary – if a player feels his character would be unaffected, he can opt to transfer the hope to narrative points instead (this reflects a rule described below). Also, an inspiring situation can certainly be narrated as part of a conflict resolution, probably by a player.

Irian has spent most of his hope points freeing his friends from the king's city, and the party now flees from the city on stolen camels. Irian's player decides to get some of that hope back by spending three narrative points: he describes a huge pillar that is suddenly visible on the horizon. The party rides towards it for three days before finally reaching it: it is a spire of immense size; one of the four Pinnacles placed on the earth by ancient powers related to Irian's religion. Realizing this, Irian leaps from his camel and excitedly explains. He then falls to he knees, in awe. Irian loses three narrative points, but gains three hope points.

The final way to gain hope is for a character to act in accordance with his values. Values all have something to say about behavior and what should be done: when a value is honored despite other negative consequences, that character's strength of character has increased, and so does his hope. The accompanying negative consequences of the action can be a short term penalty or a real change in the story, and the severity of them determines how many hope points are earned: consult the table below.

Table: Values & Hope

Hope	Consequences
6-8	Significant set-back on the main Arc: loss of ally, gaining an enemy
4-5	Small set-back concerning the main Arc or significant one concerning a side-story
2-3	Delay or minor set-back in the story or immediate penalty of -4 to -6
1-2	Penalty in a later action in the same scene, around -2 to -4 dice

Losing Hope

Sometimes a character will actively despair due to his circumstances, losing faith in himself and his quest, and hope from his pool. These kinds of events are solely up to the player controlling the character, and can be narrated at any time (technically, they are neutral events), but will probably come after a bad defeat or some major turn for the worse in the storyline. The player describes how it is that his character is losing hope, and exactly how he's affected. Hope points are then transferred directly to narrative points. The amount should probably never be greater than ten as an upper limit, and the number should vary with the severity of the character's change of state.

Possessions

Most of the time, "equipment" plays a relatively minor role in TWW: characters are able to accomplish things because of their attributes, not because they have enough gold in their pockets, or a rope of a particular design. It can usually be assumed that a party has equipment appropriate to its mission: weapons, food, shelters, and so on. However, in some cases, it will be of vital importance to know whether some particular kind of item is or is not available. This is where the Provisions rating comes in: provisions is a measurement of basically how well equipped a party currently is in terms of essential tools and food (it is held by the party, not individuals). A party's initial provision level varies with its makeup, but a good starting place is two plus one-half the number of members – each member can specialize more and so more varied tools will be available to all.

During play, if some kind of item is needed, a brief conflict resolution roll is made. One of the characters' players' (probably the one who needs the item) rolls dice equal to the party's provision rating, and the GM rolls against them using dice equal to the "rarity" of the item – a measure of how likely any party anywhere would be to have it. See the table below for guidelines.

Table: Item Rarity

Rarity	Dice	Examples
Ubiquitous	1	a knife, some cloth, torches
Common	2	rope, axe, leather thong,
Uncommon	4	very long rope, tent of great size or durability
Rare	6	incense burner,
Very Rare	8	spyglass

If at some time an individual is separated from his party and is limited to rooting through his own bag, his effective provision level will be lower than the collective one: typically two-thirds of the original value, times whatever portion of the party the individual was. So a character who is in a party of six, with a normal provision level of five, will have a two (2/3 x 1/6 x 5 = 2). Two characters with a normal level of three, when split up, will each have **

Fluctuations in Provision Level

A party's provision rating can fluctuate up and down as their story progresses: usually it slowly goes down, and is then raised back up during a recuperation sequence. Its lowering can be the result of a bad failure in a conflict, or part of a plot development (the party was captured and had all its bags taken). It's also simply par for the course of traveling though, and a reduction can be introduced by the GM after an extended travel sequence, or likewise by a player (for which he will get narrative points as usual).

If a party begins to get seriously low on provisions, they will begin to have problems. A lack of tools will generally make travel and camping in the wilds much more difficult. Even worse, a lack of food forces one to turn to the land as one's only supply of it. Conflicts should

start to arise that deal with a lack of equipment, either in terms of pressing on without, or of efforts to regain some supplies. A total lack of supplies, and even perhaps just a shortage, should begin to lower the party's hope, and players should take up narrating this (using the rules for exchanging hope for narrative points, as above). Eventually, disabilities might be introduced as well.

Special Items

While most equipment is generic and the most crucial question surrounding it will be whether it exists or not, some possessions are of vital importance to a group, and need to be duly recorded. These are called special items, and usually have to do with the plot itself (like the king's sceptre that must be taken to his enemy as a sign of cooperation), or are powerful and significant in their own rights. This latter brand of "magic" item will usually grant characters special bonuses or abilities, depending on the type of item. Three rough categories are outlined below, but realize that there is considerable overlap.

Tokens

Tokens are possessions that are valued emotionally by a particular character: because it is an heirloom, a gift from a lover or a king, etc. A token is rated numerically, depending on the level of attachment. Each level of the item effectively gives its owner hope points that can be used in a conflict to grant more dice (not to provide narrative points). These points refresh after each play session and after a recuperation sequence. Tokens work only for one particular character in this capacity, and if given to someone else, will have no powers. Characters can start with tokens if they wish; every two levels of token power are roughly equivalent to one attribute point.

Artifacts

Artifacts are items that have true magic power imbued into them and are thus much better than normal items. They might have been enchanted by a wizard, made from some special material, or be extremely old relics that have gained power over years of successful use. Artifacts are also rated numerically: every level grants extra dice to every conflict in which the artifact is used. Obviously, this "use" should be limited to instances where the item has some relevance: a sword in battle, and a sceptre when commanding people. While much more rare than tokens, artifacts can also be had at the beginning of play, their cost exactly equal to their level in attribute points.

Objects of Power

Finally, and very broadly, there are "objects of power." These are similar to artifacts, but rather than lend dice to endeavors that characters undertake, they have effective powers of their own. In one sense, objects of power (OoPs) are to artifacts as attributes as to magic disciplines. So an OoP might allow its user to see into distant lands or render him invisible.

Mechanically, OoPs provide dice that can be used a conflict, in actions not normally possible (like shooting lightning from your fingertips, say). OoPs can have multiple abilities, some of which may only be available for use by certain people: specifically, a person with a requisite rating in some attribute (fighting, level 4, say) or magic discipline.

OoPs should always be major elements in the plot, and be few and far between – no one should start with one unless that is the driving mechanism for the Arc. Because of their great power and importance, OoPs, like magic, always have disadvantages to their use as well: there should be great peril in toying with such power, and a failure during a resolution roll should produce horrible effects: a magical backlash, an incorrect target, unwittingly attracting an evil spirit, and so on.

Concluding the Game

When the player's character's meet their final complication – likely The Problem – that stands in the way of their goal, they have reached the climax of the game. The scenes that it consists of will probably involve great number of narrative and hero points, and numerous conflict resolutions. Hopefully, in the end, the characters will triumph though, and complete their ultimate goal. At this point, the game has effectively concluded; there's not much more for the characters to do.

The Final Narration

Of course, just because the goal is finished doesn't mean everyone immediately lives happily ever after. Getting home might be a major ordeal in its own right. Usually, however, playing out such adventures would be boringly anti-climactic, and poor from a literary perspective: the characters have already proven their mettle by defeating the worst enemies the world could throw at them: what else could trouble them? Rather, one final narration, consisting of bits and pieces from each player, should be created, which describes the reaching of the goal, the celebrations, the joy, and aftermath, and then perhaps suggests, or even describes, what they do with themselves afterwards. Nothing says, of course, that this need be the party's last and only adventure together: they might return for a "sequel," and so their ends might be intentionally left untold.