



Grim and Perilous Adventure

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay as a Dark Contrast to *Dungeons & Dragons*

Grim and Perilous Introduction



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This Presentation:

- Roleplaying Games
- Dungeons & Dragons, Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay
- Comparative Discussion:
 - Worlds
 - Power Level & Challenge
 - Playable Character Elements
 - Injury & Combat
 - Magic, Corruption, Fate & Fortune
- Wrapping up

Roleplaying Games (RPGs)



“a type of game/game system that involves collaboration between a small group of players and a gamemaster through face-to-face social activity with the purpose of creating a narrative experience”

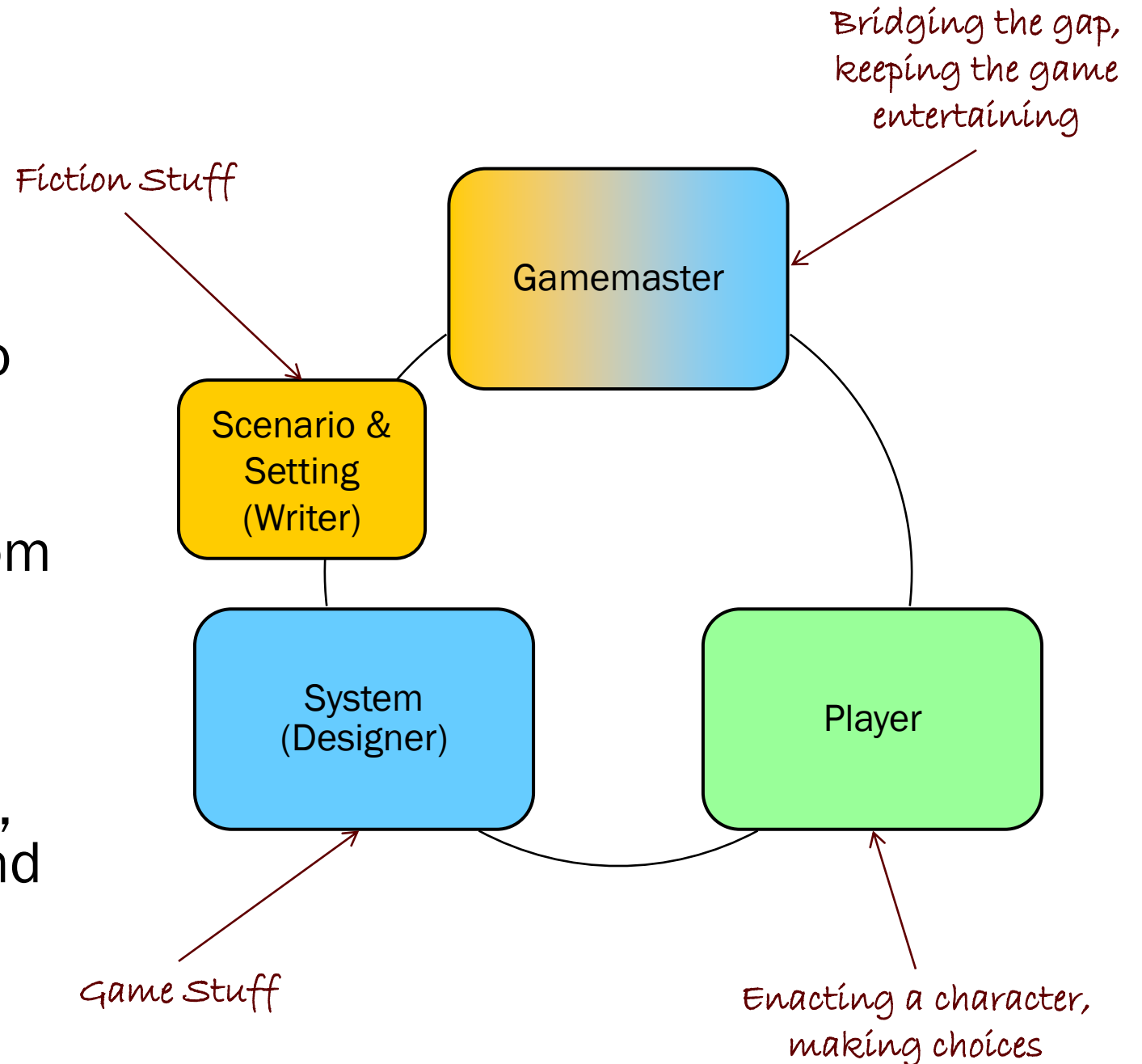
(Cover 2010: 168)

RPG Play

The system may include a setting and/or scenario(s) to provide fiction to play in/through.

These may instead come from a separate scenario or the GM.

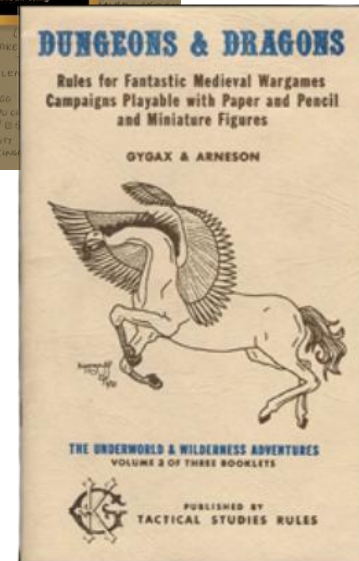
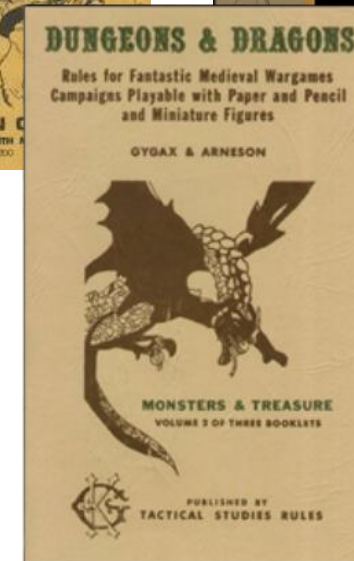
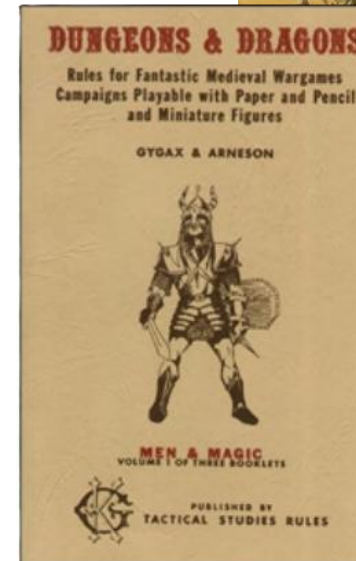
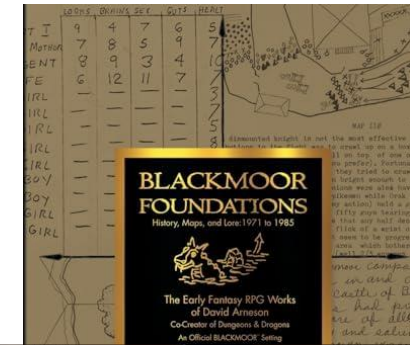
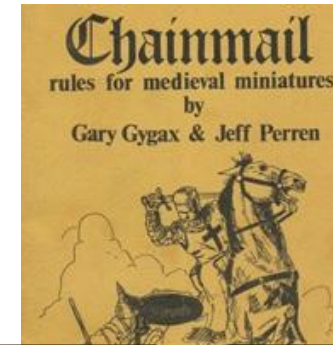
The play of an RPG is the result of these relationships, each acting on the action and story.



Dungeons & Dragons Origins

- Late 1960s to early 1970s
- Emerged from amateur design innovation in US wargaming communities
- Arneson introduced fantasy literary elements to sessions of Gygax's game
- They collaborated to produce the first RPG, published 1974
- The origin of the medium, pervasive, synonymous with RPGs to many

(Appelcline 2014)

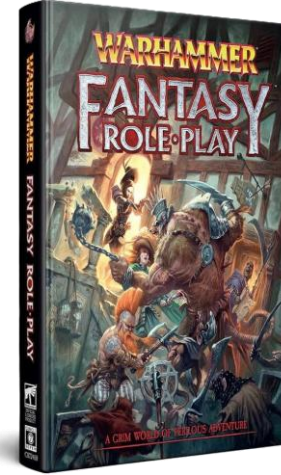
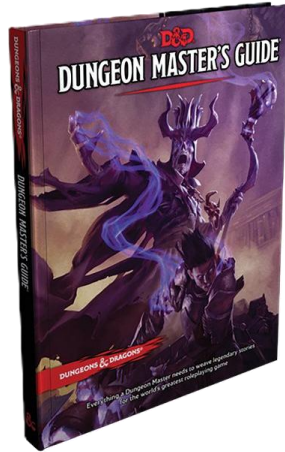


Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay Origins

- Games Workshop was an early *D&D* distributor & **the face of hobby gaming in the UK**
- Various innovations & experiments eventually led to an RPG based on their popular wargame in 1986
- It offered **innovation** in character careers, brutal combat, & a **shared setting with the wargame** (dark, approaching Renaissance)

(Appelcline 2014)





D&D 5e (2014) & WFRP 4e (2018)

- *D&D* remains immensely popular – “the world’s greatest roleplaying game”
- The *Warhammer* brand persists in the hobby gaming space
- *WFRP* is an alternative offering, in **some ways representing Britain** – it sits in **contrast to *D&D*** and always has – what meanings lie here?

D&D: The Forgotten Realms



Mordenkainen



Drizzt Do'Urden

Part of a multiverse within a planar system. Faerûn is a default setting.

Very fantastical. Notable locations:

- Neverwinter
- The Sword Coast
- Waterdeep
- Baldur's Gate
- Icewind Dale

WARHAMMER

WFRP: The Old World



Modelled on Europe. The Empire is a default setting.

Somewhat grounded. Notable locations:

- Altdorf
- Bretonnia
- Middenheim
- Estalia
- Tilea

Evokes the real
historical
British context



Emperor Karl Franz



Countess
Emmanuelle von
Liebwitz

Procedural Rhetoric

Processes (rules of behaviour, dynamic models) can persuade (change opinions) and express (convey ideas).

Similar to verbal rhetoric (persuasive oratory) and visual rhetoric (persuasive images).

(Bogost 2008)



Power Level & Challenge

- *D&D* Adventurers are practically superhuman
 - Starting Fighter has 12 HP versus a Commoner's 4
- WFRP characters are closer to commonfolk
 - Starting Fighter has 13 W versus the normal 12

Evokes mundanity, prone to injury & struggle like commonfolk

HUMANS

M	WS	BS	S	T	I	Ag	Dex	Int	WP	Fel	W
4	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	12

Traits: Prejudice (choose one), Weapon+7

Optional: Disease, Ranged+8 (50), Spellcaster

TYPICAL DIFFICULTY CLASSES

Task Difficulty	DC
Very easy	5
Easy	10
Medium	15
Hard	20
Very hard	25
Nearly impossible	30

DIFFICULTY TABLE

Difficulty	Test Modifier
Very Easy	+60
Easy	+40
Average	+20
Challenging	no modifier
Difficult	-10
Hard	-20
Very Hard	-30

COMMONER

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Any Alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

Senses Passive Perception 10

Languages Any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

WFRP Average = 50% for a normal person
D&D Medium = 30% for a normal person

Playable Species

- *D&D*: many, all available to players
 - Some Races better suit some Classes
- *WFRP*: five, stresses non-human rarity
 - Elves & Dwarfs are powerful but less favoured by Fate
- Fantasy species are coded with real-world race, as inherited from Tolkien (Yessler and Craig 2024)
- Species determine abilities, strengths & weaknesses

Players are encouraged to engage with fictional cultural distributions



<i>Dungeons & Dragons “Races”</i>	<i>Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay Species</i>
• Dwarf • Hill Dwarf • Mountain Dwarf • Elf • High Elf • Wood Elf • Dark Elf (Drow) • Halfling • Lightfoot • Stout • Human • Dragonborn • Gnome • Forest Gnome • Rock Gnome • Half-Elf • Half-Orc • Tiefling	• Human (90%) • Dwarf (4%) • Halfling (4%) • High Elf (1%) • Wood Elf (1%) The player receives bonus XP to spend on upgrades if they let probability dictate their Species.

Classes, Careers, Advancement

- *D&D*: Big leaps in power, some choices when advancing
- *WFRP*: Incremental advancement, many choices when advancing

Players are encouraged to engage with access to opportunity based on culture

Class	Career/Species	Human	Dwarf	Halfling	High Elf	Wood Elf
ACADEMICS	Apothecary	01	01	01	01-02	—
	Engineer	02	02-04	02	—	—
	Lawyer	03	05-06	03-04	03-06	—
	Nun	04-05	—	—	—	—
	Physician	06	07	05-06	07-08	—
	Priest	07-11	—	—	—	—
	Scholar	12-13	08-09	07-08	09-12	01
	Wizard	14	—	—	13-16	02-05
BURGHERS	Agitator	15	10-11	09-10	—	—
	Artisan	16-17	12-17	11-15	17-19	06-10
	Beggar	18-19	18	16-19	—	—
	Investigator	20	19-20	20-21	20-21	—
	Merchant	21	21-24	22-25	22-26	—
	Rat Catcher	22-23	25	26-28	—	—
	Townsmen	24-26	26-31	29-31	27-28	—
	Watchman	27	32-34	32-33	29	—
COURTIERS	Advisor	28	35-36	34	30-31	11-14
	Artist	29	37	35-36	32	15-18
	Duellist	30	38	—	33-34	—
	Envoy	31	39-40	37	35-37	19-25
	Noble	32	41	—	38-40	26-31
	Servant	33-35	42	38-43	—	—
	Spy	36	43	44	41-43	32-35
	Warden	37	44-45	45-46	44-45	—
PEASANTS	Bailiff	38	46-47	47	—	—
	Hedge Witch	39	—	—	—	—
	Herbalist	40	—	48-50	46-47	36-42
	Hunter	41-42	48-49	51-52	48-50	43-52
	Miner	43	50-54	53	—	—
	Mystic	44	—	—	—	53-57
	Scout	45	55	54	51-56	58-68
	Villager	46-50	56	55-57	—	—

Class	Description
Barbarian	A fierce warrior of primitive background who can enter a battle rage
Bard	An inspiring magician whose power echoes the music of creation
Cleric	A priestly champion who wields divine magic in service of a higher power
Druid	A priest of the Old Faith, wielding the powers of nature—moonlight and plant growth, fire and lightning—and adopting animal forms
Fighter	A master of martial combat, skilled with a variety of weapons and armor
Monk	An master of martial arts, harnessing the power of the body in pursuit of physical and spiritual perfection
Paladin	A holy warrior bound to a sacred oath
Ranger	A warrior who uses martial prowess and nature magic to combat threats on the edges of civilization
Rogue	A scoundrel who uses stealth and trickery to overcome obstacles and enemies
Sorcerer	A spellcaster who draws on inherent magic from a gift or bloodline
Warlock	A wielder of magic that is derived from a bargain with an extraplanar entity
Wizard	A scholarly magic-user capable of manipulating the structures of reality

Status & Money

- *D&D*: Some thematic variability in starting funds & equipment
 - Mostly gold pieces
- *WFRP*: Status system determined by Career, great wealth inequality, higher Status has social advantages
 - Pennies, shillings & crowns

Coin	cp
Copper (cp)	1
Silver (sp)	10
Electrum (ep)	50
Gold (gp)	100
Platinum (pp)	1,000

Monk: 12.5 gp

Highest = 22.5 gp

Monk = 56% of highest

Class	Funds
Barbarian	2d4 × 10 gp
Bard	5d4 × 10 gp
Cleric	5d4 × 10 gp
Druid	2d4 × 10 gp
Fighter	5d4 × 10 gp
Monk	5d4 gp
Paladin	5d4 × 10 gp
Ranger	5d4 × 10 gp
Rogue	4d4 × 10 gp
Sorcerer	3d4 × 10 gp
Warlock	4d4 × 10 gp
Wizard	4d4 × 10 gp

Status Tier	Starting Wealth
Brass	2d10 brass pennies per Status Level
Silver	1d10 silver shillings per Status Level
Gold	1 Gold crown per Status Level

1 gold crown (1GC) = 20 silver shillings (20/–) = 240 brass pennies (240d)

1 silver shilling (1/–) = 12 brass pennies (12d)

This is usually abbreviated to:
1 GC = 20/– = 240d

Noble Scion: 1 GC
(240d)

Peasant: 11d

Peasant = 5% of Noble



Evokes real socioeconomic contexts & class systems

Injury

- **D&D: Hit points** – “a combination of physical and mental durability”
 - HP max can get high, 0 means unconscious and perhaps dying, can be killed with a large amount of damage
 - Fights can have people popping up & down a lot
 - Lots of magical healing options, including resurrection
- **WFRP: Wounds** – “minor cuts and abrasions, bruises and bashes, and even the depletion of spiritual and mental energy reserves”
 - W max rarely gets high, 0 means prone but conscious, negative W and special rolls give Critical Wounds
 - Critical Wounds can happen (rarely) on any hit
 - Death comes easily but can be averted with Fate

Warning! Visceral injury descriptions below:

01–10	<i>Dramatic Injury</i>	1	A fine wound across the forehead and cheek. Gain 1 <i>Bleeding</i> Condition. Once the wound is healed, the impressive scar it leaves provides a bonus of +1 SL to appropriate social Tests. You can only gain this benefit once.
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81–85	<i>Smashed Mouth</i>	4	With a sickening crunch, your mouth is suddenly filled with broken teeth and blood. Gain 2 <i>Bleeding</i> Conditions. Lose 1d10 teeth — Amputation (Easy) .
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00	<i>Decapitated</i>	Death	Your head is entirely severed from your neck and soars through the air, landing 1d10 feet away in a random direction (see Scatter). Your body collapses, instantly dead.
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86–90	<i>Cleft Hand</i>	5	Your hand splay open from the blow. Lose 1 finger — Amputation (Difficult) . Gain 2 <i>Bleeding</i> and 1 <i>Stunned</i> Condition. For every succeeding Round in which you don't receive Medical Attention, you lose another finger as the wound tears; if you run out of fingers, you lose the hand — Amputation (Difficult) .
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26–30	<i>Twisted Back</i>	1	Suffer a Torn Muscle (Minor) injury.
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01–10	<i>Stubbed Toe</i>	1	In the scuffle, you stub your toe. Pass a Routine (+20) Endurance Test or suffer –10 on Agility Tests until the end of the next turn.
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Combining mechanical game effects with clear fictional elements produces visceral, dramatic moments of violence – not just numbers going up and down.

Combat

- *D&D*: Reposition, roll to hit AC, do damage, etc., weapons have qualities to be strategically deployed
- *WFRP*: Similar complexity & structure to *D&D*, though location & armour complicate damage, and most rolls are opposed
 - More ways for non-combatants to contribute, including Advantage

Advantage can make combat feel more strategic but also “swingy” and desperate, while opposed rolls can make confrontations feel more direct and active.

COMBAT STEP BY STEP

1. **Determine surprise.** The DM determines whether anyone involved in the combat encounter is surprised.
2. **Establish positions.** The DM decides where all the characters and monsters are located. Given the adventurers' marching order or their stated positions in the room or other location, the DM figures out where the adversaries are—how far away and in what direction.
3. **Roll initiative.** Everyone involved in the combat encounter rolls initiative, determining the order of combatants' turns.
4. **Take turns.** Each participant in the battle takes a turn in initiative order.
5. **Begin the next round.** When everyone involved in the combat has had a turn, the round ends. Repeat step 4 until the fighting stops.

COMBAT SUMMARY

Combat follows these steps until one side flees or is defeated:

1. **Determine Surprise:** The GM determines if any characters are *Surprised*. This normally only happens on the first round of combat. See the section below.
2. **Round Begins:** If the rules call for something to happen at the *start of the Round*, it happens now.
3. **Characters Take Turns:** Each combatant takes a Turn in Initiative order, starting with the highest Initiative. Each Character can normally perform a Move and an Action on their Turn (see page 157).
4. **Round Ends:** The Round ends when all combatants have taken a Turn. If the rules call for something to happen at the *end of the Round*, it happens now.
5. **Repeat Steps 2–5 As Required:** Continue to play through Rounds until the combat is resolved.

Magic

- *D&D*: Generally, a reliable tool.
- *WFRP*: Dangerous & less predictable, about mitigating risk.
 - Fictionally, heavily policed & institutionalised, except for folk traditions & witchcraft

Evokes meddling with unknown forces, paranoia and bureaucracy, with ties to real-world witch-hunts and occult traditions connected to Britain

21-25	Intestinal Rebellion: Your bowels move uncontrollably, and you soil yourself. Gain 1 <i>Fatigued Condition</i> , which cannot be removed until you can change your clothes and clean yourself up.
66-70	Unholy Visions: Fleeting visions of profane and unholy acts harass you. Receive a <i>Blinded Condition</i> ; pass a Challenging (+0) Cool Test or gain another.
06-10	Soured Milk: All milk within 1d100 yards goes sour instantly.

Miscasts blend mechanics & fiction, like *Critical Wounds*. They are a risk during any spellcasting, including opponents'.



The Colleges of Magic



Witch Hunters

WFRP: Corruption

- Tied to fiction, the Chaos Gods slowly encroach on mortal souls
- Corruption gained by exposure, but also by a Dark Deal (reroll)
- Leads to Dissolution of Body & Mind
- Difficult to lose, except via Dark Whispers (twisted actions)

	Elf	Halfling	Human	Dwarf
Body	–	01–10	01–50	01–05
Mind	01–100	11–100	51–100	06–100

26–30	Extra Leg Joints	+5 Agility
31–35	Extra Mouth	Roll on the Hit Location table to see where
36–40	Fleshy Tentacle	Gain the Tentacles Creature Trait. See page 342

36–40	Hollow Heart	+10 Willpower, –10 Fellowship
41–45	Jealous Thoughts	–10 Fellowship
46–50	Lonely Spirit	–10 to any Test when alone

Physical & Mental Corruptions also blend mechanics & fiction for dramatic character changes.

Further highlights the dangers of unknown forces, somewhat justifies the harsh views on magic, and establishes a world slowly slipping towards Chaos, tempting the player.

Fate & Fortune

- *D&D*: Few features allow rerolls & player overrides.
- *WFRP*: Characters are fictionally “Fated”.
 - Fate points can be spent to avoid death or damage
 - They provide Fortune, used for rerolls
 - Humans get more of them
 - Very hard to earn

Die Another Day: Instead of dying, your character is knocked out, left for dead, swept away by a river, or otherwise taken out of action; your character will survive, no matter the fatal incident’s circumstances, but takes no further part in the current encounter.

How Did That Miss?: Your character completely avoids the incoming damage by some extraordinary fluke, such as slipping just as a blow is about to connect, a weapon mysteriously jamming, or an unexpected source of light blinding an opponent; your character can continue on without penalty, but has no guarantee of survival in later rounds.

The choice of avoiding death or damage isn't always as straightforward as it sounds.

A player might also be aiming to let their character die in a particular way.

Doomed

Max: 1

At the age of 10, a Priest of Morr called a Doomsayer took you aside to foretell your death in an incense-laden, coming-of-age ritual called the Dooming. In conjunction with your GM, come up with a suitable Dooming. Should your character die in a fashion that matches your Dooming, your next character gains a bonus of half the total XP your dead character accrued during play.

Despite the grim setting, player characters have a destiny & players can use Fate to intervene on game events. The limited, dwindling resource makes spend decisions weighty.

Summing Up

Gritty, grounded adventures in which mortals struggle together and seize their own destiny. “Grim and perilous.”

In comparison to *D&D*, *WFRP* has:

- A **familiar world**, evoking real history, places, people
- Relatively **mundane player characters**, prone to injury & struggle like commonfolk
- Players engaging with fictional **cultural considerations & socioeconomic factors** such as wealth inequality & status
- Player characters facing **visceral & dramatic injury** in any fight
- **Combat** that can feel more directly **competitive & strategic**, but also **swingy & desperate**
- **Magic** that is **dangerous & unreliable**, leading to heavy regulation & witch-hunts
- A sense of **encroaching Chaos** via tempting Corruption mechanics
- **Fate** points, representing **character destiny** & allowing **player intervention** on game events

Further questions

- To what degree is “Britishness” notable in *WFRP*, as compared to the monolith of *D&D*?
 - Warhammer/Games Workshop is a British brand
 - The Old World evokes a British context
 - The mundane characters and socioeconomic elements (including currency and rigid status classes) evoke British structures
- To what degree are the differences simply USPs in the market?

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Thank you. Questions?