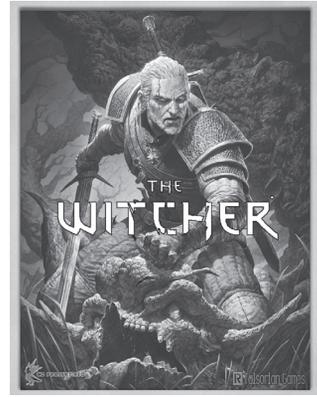# A Visit to the World of the Witcher

by R. Talsorian Games

As designers,. we at RTG want the Witcher RPG to be as unique in it's field as the Witcher games and books are. After all, no one who's ever read Andrej Sepkowski's Witcher books or played CD Projekt Red's hit Witcher video games could ever call Witcher "Standard Fantasy".

Besides the dark fantasy elements of the *Witcher*, one of the most important parts of the setting is it's anachronistic touches. In the original set of stories, the *Witcher Geralt* is effectively a detective who happens to kill monsters as well. He solves mysteries, hunts down clues and does a fair bit of negotiating, only really drawing his blade when absolutely necessary. The games, especially *Witcher 3*, get this feeling across excellently. You just know that *Geralt* has his own internal narrator and it doesn't take much to imagine *Geralt* as a gritty film noir hero. Aside from *Geralt*, we see mages who are effectively mad scientists, locking themselves away in towers and experimenting day and night on morally dubious experiments for the furthering of science. We even see collectable card games (*Gwent*), on par with *Magic the Gathering*, sweeping the *Witcher* world.

But for all of that, the *Witcher* is heavily rooted in fantasy. No matter how dark the world may get much of it still has a fractured fairytale style to it that lends to the atmosphere. While many classic fantasy plots still show up, many side quests and stories unfold like classical fairy tales and usually people, especially *Geralt*, tend to be fairly aware of this, making wry comments about princesses trapped in towers and young lads venturing off to defeat dreaded beasts as if they know we're in on the joke. In fact the first collection of short stories reads almost like a book of fractured fairy tales with *Geralt* stumbling into stories very similar to *Beauty and the Beast, Snow White* and more. But in the middle of this, you have the *Witchers*, monster-hunting sell-swords, who will happily slay your local Evil Fairy Godmonster if the price is right.

Playing a Witcher as a Character

Since they're such an important part of the setting, we've put a lot of thought into the topic of *Witchers* as player characters because it comes with a few difficult issues. The greatest of these issues is of course balancing the *Witcher* class with the others so that it doesn't overshadow everything else. In the books and the video games *Witchers* are very much the focus and it shows. Counting up all the things *Witchers* can do gives you a large list of racial abilities, special skills and faction affiliation bonuses. It can be difficult to balance a player who starts in such a, technically powerful position.

The second problem is keeping true to the narrative of the *Witcher* novels and video games. In keeping with the novels, and to a lesser extent the video games, *Witchers* are an endangered species. In total there are probably only 10 or 12 left in the entire known world and in the books it's dubious whether there are even that many. *Witchers* also haven't been made for many decades meaning that you won't be playing a young man fresh out of *Witcher* training. The third problem is that it's hard to capture the life of a *Witcher* in standard character creation. *Witchers* are incredibly long lived and have lived through most of the historical events of the known world. They've hunted hundreds of monsters and have hundreds of stories to tell.

When you set out to play a *Witcher* you are playing a character who not only exists, primarily, in a different world than the rest of the party, but is an old grizzled warrior who has been alive for decades upon decades, (perhaps even a century or two), and has lived the hardest life imaginable. To get this across players who make *Witcher* characters use a separate life path that clocks their life from when they were first taken into a school to the current day. It begins with your early training, (including your school affiliation and early training events), which is designed to give you a feel for how your characters life went before they took the trials to become a fully fledged *Witcher*. The rolls focus around how you were trained and how well your body took to initial mutation and eventually the Trial of the Grasses. Much like the rest of a *Witchers* life this section of the Witcher's Life Path is high risk and high reward with one bonus based on your school and then a split between achievements and mishaps. The life path then jumps into your life as a *Witcher*, where you roll for each decade after you finished training. In this section your decisions to play it safe or take a risk effect your chance of positive and negative effects. The more risky your hunts and the more involved you got in current events the higher your chance of making powerful allies, gaining bonus knowledge on monsters and getting cool rewards is. However the risk of danger also goes up and the chances that you'll make equally powerful enemies, suffer hindering wounds or loose the few people in your life you care about.

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Savage Combat is Key

One of the most important things to take into account when writing the *Witcher RPG* was the combat system. The combat of the *Witcher*, especially in *Witcher 2* and *Witcher 3*, is vastly different from the standard, hack and slash combat of traditional RPGs like *Dungeons and Dragons*. The combat of the *Witcher* is constantly in motion. Attacks are immediately deadly and *"critical wounds"* do much more than just lower your hit points. The way your survive in a battle in the *Witcher* is to constantly reposition, aim for enemies weak spots, knock them off guard and prepare ahead of time.

As mentioned before, *CD Projekt* has been very specific about wanting the *Witcher RPG* to be similar to our game *Cyberpunk 2020*. This meant bloody, viscous and unforgiving combat. However, *Cyberpunk* (being a dark future game) relies heavily on guns, and gun combat doesn't translate too well into melee combat, especially in the fast paced, frenetic combat of the *Witcher*. So I set out to make the combat system for the RPG fit the world while still delivering the deadliness *CD Projekt* was looking for. In the end the combat system is about where I was hoping to get it thanks to three major system tweaks and a major system addition.

The first tweak was to take an in depth look at melee combat. We wanted more granularity to combat in the *Witcher*. More than just, *"I hit him, he misses me, I hit him, he hits me."* In the *Witcher RPG*, when using melee weapons you have specific attacks that you can use. We took this approach in *Cyberpunk* as well but because it was relegated to martial arts mostly it didn't get a lot of play.

The idea is to give the player options in combat that would make their combat less predictable and less static. With this system people can think about their options, stay in constant motion, re-positioning, striking, tripping their opponents, going for grapples and parrying blades.

The second system tweak is healing. While there are some healing items in the RPG such as healing potions and healing magic the major brunt of healing must be done over time. Part of the realistic, violent feel *CD Projekt* wanted to get in the RPG is that you can't always just drink a health potion and get all your hit points back immediately. Healing items allow you to regenerate hit points but you still have to stay on your toes until you regenerate. Unlike the video game you can't get hit points back by eating a ham sandwich or some raw wolf meat. Unless you have a mage or some potions on hand healing is done through R&R.

To really capture the feeling of combat in the *Witcher* we have also created a critical system for the game. In the *Witcher* books the brutality of combat is often underscored

and characters never just *"get hit"*. Bones are broken, arteries are cut and emphasis is always put on how *Geralt* is able to get by due to his incredible skill, (and high pain threshold). In the *Witcher RPG* you can score *"critical hits"* on opponents by rolling a higher attack roll than their defense roll and the larger the difference between your totals the more damaging and hindering the attack is. Low range examples are things like dislocated limbs, lost teeth and minor head wounds with which you can battle on but which impose small penalties and give more feeling of life and danger to a combat. The most dangerous of critical strikes can kill you outright if not treated and always take a piece of you such as dismembered limbs, septic shock and lost eyes. This means that if you have a high weapon skill you know that it will count for something in combat. If a master swordsman fights a peasant he knows he can almost always take the peasant apart with ease. But it also encourages players to weigh their options, and keep on their toes. If their opponent is far more skilled than them they might want to wait and try a more stealthy approach rather than risk broken bones or worse. All critical wounds can be stabilized on the battlefield so the victim won't bleed out or the like but to fully heal them they must be treated by a Doctor, Priest or Mage and, as with standard healing, they take time to heal.

In the *Witcher RPG* we want to deliver a combat system that feels as risky, and dynamic as the combat of *Witcher 3*. Something that stands out and has it's own feel and encourages players to think before they leap into combat.

Something that's more than just a typical Fantasy game.

Witcher is a fantasy game for grownups.

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