

Introduction



In which the reason for this manual is given, role playing games and their workings are discussed, and relevant works affecting few – or many – fans are reviewed.

Carts full of corpses slide through the muddy streets of a deserted city. Monks copy manuscripts silently in their cold monastery rooms. A hammer falls again and again on glowing red metal in a blacksmith shop. Fragrant flowers perfume private courtyard gardens. Grim and silent soldiers march the dusty roads in search of enemies, whether infidel or faithful. This is the world of the Middle Ages, which our ancestors knew and which shaped our present.

But beyond this human world, in the most shadowy depths of the woods, in the loneliest cave, in the most obscure cell, in the dimmest chambers of the human heart, legends live. Here, demons haunt castles, elves skulk in the forest, alchemists concoct spells, and brujas laugh and laugh around their campfire in a forest clearing bathed in moonlight, as the demon sitting among them raises his goatish head and grins, directly at you, dear reader, saying...

*"Welcome to the *aquelarre* — welcome to the coven."*

A Role-Playing Game

This enormous book you hold in your hands is the manual for a role-playing game. Let's be more specific: these are the rules for playing *Aquelarre: The Demonic Medieval Role-Playing Game*, a game set in the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula during the 14th and 15th centuries, one in which history and fantasy live side by side, where the rule of Pedro I the Cruel and Satan equally exist. If you don't already know what role-playing games are, read this entire section; if you don't know what *Aquelarre* is, read the "A Little History" section; and if you are a firebrand and already know everything you need to know about role-playing games and about *Aquelarre*, we will see you in the final section, "This English Translation."

hey, A ROLE-PLAYING GAME

If this is the first time you have bought a role-playing game and you have chosen this one to begin, we can only give you our congratulations. First because you have made a good choice (what else could we say?), and second because you are going to start with the dean of Spanish role-playing games, and that is something, right?

Some people say you learn what a role-playing game is by playing, although we could also say that you learn to drive by driving, but that isn't exactly true. We can say that playing a role-playing game gives you experience with that game, but we need to explain briefly what all is involved in that. Let's begin with the simplest description we can make of a role-playing game: imagine that you are watching a movie, and a moment comes in which one of the protagonists does something that to you seems stupid, and you say to the person next to you: "Look at that fool! Like I would ever separate from my group in the middle of the woods with a murderer loose!" If you have ever done this, welcome to the world of role-playing games, as this is basically what is done in them, making ourselves the protagonists of a movie that we don't watch, instead relating our choices to a lead player, reacting as we wish to whatever happens in the story.

The player who tells us what is happening around us also becomes the arbiter of any disputes (using the rules contained in this manual), and also acts secondary parts, representing all the people who are going to appear in the tale but who aren't the protagonists. This player receives the title of *Game Director* (GD to abbreviate, or *Game Master* for some people), while the story's protagonists are *Player Characters* (PCs), whose roles the remaining players perform. All characters not controlled by a player—like the secondary actors in the movies—who appear in the stories (or adventures, as we also call them) are *Non-Player Characters* (NPCs) and are controlled by the *Game Director*.

With this information, you now have the basis of what a role-playing game is, which rests upon three main pillars: dialog among the players and between them and the GD; imagination (since the story takes place in the minds of the players); and representation (since each of the players will act as his character would). If you have ever played a role-playing video game (*Neverwinter Nights*, *World of Warcraft*, etc.), you will have seen something very similar; which isn't that strange, given that video games are a development of classic role-playing games, like the one you have in your hands. But while in a videogame the programming determines the types of tasks or actions a character can perform (which, however many there may be, are always finite), in a classic role-playing game there is no end to the actions that can be performed, as many as we can imagine. For example, when in a videogame we encounter a character controlled by the computer, we are given a series of options: fight, speak, etc.; in a role-playing game like *Aquelarre* there is complete liberty: we can speak, certainly, and fight, without a doubt, but we can also mock him and stick a finger up our nose or show him our backsides and then take off running. Here, anything is possible. Nevertheless, here we have a human *Game Director*, which gains us many more benefits than the simple script of a computer game, such that he can change the story we are telling at any moment, modified by our reactions, including even arguing with him, something a videogame cannot allow us (at least, currently...).

To be able to interact with the world a role-playing game offers us, each of the players must fill out a Character Sheet (at the end of the manual you will find one, which we recommend you photocopy, or that you download one from [specific Nocturnal Media Web page], so that you don't have to tear the one from the book), following the rules we offer you in the first chapter. On this sheet the characteristics and skills our character possesses will be reflected by means of number values: Is he strong? Is he agile? Does he know how to move in silence? Is he good handling a sword? etc. In this way, when the GD decides the chance of success or failure for an action, we can use these ratings and a dice roll to know whether...

What? We haven't yet mentioned dice? You are right, and I believe the moment has arrived.

DICE CONVENTIONS

If you have never played a role-playing game or, if you have, it was not a session of **Aquelarre** or another of the many games that use a percentile system (like *Call of Cthulhu*, *Runesquest*, or *Stormbringer*, to name a few), it's possible you feel a bit intimidated facing a set of rules that seem something like an economic treatise: percentiles, percentages, tables, etc. As we have said, in this manual you have all the rules, carefully explained, and filled with examples, but here is a summary so that you can get the hang of the system overall. You'll see it's no big deal.

In respect to dice, **Aquelarre** uses types with four, six, eight, and ten sides—especially the last; dice you can find in the same store where you obtained this manual. And if it is well stocked, you can even choose the color and type (gem dice, crystal dice, marbled dice, metal dice, etc.). These dice are used in **Aquelarre** in the following ways:

✧ **Percentile Rolls (abbreviated 1d100):** This is the most common type of roll in the game. It is made by rolling two ten-sided dice, usually of different colors: one of them will be the Tens (one marked specifically for this, or one that stands out, we typically say) and the other the Ones. For example, if we get a 2 on the tens and a 1 on the ones, we have a 21; a 4 and a 7 become a 47; and an 8 and a 5 become an 85. If we get a double 00, we have rolled a 100. Most of the ratings used in the game are expressed as percentages, which allows measurement on a scale of 1 to 100 of how good a particular ability or skill is: for example, a character who has a 30% in Climbing is fairly mediocre; if he has a 50%, he is a bit better; and with an 80%, he is clearly good. So each time we need to find out if we have succeeded at a specific action, we make a percentile roll: if we receive a result less than or equal to the percentage we possess, we have been successful; if it is higher, we have failed.

✧ **Other Rolls:** Besides the 1d100, you will encounter other types of rolls that are used in specific circumstances, whether that be to find how much damage is caused by an attack, how many days are spent convalescing

INTRODUCTION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ROLE-PLAYED

Don't be ashamed. It's only human to fear what one doesn't know. And what people fear, they attack, they forbid, they attempt to keep far from themselves and their loved ones. Role-playing gamers understand that.

We understand that, in a largely audio-visual society like ours, an entertainment based on imagination seems strange. An entertainment in which the player — instead of taking a merely passive role, as happens in front of the television — adopts a totally active role, creating the story by means of play.

We also understand, dear reader who has never role-played, that in this society of yours and mine, which tends toward individualism and loneliness, and whose future seems to be relations via the Internet, that there are some crazies who still like to do a collective activity, gathering in groups of a half dozen friends, having some refreshment before beginning, playing for a few hours around a table, and going to the movies or out to eat afterward.

We understand that you — you, who have lived your whole life wrapped up in pre-established norms and rules — view with mistrust a game whose only limit is the imagination of those who play it.

Finally, we understand that in a world like this one, at the beginning of the century, dominated by new technologies, that you look strangely on some crazies who, instead of playing in front of a computer, prefer to return to oral tradition, to narration and dialog, as it was before the time of television.

We understand. Don't worry. But... wouldn't you prefer to criticize us knowledgeably? Then why not read the manual, play a session, and judge later? And don't worry if you find you don't like it. Unlike you, we understand that not all the world has to like the same things.

Postscript for fundamentalist believers: In this game angels and demons appear. We wish we could say that they are the fruit of the author's imagination, but the truth is that they have been taken from various biblical texts and from classic demonology. Before shouting to high heaven (never better said), you should be aware that these texts were declared Inspired not only by the Church Fathers but also by the Vatican Council II. Come on; it's clear they're not real. This is a game, a jest, just words. So please, don't be offended. And if you are, let it pass; as a colleague of mine once said (and I love to repeat it), one Salman Rushdie in the world is enough.

from an illness, or how much time a spell effect endures. For these we use dice with four faces (1d4), six faces (1d6), eight faces (1d8), and ten faces (1d10). In some cases, we must roll more than one die of a specific type (for example, 2d4; rolling two four-sided dice and adding the results), or we have to add or subtract a determined amount from the result (for example 1d4+2: roll one four-sided die and add 2), or even perhaps roll dice of different types (for example, 1d4+1d6; rolling one four-sided die and one six-sided die and adding the results. To roll 1d3, use 1d6 and divide the results by two (rounding up). Do the same to roll 1d5, using 1d10.

With what we have now told you, you should more or less understand what a role-playing game is (as we mentioned at the beginning, by playing a couple of sessions you will find that it is easier than it seems) and what the basic rules of **Aquelarre** consist of. As you may have noticed, we haven't spoken anywhere about who wins in a role-playing game, as in reality there are no winners (or, put another way, all

the players win), as it is about trying to live an adventure in our own imagination, dreaming of what it is like to be someone different than we are in reality. Upon finishing an adventure, it may be that characters have gained allies, money, power, and have also raised their abilities through experience, but none of this can properly be called "winning"; and the worst that can happen is that our character dies, though that isn't actually losing either, since we can go back and create another character from the beginning and continue playing.

Don't worry if you haven't fully captured some of the previous concepts, as we repeat them so many times throughout the book that you will learn them in the end; we recommend that you read the first four chapters and then play the interactive adventure **Specus Vespertillionum** (Fabula 1, **page XX**), so that you can learn step by step, in an entertaining way, the ins and outs of the rules.

Glossary

No one is perfect, here is a small glossary of terms and abbreviations often used in the game, so that you don't get lost in jargon and strange terms.

Action: One of the two maneuvers or deeds that a character can perform during a Round.

AGI: Agility. See "Characteristics."

APP: Appearance. See below.

Appearance: A secondary characteristic measuring a character's looks—the character's beauty or ugliness.

Adventure: The term for each story in which the characters become involved. Traditionally called a "module," within a series of related adventures called a "campaign."

Blunder: A failure so disastrous that it invokes more unusual penalties than usual for a failed roll.

Characteristics: There are seven primary characteristics, each rated from 1 to 20, which indicate the physical and mental abilities of a character. These are Strength, Agility, Dexterity, Fortitude, Perception, Communication, and Culture—and they determine what the character is like (as opposed to what the character has learned). Each character also has a number of secondary characteristics rating Luck, Temperance, Rationality/Irrationality, Life Points, Appearance, Age, and Height and Weight.

COM: Communication. See "Characteristics."

Concentration Points (CP): A representation of the mystic energy that allows a bruja, mage, or other user of magic to empower the spells that character knows.

Confrontational Rolls: Rolls made by two or more characters whose actions oppose one another.

Consilium Arbitro: Advice from the Author to the Game Director.

CP: See "Concentration Points."

Critical Success: The best result possible on a dice roll, giving additional benefits to an action.

CUL: Culture. See "Characteristics."

D100: See "Percentile Roll."

Damage Points (DP): A representation of the amount of damage inflicted by an attack, a weapon, or harmful elements.

DEX: Dexterity. See "Characteristics."

Difficulty: A bonus or penalty that the Game Director applies to a dice roll, giving it a better or worse chance of succeeding.

DP: See "Damage Points."

Experience Points (XP): A representation of knowledge gained by a character from studying, working, or living adventures, which allows him to improve his Skills.

Faith Points (FP): (Faith Points) A representation of a character's strength of belief, which allows that character to maintain multiple rituals of faith at the same time.

FOR: Fortitude. See "Characteristics."

FP: See "Faith Points."

Game Director: This is the player who is responsible for preparing the adventures the other players will take

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part in, who acts as an arbiter of the rules, and who takes the roles of all characters who appear in the adventure other than those of the players.

Game Session: This is a period of continuous play. During this time an adventure (or part of an adventure) may be completed, depending on the amount of time available and the actions taken by the characters.

GD: See "Game Director."

Initiative: A roll that determines at what moment during a Round a character can act.

IRR: Irrationality. See "Rationality/Irrationality."

Life Points (LP): A character's level of health, which can be lowered by wounds or illnesses. A large loss of LP can result in a character's death.

LP: See "Life Points."

Luck: A secondary characteristic indicating a character's good fortune, and which can be used to gain success with dice rolls that are more difficult than usual.

Non-Player Character (NPC): Characters not directly controlled by one of the players, but instead by the GD.

NPC: See "Non-Player Character."

Ordo: (*Plural, Ordines*) "Order" or "level" indicates the power of a ritual of faith. The six ordines are: primus, secundus, tertius, quartus, quintus, and sextus.

PER: Perception. See "Characteristics."

Percentile Roll: The most common type of dice roll in the game, this involves rolling two 10-sided dice. One die (you declare which before rolling) represents the Tens digit and the other the Ones digit. For example, if you roll a 4 and then an 8, your result is a 48.

PC: See "Player Character."

Player Character (PC): A character directly controlled by one of the players.

Profession: The occupation exercised by a person during his life.

Rationality (RR)/Irrationality (IRR): A pair of numbers indicating the amount of belief a character possesses about the rational and irrational worlds.

Ritual of Faith: A power given to a priest by God.

Round: An artificial measure of time used in the game—approximately 12 seconds of real time.

RR: Rationality. See "Rationality/Irrationality."

Skills: Abilities possessed by characters in the game, which represent knowledges and aptitudes a character has learned during life.

Social Position: The step on the social ladder a person occupies in medieval society.



STR: Strength. See “Characteristics.”

Temperance: A secondary characteristic measuring the mental endurance and courage of a character.

Vis: The potency, magnitude, or power level of a spell. They are, in order from least to greatest power: vis prima, vis secunda, vis tertia, vis quarta, vis quinta, vis sexta, and vis septima.

XP: See “Experience Points.”

A Little History

Aquelarre: The Demonic Medieval Role-Playing Game first appeared for sale on Wednesday, 13 November 1990 and became the first one-hundred-percent Spanish role-playing game: it was written in Spanish, designed by a Spaniard—Ricard Ibáñez—published by a Spanish publisher—Joc Internacional—and set within the 14th century kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula. Over the years, the game gained momentum and supplements for it multiplied (*Lilith*, *Rerum Démoni*, *Dracs...*), which added more depth to its setting.

In 1993, the game made a jump in time to land in the 16th century with *Rinascita*, a supplement that allowed players to place their adventures within the Renaissance. And things didn’t stop there, as three years later *Villa y Corte* came to light, a manual that places players in the Madrid of the Austrian Hapsburgs during the 17th century. However, to the disappointment of the game’s fans, this would be the last *Aquelarre* supplement from Joc Internacional, as the publisher dissolved and left the game homeless.

During the following years, followers of *Aquelarre* did as best they could to continue their campaigns without newly published material, at least until the end of 1999: In November of that year, José Luis Rodríguez, known on the Net as Tanys, founded on the Internet the Anathema Brotherhood, a mailing list dedicated to the game (es.groups.yahoo.com/group/Aquelarre/), which from then on became a meeting place for hundreds of fans who could use it to share ideas, adventures, and suggestions. And things didn’t stop there, as one month later a new publisher, Caja de Pandora, published a second edition of *Aquelarre*, including in a single book all the corrections and new rules that had been generated since the first edition appeared.

Thus began the game’s second renaissance, as many new players discovered it besides those who had come before.

More supplements were produced by Ricard Ibáñez (*Jentilen Lurra*, *Fogar de Breogán*, etc.), by other authors (like the *Ad Intra Mare* campaign by Pedro García), and compilations of adventures written by fans of the game (*Ultreya*). Things seemed to be going brilliantly for the game, including the launch of a release in full color, but none of this could prevent the publisher finally closing its doors and *Aquelarre* again finding itself without an official producer. Luckily for fans, this would prove to be only a momentary fading, as several members of Caja de Pandora created CROM, a publisher willing to take over *Aquelarre*, also opening their doors to new authors, which let them bring to market a great quantity of supplements—dedicated to different ethnic groups (Al Andalus and Sefarad), to magic (*Grimorio*), to cities (*Medina Grnatha*, *Descriptio Cordubae*), and to professions (*Codex Inquisitorius*, *Ars Magna*, *Ars Medica*, *Ars Carmina*), as well as new adventures (*Fraternitas Vera Lucis*), and even rerelease old supplements (*Ad Intra Mare*, *Jentilen Lurra*, and *Fogar de Breogán*). Sadly, CROM had to close its doors between the years 2003 and 2004.

In this state of affairs, and after many years of publishing drought, the publisher Nosolorol and Ricard Ibáñez decided to publish a third edition of *Aquelarre* in 2013, rewriting the manual entirely, polishing some of the rules to make them clearer to understand and easier to use, at the same time incorporating material that had been published separately in different supplements. The resulting manual that could claim to be the definitive version, encompassing the greatest possible quantity of the game’s features, while in the future Nosolorol is dedicated to publish more supplements and guides for *Aquelarre*, to expand the game world even further.

This English Edition

The English edition you now hold in your hands is translated from that Spanish third edition of *Aquelarre*.