light

*i*sophasm*i*c

the *whole group* rules

Polycosm
Publishing ™

PolyP

isophasmic is a game for two or more people, as well as a system for resolving fictional problems.

Inspired by approaches to early adventure gaming, it provides a set of simple tools for exploring a shared world. Specific rules are created on the fly, allowing new players to jump straight in, but also offering a challenge to more experienced gamers.

This version is laid out as a PolyP booklet to make it easier to play spontaneously and on the move, and it can be copied for anyone interested in joining in.

creating the World

Before each game the Players decide the nature of the World in which their Characters are to exist.

In isophasmic a World can be defined as briefly or fully as the Players wish. For practical purposes it can be treated as a set of Landscapes, Beings and Events, with the Players defining the basics of each.

Once a game is underway, the World is likely to develop further, with the Players interpreting its agreed nature and expanding on this. By allowing the Referee to make some or all decisions alone, the other Players add potential for surprise; the Referee can then include prepared or published material unseen, e.g. adventures.

What does it look like?

L a n d s c a p e s

Where is it, and when?

W o r l d

How has it developed?

Who lives there?

B e i n g s

E v e n t s   *What's going on?*

What you need, as well as this booklet or another version of isophasmic, are a) two or more Players, b) ideally at least one six-sided Die (the cube used for many traditional board games, with six equally-sized faces marked 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, often called a D6) and maybe c) a way to make notes, e.g. a pen and paper.

How it works depends on the Players. One Player is the Referee, who describes the current situation in the imagined World. The other Players each guide one or more Characters through this World by listening to the Referee and declaring the actions that their Characters are taking at any given point. The Referee guides any Beings met on the way and updates the World as everyone interacts with it.

Of course, the precise nature of a given situation and the feasibility or result of a given action may be debated by the Players. If the situation in the World or the realisation of any action is unclear, the Players together decide how to resolve this.

creating Characters

A Character is part of a given World. For practical purposes, each Character can be treated as a Being associated with Landscapes and Events. The Players decide how many Characters each of them creates and guides, as well as any restrictions as to nature.

In isophasmic a Character can be defined in any agreed form. Unless the Players decide otherwise, each Character has a general ability score of 3, and is described in three words and assigned up to six related possessions by the creating Player.

Words and possessions are points of reference for what a Character might do, know and have, while a given score can be used as a target number for Skill rolls.

s a m p l e   p r o f i l e

John Polycosmith **3**

daring human gamer

dice bag, notebook, pencil, snack, loose change, keys

3d2 =

1 1 2 = 6

3d3* =

3 3 3 ₉

- 3 +

2 1 2 = 11
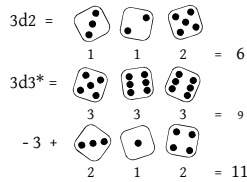
generating numbers - 1

isophasmic assumes that random numbers will be used in deciding and resolving, and be generated by rolling one or more Dice. If no Dice are available, the alternative at the end of the booklet can be used.

The term '1D6' means 'one Die' or 'the result rolled on one Die'. The first digit is the number of Dice; if above one, the results are totalled, so '2D6' is '1D6+1D6'. A D3 is a D6 divided by two, a D2 a D6 divided by three, in both cases rounding up.

An asterisk (*) means that if the maximum is rolled, the minimum is deducted and a further roll made and added, repeated for each further maximum, e.g. if '2D6*' is initially a 12, 2 is deducted and 2D6 rolled again, which if a 7 is a total result of 17.

exploring the World

← P ↔ R ↔ P →

The Players decide where in the World the Characters are as the game begins, why they are together, assuming they are, and what is happening around them.

The game is then an ongoing dialogue between the Referee and the other Players.

The Players guiding the Characters declare the actions which their Characters are taking, with the Referee doing so for any other Beings present. If a given action is feasible and has a clear duration and result, its effect on the situation in the World is taken into account and the updated situation is described by the Referee.

If the feasibility, duration and/or result of an action or any aspect of the current situation in the World is unclear, the Players decide how to resolve this problem.

? ├→1 │ ? ├→2 │ ? │ 1/2
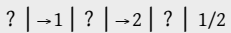
making decisions

When the Players have a decision to make they discuss what to do. If they agree, the decision is applied: all agreed rolls are made; the Referee updates the World.

If they cannot agree, the Referee proposes a favourite solution. This is Solution 1.

If the other Players agree with Solution 1, it is applied. If not, they propose a Solution 2, even if this overlaps. If they cannot agree on a 2, 1 is applied after all.

If the Referee cannot agree with Solution 2, someone rolls 1D2 to determine which of the two solutions is applied: a result of 1 is Solution 1; a 2 is Solution 2.

The Players decide before a game which Player is Referee. They may decide at any time to: a) change Referee; b) allow the Referee to make any or all decisions alone.

SAMPLE SOLUTIONS for inspiration, based on rolls including STATE, SCALE and SKILL

Order of actions?	Each Player rolls 1D6 + score, +/- 1 per related word etc.; highest is first
Something near?	STATE, +/- for Landscape and related Events; does the Ref. roll secretly?
Detect presence?	SKILL, using score, +/- 1 per related word etc., incl. behaviour and health
Nature of group?	SCALE, for a) no. of types then b) no. in type; SCALE, for attitude on range
Distribution?	Roll 1D6: positions of individuals reflect layout of pips or shape of number
Local features?	SCALE for no. of dice: roll these onto a surface for positions; results are size
Attack / Defend?	SKILL, using score, +/- 1 per related word etc., incl. behaviour and health
Injury inflicted?	SCALE, based on weapon + deg. of success: reduces victim score(s); death at 0
Complication?	STATE, then SCALE for severity; if history, reroll, or roll twice and pick best/worst
Recovery?	STATE for care; SKILL for diagnosis; SCALE for period to recover 1 score
Gain in ability?	STATE per Event or situation, for a new word or +1 to specific ability score

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Three standard rolls - STATE, SCALE and SKILL - can be used to answer common questions quickly and simplify any solutions the Players might need to propose.

STATE *True or not?* Someone rolls 1D6: if the result is 5 or above, this thing is true.

SCALE *How much?* The Players set a suitable range (e.g. xD3+y), then someone rolls.

SKILL *Successful?* The Players set a window for success, from 1 (narrow) to 6 (wide); the Player guiding the Character attempting the action then rolls 1D6: if the result is equal to or below the number, it succeeds, but if equal only just.

Any of these rolls can be modified by a number set by the Players, to adjust the range of results and likelihood of an outcome, and better reflect the World. The Players can also define new rolls or mechanisms for resolution and set other conditions, e.g. cases in which a result may be ignored and the roll made again.

The flexibility of isophasmic allows material for other systems and settings to be used too, even without adaptation. The Players decide how material is included.

generating numbers - 2

If no Die is available, a result for a given Die size can be generated using the grid below. Place a fingertip at the far left and run it to the right with eyes averted and in good faith to an unknown column; the number in the given row is the result.

1D2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1
1D3	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	2
1D6	3	5	1	2	4	6	1	5	3	6	4	2	3	5	1	2	4	6	1	5	3	6	4	2

*i*sophasm*i*c ^{light} | example of play

Together at a game store, Akira (A), Bobby (B), Chris (C) and Deniz (D) decide to play *isophasmic*, although A can only stay for half an hour. They decide that D will be the Referee.

They discuss the nature of the World. A suggests a high fantasy setting and B agrees, adding in aspects of horror and sketching a troubled land, with dark forests and labyrinthine tombs as key Landscapes. C agrees on horror, but prefers a sci-fi feel and proposes the World be at least post-apocalyptic; D likes the potential in this for lost technology. The group has a good discussion and agrees on *a benighted realm enclosed by deep fungal woods, with fading folk memories of an ancient collapse and haunted tunnels beneath the thin soil.* For a key recent Event, D suggests that *the mists part to reveal the sky is a phosphorescent vault formed of fused, decayed craft.* A would prefer these to be wooden, for a more classical tone, and C likes wood as suitably weird, but B and D feel that metal ships are a more evocative approach. The group chooses to go on to the solution proposal procedure. The Referee, D, opts for 'metal' as Solution 1. But A, B and C cannot agree a Solution 2. Rather than let 1 be applied by default, A suggests a compromise, that *the materials are unclear to the observers.* The others agree and this becomes Solution 2. D is happy to accept, meaning that no roll need be made. For Beings the group agrees that *many are descended from the crews and cargos of the various ships, but most are native flora and fauna.* They agree that *the people of the realm are largely humanoid*, of whatever natures the Players choose for their Characters. The Players now feel that they have a good starting point and know generally what their Characters might know.

Next they discuss and create Characters. They agree that *A, B and C will each create and guide one Character at a time, while D creates others as needed, secretly, subject to confirmation by the group.* For speed, and to keep things simple as they get used to the game, they agree to *use the basic Character profile, but allowing extra words at the cost of one item each.* A creates *a fallen elven noble* with the full six items, but one of these is an enchanted sword of great power so B proposes that each unusual feature cost one item extra, capped at two, or the other Players add a drawback. A prefers no cap and C agrees, hoping to create a powerful psychic, but D sides with B. As Referee, D makes B's idea Solution 1. A, B and C cannot agree a Solution 2 so 1 is applied: *each unusual feature costs one item extra, capped at two.* For the purposes of counting words they agree that *hyphenations count as one and conjunctions none*, so B creates *a part-fungal human head forester* with five items (the hyphenation costs one), C *a precognitive, telepathic and telekinetic dwarven outcast* with one item (two extra words and three unusual features). The elf and dwarf carry all of their items, but the human keeps a toolbox at the foresters' lodge.

They discuss how the game begins. D proposes that the Characters meet soon after the mists part, with A suggesting that the elf sees a chance to take power, B that the head forester craves the light and C that the dwarf is intrigued by the ships: they agree that *the three meet on a low forest hill, gaze up at the vault and consent to travel as one to a near edge.* D suggests secret SCALE rolls for the number of days it takes and the frequency of encounters; the group agrees on *2D6 days of travel at 1D3-1 encounters per day, all rolled secretly by the Referee.* They also agree to *use the sample solutions for encounters*, again for speed.

The Characters begin exploring the World. B declares that the head forester sends an apprentice back to collect the tools. The Players disagree on how many foresters there are. B suggests five, the others one. As Solution 1, D proposes '1D3+1', but B argues that more helps the party so Solution 2 is '1D6+1'. D disagrees, to avoid party size becoming unwieldy, and 1D2 is rolled: the result is a 2, so Solution 2 is applied. B rolls a 3: *four foresters*. The Players agree *that B guides these, subject to confirmation*, and that *the other foresters panicked*. A, B and C create the new Characters while D makes a list of likely encounters, numbering them 1 to 6 so that rolling 1D6 selects one randomly. They agree that *the lodge is close* and that *when the apprentice returns, they set off*. D rolls secretly as agreed: *eight days to the near edge* and *one encounter the first day*, which is 'funglid tunnel mouth'. All agree with D that *the Characters are still in the forest* and *D will use the 'Local features?' solution to create the encounter site, rolling 3D6 Dice onto the table for stalk positions, with the results rolled reflecting root bulk, the lowest being a tunnel mouth.* D suggests using 'Something near?' for funglids; the others are unsure, but D argues a need for license and they agree to *a STATE roll for the presence of 1D3 funglids.* This shows that *a funglid is present*; they agree that *a funglid has a general score of 3, plus an infestation score of 1.* C suggests that the dwarf may have had a premonition; the group agrees that *a psychic power can be used once per day through a SKILL roll, using score as window for success.* The attempt fails: they agree that *the future is clouded.* B declares that the head forester attempts 'Detect presence?' with a bonus of 2 (1 for 'part-fungal', 1 for 'forester'). This succeeds; they agree to *identify the stalk hiding the funglid randomly, assume distance is 1D6x10' and base speed 40' per action and use 'Order of actions?'.* D rolls highest, going first; the group agrees to *use a SCALE roll of 1D6 for reaction, 1 strongly negative, 6 strongly positive, and the Referee interpreting.* A 2 is rolled: *the funglid retreats.* At this point D takes a call and has to leave; it is almost time for A too. B and C agree that *C is the new Referee*: D gives C the day total and encounter list and A, B and C agree that *B guides the elf.* B and C resume. The party advances; and in the next round the funglid leaves the site. B declares that they approach the mouth, cautiously, and asks for a fuller description of the area; C provides it. Identifying a blind spot, B has the party circle round, up to the lip. C proposes a STATE roll for disturbed fungi and B agrees if there is a bonus for the skill of the foresters: *none are distrubed.* They agree that *C will create a simple system to generate the tunnels*, but Elliot (E), watching the game, offers an unused map. They ask E to join in; Fran (F) is interested too. They agree that *E will guide the foresters, B the elf and F a new Character.* If B and C forget one of the decisions for creation, the group simply makes it again.