

# ELEGANT ROLE-PLAYING

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*Elegant Role-Playing (ERP) is a free role-playing game system.*

**MASTERY – WISDOM – POWER**

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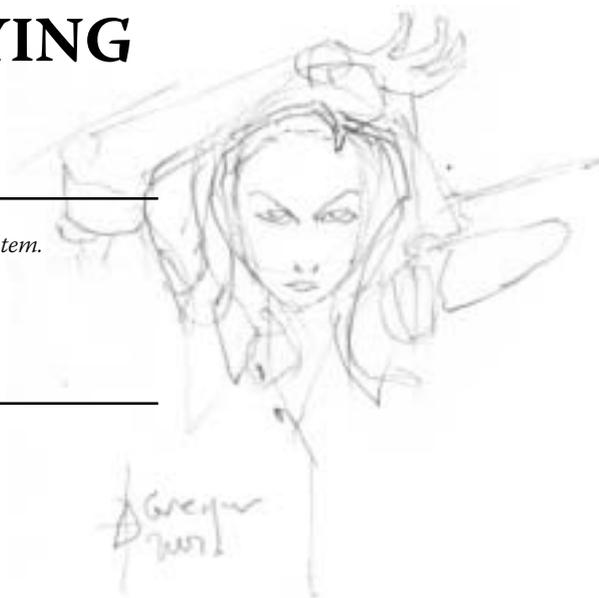
## 1. THE BASICS

Elegant Role-Playing (ERP) is a simple system for running role-playing games. Role-playing is an interactive narrative between several players and a moderator, called the GamesMaster (GM). The players all play a single character each (called a PC, for Player Character) and the GM describes the world in which the adventure is taking place. The GM also plays all the incidental characters, such as the friends and enemies of the PCs. The idea is for everyone to have a good time, adventuring, solving puzzles and mysteries, and making stories.

ERP is based on three Characteristics: MASTERY, WISDOM and POWER. You will need a six-sided die (d6) to play. ERP can be used for anything from a fantasy setting to modern and science-fiction games. It can also handle anything from human to Godlike level. I hope it is simple to use and allows you to have many enjoyable adventures.

### 1.1 Characteristics

Mastery, Wisdom and Power are described in rating points, an average human has a rating of 3, while a mighty hero may have 12 or more.





## 1.2 Mastery

Mastery measures physical ability and strength. It is used for tasks that have a physical nature, and for resisting bodily injuries.

### 1.2.1 Aspects

The Aspects of Mastery are: dexterity, skill, talent, strength. These are alternative ways of thinking of Mastery.

### 1.2.2 Associated Attributes

Strong, Agile, Stealthy, Quick, Healthy, Tough, Nimble, Fleet-Footed, Spring-Heeled, Well-Balanced, Sure-Handed

## 1.3 Wisdom

Wisdom describes mental ability and capacity. It is used for tasks that have a mental nature, and for resisting insanity and shock.

### 1.3.1 Aspects

The Aspects of Wisdom are: knowledge, memory, reason, education. These are alternative ways of thinking of Wisdom.

### 1.3.2 Associated Attributes

Wise, Intelligent, Educated, Alert, Witty, Reasoned, Logical, Inquiring, Clever, Quick-Thinking

## 1.4 Power

Power gauges emotional and spiritual prowess and strength. It is used for tasks with a social and mystical nature, and for protection from empathic and ethereal pain.

### 1.4.1 Aspects

The Aspects of Power are: chi, charisma, determination, fate. These are alternative ways of thinking of Power.

### 1.4.2 Associated Attributes

Charismatic, Attractive, Strong-Willed, Empathic, Persuasive, Radiant, Purposeful, Defiant

## 1.5 Attributes

Allows an additional d6 to be rolled if the Attribute is relevant to the task. The die with the highest result is taken to calculate the score of the attempt. No more than one Attribute may be used for any given contest, so no more than three dice are rolled at the same time (if there is also a Skill involved). You may have no more Attributes for a Characteristic than that Characteristic's rating divided by 2 (rounded up). For example, Jargo the Thief has a Mastery of 5 and so can have up to 3 Attributes associated with Mastery.

Sample Attributes: Strong, Agile, Stealthy, Quick, Healthy, Tough, Wise, Intelligent, Educated, Alert, Charismatic, Attractive, Strong-Willed, Empathic, etc.

## 1.6 Skills

Allows an additional d6 to be rolled if the Skill is relevant to the task. The die with the highest result is taken to calculate the score of the attempt. No more than one Skill may be used for any given contest, so no more than three dice are rolled at the same time (if there is also a relevant Attribute). There is no limit on the number of Skills that a character can possess. Skills cover areas of expertise, training and learning.

Sample Skills: Athletics, Stealth, Art, Music, Science, Interaction, Manipulation, Combat, Weapons, Ballistics, Mechanics, Electronics, Computers, Engineer, Medicine, Natural History, Pilot, Driver, etc.



## 1.7 Gifts

Gifts allow characters to perform special actions and activities, but grant no modifier to dice rolls.

Sample Gifts: Ambidexterity, Eidetic Memory, Animal Empathy, Sense of Direction, Wealth, Status, Rank, Allies, Contacts, Patron, Followers, etc.

## 1.8 Wounds

When completely healthy a character has 0 Wounds. Wounds can be physical (cuts, bruises), mental (shock, insanity) or mystical (a broken heart, magical or spiritual attacks) and are all added (cumulatively) to the same Wounds total. There are not separate Wounds totals for the different types of damage. A physically injured character is more susceptible to a sudden shock than an uninjured character.

When a character is wounded the player tests to see if the character is knocked out or possibly killed (see Section 2.3). Wounds can be healed (see Section 2.4).

## 1.9 Glory

After an adventure the GM awards 0 to 2 Glory points. The GM may also award an extra Glory point if something very significant has taken place (e.g. the player characters prevented the start of what would have been a bloody war). If the players are taking part in 'troupe-style' play, where the players take turns to be the GM, then the GM of the adventure is normally awarded 1 Glory to one of their characters, as long as the majority of players agree with this.

Glory can be spent as follows.

- Reroll a d6 on a task: 1 Glory
- Add an extra d6 to a task score: 2 Glory
- Gain an Attribute for Mastery, Wisdom or Power:  
(current rating/2, round up) Glory
- Gain a Skill: (current number of Skills) Glory
- Raise the rating of Mastery, Wisdom or Power:  
(current rating + number of associated Attributes) Glory
- Gain a Gift: 10 Glory

For example, Jargo the Thief has a Mastery of 5 and the Attribute 'Stealthy' associated with his Mastery. To raise his Mastery from 5 to 6 would cost 6 Glory (current rating of 5 + 1 for the associated Attribute).

Note that you can also lose Glory for cowardly or shameful acts.

If a character does not have any Glory to lose then the GM may make the player convert some of the character's Mastery, Wisdom, Power, Skills or Attributes into Glory. Simply work out how much Glory it would cost to 'undo' the reduction. Note that it costs an additional 1 Glory to reduce Characteristics, Skills and Attributes in this way.

For example, reducing Jargo's Mastery from 5 to 4 would give Jargo 4 Glory and 1 would be spent in the conversion. This is because it would cost Jargo 5 Glory points to go from Mastery 4 to 5 (remember he has the 'Stealthy' Attribute). Alternatively, if Jargo decided to lose the Attribute 'Stealthy' he would gain 2 Glory in exchange (his current Mastery rating of 5 divided by 2 is 3 when rounded up, and then 1 Glory is expended in the conversion down).





## 2. THE SYSTEM

The ERP system is very simple and elegant. Note that if a fraction is generated by division then round-up to a whole number.

### 2.1 Tasks

When attempting a task (such as leaping a fence or striking an opponent) you roll a six-sided die (d6) and add this to a rating (Mastery for physical actions, Wisdom for mental actions, and Power for mystical or social actions) to form a score. Compare the score with an opposing value [either a fixed number determined by the GamesMaster (GM), e.g. 6 is tough, 9 is hard, or an opponent's score if contesting] to get a result.

$$\text{acting score} - \text{opposing value} = \text{result}$$

### 2.2 Results

A result of 0 or lower means failure. A result of 1 means marginal success, higher results yield greater degrees of success. For a lengthy task a character may need to accumulate a number of result points to be successful. These result points may require several contests, with the result points totalled over several attempts.

#### 2.2.1 Example: Picking A Lock

*Jargo the Thief is attempting to pick a rusty lock. The GM tells Jargo's player that she must test his Mastery against an opposing value of 6. Jargo has a Mastery of 5 and so his player rolls a d6, knowing she needs anything but a 1 to succeed (as a score of 6 gives 0 result points). She rolls a 3 on the die and so Jargo has a score of 8, for 2 result points. The lock opens with a click.*

#### 2.2.2 Example: Remember Me?

*Hecuba is in a nightclub awaiting the arrival of a fellow player character, when she notices a man acting strangely at the bar. She is sure that she has seen him before... The GM asks Hecuba's player to attempt a Wisdom task with an opposing value of 7. Hecuba has a Wisdom of 4, but she also has the Attribute 'Alert', which the GM allows her to use. Hecuba's player rolls two dice and gets to pick the higher of the two. She rolls a 3 and a 5. So Hecuba achieves a score of 9, giving 2 result points. The GM passes a note to Hecuba's player. The man at the bar is a bitter foe of the player character she is due to meet in the nightclub, and he has some sort of gun in his jacket. Note that the roll of 3 would have not been enough for Hecuba to succeed, as this would have given her 0 result points.*

#### 2.2.3 Example: Resisting Allure

*A woman's alluring voice calls forth to Jargo from behind a curtain on the far side of the bedroom. It is deep, husky and mesmerizing. The thought that vampires inhabit the castle is almost lost from Jargo's mind as he starts to move towards the velvet drapes and away from the jewelry case he was raiding. The GM asks Jargo's player to attempt a Power task with a difficulty of 9. Jargo only has a Power of 3, and the GM rules that the Attribute 'Charismatic' is not usable on the task. Jargo's player rolls a die, which comes up as a 2 and Jargo scores 5. Jargo's player declares she is spending Jargo's final 2 Glory points to add a d6 to the score. She rolls a 4 and Jargo's score is now 9, which is still not enough to resist. The GM asks if Jargo will spend more Glory, by dropping a Characteristic, Attribute or Skill. His player declares that reluctantly Jargo walks towards the voice, and whatever awaits him behind the curtain...*



### 2.3 Damage

In combat each result point of an attack causes 1 Wound point to the victim. When wounded, a character tests their Mastery, Wisdom or Power (for physical, mental or mystical wounds) against an opposing value of their current Wounds total (Wounds are cumulative). A result of 1 or more means the character can fight on. A result of

0 or lower renders the character unconscious. A result of  $-5$  or lower indicates that the character is possibly dead. Only the GM and the other players can decide if a character dies or not, it is their responsibility to choose what is best for the story.

## 2.4 Healing

Characters normally heal 1 wound (i.e. subtract one from their current wounds total) for every hour of rest, but the GM can rule that wounds may take longer to heal and require either medical or mystical aid.

### 2.4.1 Mystical Aid

One example of mystical aid might be a healing spell with an opposing value of 6. The caster attempts a task of Power against an opposing value of 6, with each result point being a wound healed by the target of the spell. Spells can be demanding on the body and mind, and commonly the caster gains 1 wound for casting a spell (more dangerous spells can cause more than this and it is said that some spells such as summoning demi-Gods can kill the caster outright!). Wounds gained in this way are contested against Power to see if they render the sorcerer unconscious or dead.

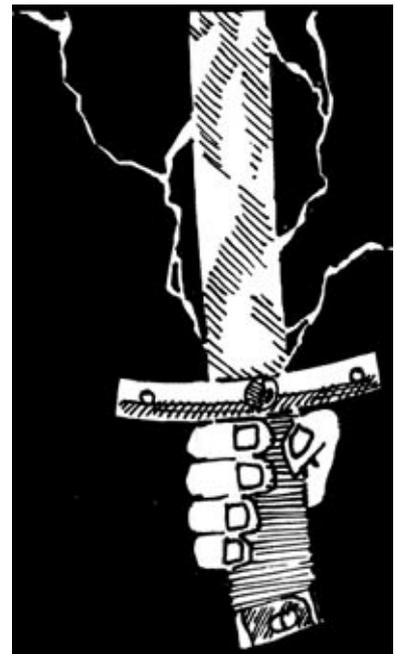
Injured sorcerers often have to rest before casting again, lest their own art finishes them off where a barbarian's sword failed. Of course the quickest way to heal is to cast a spell... and healing spells are notoriously dangerous to cast on fellow sorcerers. Note that sorcerers can usually only cast their Power rating in spells a day.

## 2.5 Weapons

A punch or kick does less damage than other attacks and so subtracts 3 from the wounds caused [a 'damage modifier' (DM) of  $-3$ ], a knife has DM  $-2$ , a cudgel or similar weapon DM  $-1$  (although in all these cases this will not take the wounds caused below 1), while a two-handed sword has DM  $+2$ . A sword has DM 0, unless it is wielded two-handed (DM  $+1$ ).

Type	DM	Example
Ultra Lt	$-3$	Kick, Punch, Sling, Improvised Attack (bottle, etc.)
Very Lt	$-2$	Knife, Sap, Shortbow (long range), .22 Handgun or SMG
Light	$-1$	Club, Machete, Shortbow (short range), Longbow (long range), 9mm Handgun or SMG
Medium	$\pm 0$	Sword, Axe, Crossbow, .45 Handgun or SMG, Longbow (short range), Shotgun (short range)
Heavy	$+1$	Sword (2H), Flail (2H), Spear (2H), .357 or .44 Handgun, Light (.22) Rifle
Very Hv	$+2$	Greatsword (2H), Greataxe (2H), Halberd (2H), Pike (2H), Medium (5.56mm) Rifle
Ultra Hv	$+3$	Chainsaw (2H), Heavy (7.62mm, .303) Rifle, Shotgun (pointblank)

(2H) = two-handed use



## 2.6 Armour

Armour reduces the number of wounds by a set amount. Hardened leather armour reduces the damage by 1, ring mail by 2, chain mail by 3 and plate mail by 4. Armour will not reduce a blow below causing 1 wound. Also note that armour does not protect against non-physical wounds. Rings of Protection typically reduce damage by either 1 or 2 points depending on the strength of the magic, these can reduce a blow to causing no wounds (unlike armour). Protective magic is subtracted from the damage before any armour is taken into account. Rings of Protection also protect against almost all sorts of damage (psychic attacks and so on). Strangely Rings don't protect against the damaging effects of casting spells, and some say that the rings even take pleasure in being bathed in such damage...

Legend also says that rings can gain Glory...



PR	EN	Armour
+1	0	Leather
+2	1	Ringmail, Light Chainmail Armour or Flak Jacket
+3	2	Heavy Chainmail, Scale Armour or Kevlar Vest
+4	3	Plate Armour or Reinforced Kevlar
+1	0	Helmet

PR = Protection, EN = Encumbrance

Heavy armour limits the wearer in his agility, flexibility and movement; the scores of all contests involving agility are reduced by the encumbrance level of the protective clothing worn.

### 3. CHARACTERS

Role-playing is a hobby that has to be played to be understood and enjoyed. To play you will need a character (called a PC). Note that while the GM does not play a PC along with the other players, the GM plays all the incidental characters in the game: so-called Non-Player Characters (NPCs). They are created in much the same way as PCs but are less important to the game. Ideally the game should be about the adventures of the PCs, not the machinations of an NPC.

As a player you have a responsibility to play your character fairly and with vigour. You also have a responsibility to the other players in the group, this is a joint experience.

#### 3.1 Creation

A common way to create characters suitable for adventuring is as follows. Allocate 15 points between the three Characteristics: Mastery, Wisdom and Power. Typically the Characteristics should be rated as 4, 5 and 6. Pick 1 skill. Pick 1 Attribute for one of the three Characteristics. Take 15 Glory and either mark it on the Character Sheet as unspent Glory or use it to buy Skills, Attributes, Characteristics or a Gift. Note that the highest rated Characteristic can be no more than five higher than the lowest rated one.

Of course, you must also have an idea of the character's name, what they look like and what they do. Try to create your character with flair.

#### 3.2 Possessions

Write down all that the character owns. This list is subject to the approval of the GM and your fellow players. Think about what your character has very carefully. Do not make this an exercise in writing down every useful piece of equipment that you can think of. For instance: why does your character have only the clothes he wears, and why are they wet? Or why does your character have the fabled Cutlass of Mandang, and why is it not in the Sultan's Palace in Rumardia?

#### 3.3 Breath of Life

Think about you character for a moment. How does the character see the world they live in? Why is the character where they are? What does the character believe in, and which things in life do they enjoy? And what do they dislike? Try to create a well-rounded character that will be fun and memorable. Also think carefully about how and why they will integrate with the other PCs. Do not create reasons that your character will not be a team player. When you have found you character's 'voice' within the 'choir' of the group then you are ready to play.

#### 3.4 Character Sheet

On page 8 there is a character sheet for ERP that you can use for making a note of your character's details.



## 4. THE GAMESMASTER

The players all have a responsibility to play their characters fairly and with vigour. The GM has a responsibility to do likewise, but the GM is responsible for the whole gaming world and all its inhabitants! A good GM will be fair and allow everyone to have a good time, while creating interesting adventures for the PCs. This is a difficult task, but one that can be very rewarding.

### 4.1 Adventures

The GM creates the basis for the stories. It is the GM that fleshes out the adventure with mysteries, clues, vibrant NPCs and dastardly foes. The GM should ensure that the adventure makes sense, has a beginning, middle, a climax and a definite end. The GM is also in charge of handing out rewards at the end of the adventure (see Glory in Section 1.9). If the players are going off-track it is the GM's job to re-evaluate the story and ensure that a new story unfolds seamlessly.

### 4.2 Balance

The GM is the final judge of what is, and what is not, allowed in the game. This power should be wielded fairly and in cooperation with the players. The players, in turn, must trust their GM to run the game fairly and in the best interests of everyone. If they give you their trust ensure that you keep it. It can be a tricky line to walk; at times you must put the PCs in danger while making sure that you are not seen as unfair. Never make rash decisions or treat the players with disrespect. After all, if you are not fair and balanced no one will play any games you run in the future.

### 4.3 Atmosphere

The mood of the game, while maintained in cooperation between the GM and the players, is set by the GM. The tone of the game is important and the game will be more memorable if the GM establishes and maintains the atmosphere appropriately. As a GM, whether you are fostering a mood of inspiration, fear, high adventure, tension or slow-creeping horror, it is up to you to convey the mood at all times. Music and lighting can be an aid to this if used well and subtly.

### 4.4 Troupes

An alternative style of play is so-called 'Troupe-style' play where the players all take turns in being the GM. This can be very enjoyable as everyone gets a turn at presenting interesting adventures for the others. The golden rule for this sort of game is that the GM must not favour their own PCs. In fact I would recommend that PCs of the GM are not involved in adventures at all. Still, as mentioned in Section 1.9, a fair GM may receive Glory for one of their PCs should the other players think the GM did a good job. This type of play can prevent a series of adventures becoming stale. On the other hand many players prefer to be only a player or a GM, so it is not a style of play that suits everyone.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### 5.1 About The Author

Gregor Hutton was born in 1972 near Glasgow in Scotland. He has been a role-player, game-tinkerer and writer since 1984. He currently lives in Edinburgh and works as a Senior Editor for a publishing company.

### 5.2 Thanks

Thanks to David Bruns for suggesting the addition of Attributes, Skills and Gifts. David continues to make an invaluable contribution to ERP and ERS (the German translation). Cheers David!

### 5.3 Copyright

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<http://gregorhutton.com/>



**MY LEGEND and my specialities**

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**MY POSSESSIONS and their effects**

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