

ELEGANT ROLE-PLAYING

by Gregor Hutton

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

MASTERY – WISDOM – POWER

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1. THE INTRODUCTION

ERP is based on three Characteristics: Mastery, Wisdom and Power. You will need some six-sided dice (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.

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.

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!

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2. CHARACTERS

Characters are described by the three central Characteristics (Mastery, Wisdom and Power), a variable set of Specialities (Attributes, Skills and Gifts) and Glory.

Characteristics

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

Mastery

Mastery measures physical ability and strength. It is used for tasks that have a physical nature, and for resisting bodily injuries. The Aspects of Mastery are: dexterity, skill, talent, strength. These are alternative ways of thinking of Mastery. Associated Attributes include Strong, Agile, Stealthy, Quick, Healthy, Tough, Nimble, Fleet-Footed, Spring-Heeled, Well-Balanced, Sure-Handed, Stout and Graceful.

Wisdom

Wisdom describes mental ability and capacity. It is used for tasks that have a mental nature, and for resisting insanity and shock. The Aspects of Wisdom are: knowledge, memory, reason, education. These are alternative ways of thinking of Wisdom. Associated Attributes include Wise, Intelligent, Educated, Alert, Witty, Reasoned, Logical, Inquiring, Clever, Quick-Thinking, Cunning and Rigorous.

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. The Aspects of Power are: chi, charisma, determination, fate. These are alternative ways of thinking of Power. Associated Attributes include Charismatic, Attractive, Strong-Willed, Empathic, Persuasive, Radiant, Purposeful, Defiant and Divine.

Specialities

While Characteristics are universal to all characters, Specialities tend to vary. They have no ratings: you either have them or you don't!

Attributes

Attributes are abilities that describe a character's capabilities deeper. They are always linked to a certain Characteristic and examples can be found above with the Characteristic in question.

Skills

Skills cover areas of expertise, training and learning. They depend on the gaming world or genre and some examples are: Athletics, Stealth, Art, Music, Science, Interaction, Manipulation, Armed Combat, Firearms, Ballistics, Mechanics, Electronics, Computers, Engineer, Medicine, Natural History, Pilot, Driver, etc.

Gifts

Gifts allow characters to perform special actions and activities or some other sort of advantage. Some example Gifts are: Ambidexterity, Eidetic Memory, Animal Empathy, Cult, Sense of Direction, Wealth, Status, Rank, Allies, Contacts, Patron, Danger Sense, Pain Tolerance, Fame, Followers, etc.

Glory

Glory reflects Karma, Luck, Experience, Fortune and Destiny. It is awarded by the GM for good role-playing and can be used to alter in-game dice rolls and to permanently enhance your character.

Creation

A common way to create characters suitable for adventuring is as follows.

1. Allocate 15 points between the three Characteristics: Mastery, Wisdom and Power. Typically the Characteristics should be rated as 4, 5 and 6. Note that the highest rated Characteristic can be no more than five higher than the lowest rated one.
2. Pick 1 Attribute for one of the three Characteristics. You may have no more Attributes for a Characteristic than that Characteristic's rating divided by 2 (rounded up). For example, Hecuba (right) has a Power of 5 and so can have up to 3 Attributes associated with Power.
3. Pick 1 skill. There is no limit on the number of Skills that a character can possess.
4. Take 15 Glory and use it to buy Skills, Attributes, Characteristics or a Gift according to the guidelines below. You may save a maximum of 5 Glory for later use, but no more (mark it on the Character Sheet as unspent 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

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.

Possessions

Write down what 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?

Breath of Life

Think about your 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 your character's 'voice' within the 'choir' of the group then you are ready to play.



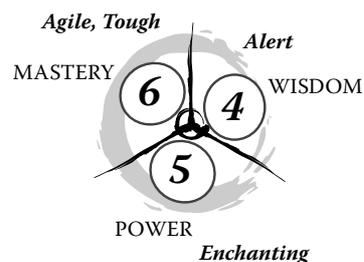
An Example Character (Glory costs of upgrades are noted in brackets).

Hecuba

Mastery: 6, Agile (0), Tough (3)

Wisdom: 4, Alert (2)

Power: 5, Enchanting (3)



Skills: Dance, Seduction (1), Armed Combat (2), Infiltration (3)

Gifts: none

Glory: 1

Possessions: Jumpsuit, stylish plati-que boots, weather-beaten rain-coat, Fabric Armour smock (PR 1; ENC 0), shoulderbag, make-up, nail file, perfume, credstick, StunBaton (DM -1), cheap rented apartment, an artificial cat called Hester.



3. 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.)

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 GM, e.g. 6 is tough, 9 is hard, or an opponent's score if contesting) to get a result. Most tasks (e.g. striking in combat) have a default opposing value of 6.

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

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.

Example: Picking A Lock

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

Using Specialities

Attributes and Skills allow an additional d6 to be rolled if they are relevant to the task. The die with the highest result is taken to calculate the score of the attempt. No more than one Skill and one Attribute may be used for any given task, so no more than three dice are rolled at the same time (with the exception of Glory-bought extra dice, see below). Gifts sometimes allow special actions but grant no modifications to scores.

Example: Remember Me?

Hecuba is in a nightclub awaiting the arrival of a fellow PC, 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 PC she is due to meet in the nightclub, and the man has some sort of gun in his jacket. Note that the roll of 3 would have not been enough for success, as this would have given Hecuba 0 result points.



Luck

Glory, in its aspect as Luck, can be used to manipulate in-game scores and events. An example of a Lucky Break is finding somewhere to hide in a dead-end street.

Benefit gained	Glory Cost
Reroll a d6 on a task	1
Add an extra d6 to a task score	2
Lucky Break	1-3 (GM decides)

Example: Resisting Allure

A woman's alluring voice calls forth to Jargo from behind a curtain on the far side of the master 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 is 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 he is spending Jargo's final 2 Glory points to add a d6 to the score. He rolls a 4 and Jargo's score is now 9, which is still not enough to resist. His player declares that reluctantly Jargo walks towards the voice, and whatever awaits him behind the curtain...

Damage

When completely healthy a character has 0 Wounds. Wounds can be physical (cuts, bruises), mental (shock, insanity) or mystical (a broken heart, 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.

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 damage) against an opposing value of their current Wounds total. 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.

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], other DMs are given below.

Type	DM	Example
Ultra Light	-3	Kick, Punch, Sling, Improvised Attack (bottle, etc.)
Very Light	-2	Knife, Sap, Shortbow, .22 Handgun or SMG
Light	-1	Club, Machete, 9mm or .38 Handgun or SMG
Medium	±0	Sword, Axe, Crossbow, .45 Handgun or SMG, Shotgun
Heavy	+1	Sword (2H), Flail (2H), Spear (2H), .357 or .44 Handgun, Light Rifle (5.56mm, .22)
Very Heavy	+2	Greatsword (2H), Greataxe (2H), Halberd (2H), Pike (2H), Medium Rifle (7.62mm, .303 cal), Shotgun (pointblank)
Ultra Heavy	+3	Chainsaw (2H), Heavy (13mm, .50 cal) Rifle

(2H) = two-handed use. Kicks, punches and improvised attacks require no skill.

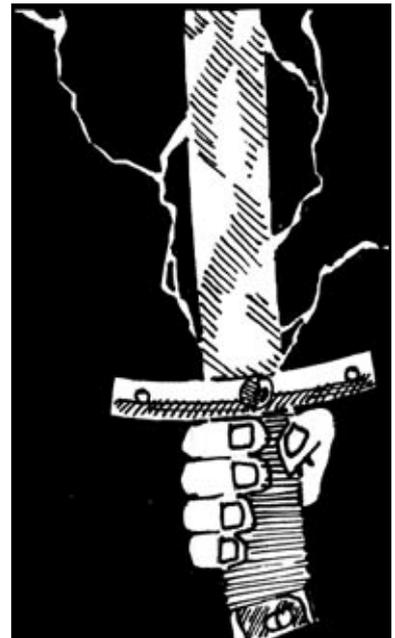
Armour

Armour reduces the number of Wounds by a set amount, see the table below. Armour will not reduce a blow below causing 1 Wound. Armour does not protect against non-physical wounds. (PR = Protection, ENC = Encumbrance.)

PR	ENC	Armour
+1	0	Leather, Composite Fabric armour
+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

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 some other aid (e.g. psychoanalysis for insanity).



Encumbrance and Agility

Heavy armour limits the wearer's agility, flexibility and movement; the scores of all tasks involving agility are reduced by the ENC level of the armour worn.



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, rather than just one PC! 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.

Awarding Glory

After an adventure the GM awards 0 to 2 Glory points to each PC. The GM may also award an extra Glory point if something very significant has taken place (e.g. the PCs prevented 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.

Using Glory

Glory can either be used to manipulate in-game rolls as described in the *System* section or to increase your character's Characteristics and Specialities. For this second option, consult the character creation list in the *Characters* section, it is used unchanged (including the limitations). Note that once you are playing your character you can accumulate more than the 5 Glory you were limited to in character creation.

Bad Karma

You can also lose Glory for cowardly or shameful acts. If there is no more Glory to be lost then the GM may award Bad Karma – negative Glory. A player has to buy off Bad Karma with Glory on a one-to-one basis before they are allowed to employ Glory for its beneficial effects again.

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 their adventures at all. Still, as mentioned above, a fair GM may receive Glory for one of their PCs (their choice) 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.

General Advice

Role-playing is a hobby that has to be played to be understood and enjoyed. Players have a responsibility to each other, this is a joint experience.

Adventures

The GM creates the basis for the stories, filling 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.

Balance

The GM is the final judge of what is, and what is not, allowed in the game. The players should trust their GM to run the game fairly and in the best interests of everyone. It can be a tricky line to walk as at times the GM must put the PCs in danger. Never make rash decisions or treat other players with disrespect. After all, if you are not fair and balanced no one will play any games you run in the future.

Atmosphere

The mood 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.

ELEGANT ROLE-PLAYING

G A M I N G S H E E T

Glory (enhancing your character)

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Gain a Skill	(current number of Skills) Glory
Raise the rating of Mastery, Wisdom or Power	(current rating + number of associated Attributes) Glory
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Glory (affecting the game)

Benefit gained	Glory Cost
Reroll a d6 on a task	1
Add an extra d6 to a task score	2
Lucky Break	1-3 (GM decides)

Weapons

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+1	0	Helmet

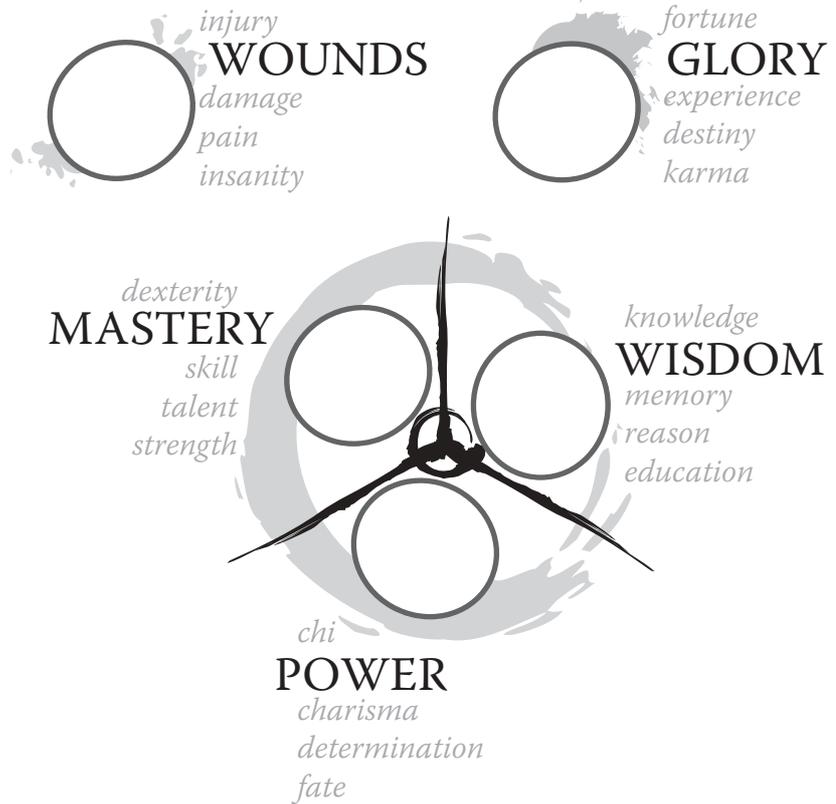
Skills

Armed Combat
Art
Athletics
Ballistics
Computers
Driver
Electronics
Engineer
Firearms
Interaction
Manipulation
Mechanics
Medicine
Music
Natural History
Pilot
Science
Stealth

ELEGANT ROLE-PLAYING

CHARACTER SHEET

NAME



MY LEGEND and my Specialities

MY POSSESSIONS and their effects

acting score – opposing value = result

Your **score** is a **rating plus a d6**. Both **Attributes** and **Skills** allow an extra d6 to be rolled on tasks (up to a maximum of 3 dice), pick the highest die for calculating the score.

Reroll a d6 on a task:	1 Glory
Add an extra d6 to a task score:	2 Glory

Wounds start at 0 and are cumulative. When injured test Mastery, Wisdom or Power against the current number of wounds. A result of 0 or lower renders the character unconscious. A result of -5 or below may kill the character.
