

Eternal Worlds

A
Free Pen-and-paper RPG

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Beta
Version 1.0b

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Part I – Roleplaying

This part is an introduction to roleplaying, and to the design goals of Eternal Worlds. It also contains some more advanced suggestions concerning the topic of roleplaying, which can be useful for new and seasoned gamers alike. After reading it, you should be able to answer the following question, and more:

- What is roleplaying, more or less?
- Why are there so many different roleplaying games?
- What types of play does Eternal Worlds try to facilitate?
- What materials do I need to play this game?
- Which of the advanced suggestions strike me as useful?

Introduction

Eternal Worlds is a game. And not just any kind of game: it's a roleplaying game, commonly abbreviated as 'RPG'. There are many RPGs available, some of them so different from each other that it's hard to see why they're called by the same name. This chapter is a quick introduction to roleplaying. We'll restrict ourselves to the more traditional roleplaying games – a full-scope introduction to RPGs would have to be far longer than this entire document.

In a traditional RPG, a group of people come together to play. One of them is the 'leader': he or she creates the world in which the adventures take place, and the situations that the players will encounter. The name for this leader differs from RPG to RPG; sometimes it's 'DungeonMaster', sometimes it's 'Storyteller' – in Eternal World we'll talk about the GameMaster. (Or GameMistress, but I'll restrict myself to the masculine form.) The other people are the 'players'. They each control one 'character', a person who lives in the world created by the GameMaster. The players decide what their characters do, and the GameMaster tells them what happens.

Example: Kevin is a player, and Frank is his GameMaster. Kevin's character is standing in front of a house. 'I'll walk inside', Kevin announces. 'You open the door, and see a small entrance hall. There is a door to the left and a door to the right', answers Frank.

How does the GameMaster know what Kevin's character sees? Well, he doesn't exactly *know* what Kevin's character sees; he *decides* what the character sees. He's in complete control of the world. Whatever he says about it is true.

The basics of role-playing have already been captured in this very short explanation: characters interacting with a world. But what, you may ask, is the goal of the game? How do you win? The answer may surprise you: there are exceptions, but in most RPGs, you can't win, and you can't lose. Sure, your character can die. But you've not *lost* if your character dies. The game doesn't end there. You can play on with a new character.

Still, an RPG is not entirely goal-less; but what the goals are differs greatly from game to game, from gaming group to gaming group, and even from player to player. Maybe the goal of the game is to lead your characters through dungeons filled with monsters, traps and treasure, trying to make your character more powerful and give him better weapons and such. Maybe the goal of the game is to solve puzzles created by the GameMaster, or to find the best way to get your character out of a difficult situation. The goal of the game might be to simulate a world as realistically as possible. It might be playing your characters as true to their 'character' as possible: accurately basing their decisions on the personality and goals you've given them. Maybe the goal of your game is to create a story of literary worth through play. Maybe it's all about having the characters face difficult ethical dilemmas, and exploring the consequences of their choices. All these, and many more, are possible goals. Often people will have more than one goal, and the goals of all players do not have to be exactly the same – one member of a group might be more interested in creating a story, while another prefers solving 'quests' given by the GameMaster.

The fact that so many goals exist also explains why there are so many different roleplaying games: not every game will allow you to reach a certain goal as easily as every other. A well-known game like TSR's 'Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition' is very good if you want to lead

your character through monster-filled dungeons, with swinging swords and blasting magic, but it's pretty worthless if you want to create a great story. What goals can be achieved easily with Eternal Worlds? We'll look at that in the next chapter; first I want to discuss some other aspects of roleplaying.

In the example given above, where someone enters a house, no rules are used. The player states what he wants to do, and the GameMaster tells him what happens. So, why would you need rules? And what, exactly, does an RPG consist of?

You cannot roleplay without rules. Sure, you can roleplay without explicitly stating any rules, but you'll always be using some – even if they're as simple as 'the GameMaster is always right'. Many people, though there are exceptions, prefer to play with a set of rules that is a little more complicated than that. We might, for instance, wish to use dice to find out whether certain actions made by the characters succeed. And we might want to say in advance what powers the players have over the development of the narrative. Such things, and many more, can be accomplished by the rules of an RPG.

An RPG does not necessarily consist of nothing but rules. Other important components can be a setting, a world or a theme. A setting is the 'kind' of world the game is set in; for instance, 'high fantasy', 'gothic horror', or 'near-future science fiction'. Many games are made with a certain setting in mind. Somewhat more rare, but still common, are games which come with a complete world – a description of the history, places and anything else the makers deem important. Last, but certainly not least, is a game's theme; the kind of situation it wishes to model, or the kind of question it wishes to explore. Games can have themes like 'war', 'religion', etcetera. However, all components beyond the rules are merely optional: many roleplaying games consist of nothing but rules, and leave it up to the players to come up with a setting, a world and a theme.

Eternal Worlds

We've seen what a roleplaying game is in the last section, and I explained that different roleplaying games are meant to facilitate the accomplishment of different goals. What does Eternal Worlds try to facilitate?

If you want to play a 'dungeon crawl' game, with character fighting their way through monsters, accumulating items and experience, Eternal Worlds isn't what you need. If you want to play a game that is as realistic as possible, Eternal Worlds isn't what you need either. This game focuses on a character's personality, on his or her ethics and goals; while the character is trying to accomplish those goals, we wish to get to know him or her and develop the personality. This may sound more esoteric than it is; it is merely what is often called 'playing your character well'. A player's decisions in Eternal Worlds should be primarily based on what *the character* would do.

This is not common to all roleplaying games. In some, players should base their decisions on what the best way to achieve a certain in-game goal is; for instance, characters are assumed to check a chest they wish to open for traps, even if their characters have no reason to believe the chest to be trapped. In other games, players should base their decisions on meta-game goals such as creating a story of literary worth. Not so in Eternal Worlds: the most important (though not the only) basis for decision making is the character itself.

I said 'not the only', because there is a secondary goal, which is story creation. This is a rather vague term, and some explanation is in order. Just playing a character as convincing as you can isn't much fun if there aren't any interesting situations in which your character finds himself. Therefore, you should try and get your character into situations where they have to face difficult dilemma's, preferably linked to the characters personality, goals or morals. Conflicts between goals, moral standards or personality aspects within a character are the seed of a good story, which is why I called it 'story creation'.

To help you accomplish this, Eternal World asks you to identify a set of issues that may come up during play when you are creating your characters. You should try to explore those issues, and create situations where they become important to your character.

Finally, everybody likes an interesting world. Playing in a world filled with intrigue, danger and romance is simply more fun than playing in a more mundane, every-day world. A world where the characters have to overcome interesting obstacles while trying to attain their goals, where they face danger, where they can find victory and defeat, meet intriguing people, and discover wondrous things is the ideal background for the two previously stated goals. Try to keep that in mind, while focusing on exploration of character and story creation.

Does Eternal Worlds have a setting, a world or a theme? No, no and no. However, some settings work better with the goals stated above than others. Don't try to play a 'superheroes' game with Eternal Worlds; it's not going to work well. Most examples are set in a Fantasy world. But basically, choosing a setting, creating a world and deciding on a theme is left to you. Eternal Worlds is a generic system.

What do you need to play?

Very little. If you wish to refer to these rules, you'll need at least one copy of them. Each player needs a Character Sheet, on which he writes down the attributes of his character. You can use the Character Sheet at the end of this document if you wish.

Furthermore, everyone needs pencils and paper to make notes, and you should have a full collection of polyhedral dice.

What kind of dice? Polyhedral dice. You'll need 4-sided, 6-sided, 8-sided, 10-sided, 12-sided and 20-sided dice. These can be bought at any good game store. In the rest of this document, I'll refer to dice using notations like '1d8': this means: one 8-sided die. Thus, '3d4' means: 3 4-sided dice.

Everyone should sit in a circle. Whether you want a table in the middle or not is your own choice.

That's it. You don't need anything else. Few hobbies are as cheap as roleplaying.

More on Roleplaying

To maximize your appreciation of roleplaying, I want to speak about a few of its aspects. There are many different ways to roleplay, and everyone has his special preferences. There is no right and no wrong way, so I don't claim to be able to tell you how you should play. Still, there are some things I might at least mention – you may decide whether you think they're important.

In-Character, Out-of-Character and Out-of-Game are technical terms to describe things said by players. An 'in-character' statement is something that the character could have said himself. 'I walk to the table' is in-character; a played-out conversation is in-character as well. Out-of-character are those things that a player says which are not in-character, but are still about the game. If your character is called 'John', then 'John walks to the table' is out-of-character. 'I succeed at this check with a success rate of 5' is out-of-character too. Statements that aren't about the game at all are called 'out-of-game'.

Personally, I like to have as little out-of-game chatter as possible, and I prefer actions to be announced with in-character statements instead of out-of-character statements. This is a very personal preference, but it is a good idea to talk with the other players about it and decide whether you think lots of out-of-game talking is all right or not.

Descriptions are very important in a roleplaying game. Vividly describing a scene, an object or a place makes it memorable. 'You're in a small room' isn't very dramatic – who is going to remember that room later? Try to add some flavour to your descriptions. Describe what people hear and see and smell. Not everything you say has to be a piece of art, but you can do better than 'a man approaches you'. This is very important for the GameMaster, but the players shouldn't forget it either.

Inner Monologue is a much-overlooked tool for the roleplayer. It is often used in books, where people's thoughts are written down all the time, and even movies sometimes use it (often through a voice-over). If you want people to know what your character really thinks, ensure that everyone knows you're going to speak some inner monologue, and say out loud what your character silently thinks. Obviously, the other characters do not hear this; but the other *players* and the GM do, and this might help them to create interesting situations for your character. It also allows them to understand the motives of your character better.

Stance is a useful division of the ways in which a player can reach a decision about what his character does. There are four stances: actor stance, author stance, pawn stance and director stance. In actor stance, you base your decisions exclusively upon the things the character knows and perceives. In author stance, you base your character's decision on your own goals, using your own knowledge, and then retroactively decide why your character would make that decision. Pawn stance is much like author stance, yet without the last step. In director stance, finally, the player determines not only the actions of the character, but also things that the character does not have any influence on (such as the actions of other characters, or features of the world). You shouldn't use pawn stance in *Eternal Worlds* – the game is all about the motivations and problems of the characters, so why would you have your character do things he or she has no good reason for? The other three stances, however, are all very useful. Actor stance allows you to really 'get into' your character and author stance allows you to fine-tune your character's action to the needs of the story and the other characters.

Finally, *Eternal Worlds* will force you to use director stance now and then: sometimes you'll be the one who has to describe a certain scene. You'll have to describe not only the actions of your own characters, but also those of other characters, and you'll need to invent facts about the world. There is, however, no reason you can't use director stance when the rules don't require it. However, you should decide with the entire group how far the narrative powers of players go. If you're in a bar, no one is going to complain when you say 'I sit down at one of the tables', even if the GameMaster hasn't told you that there are tables. This is a legitimate use of directorial powers. But introducing new non-player characters, for instance, is something else entirely. Some groups may love it, some may hate it. Make sure everyone knows how far he can go.

Theme, or *Premise*, is what gives a story depth. '1984' is not just about a single man and his fight against the system, it's about personal freedom and totalitarian government. It explores all kinds of questions, such as 'can an individual change the way a collective operates?' Exploring questions like these is what makes the narrative interesting beyond exploring your own character and the world. *Eternal World* asks you to identify 'issues' during character creation that fit your setting and your character's goals. These issues should be used as the themes driving the narrative; make sure your character struggles with the questions raised by them. This technique can be used playing other RPGs too, obviously.

Fortune-at-the-end is the best-known way of determining what happens. The player states in a detailed way what he wishes to do, dice are rolled, and it becomes clear if he succeeds. For instance, the player might say 'I want to attack the bandit with my sword', and if he succeeds his roll, he hits. There are other ways of doing things, and important in the context of *Eternal Worlds* is *fortune-in-the-middle*. Here, the player states what he wants to do in a general way; dice are rolled, and depending on their outcome, it is decided what happens in detail. For instance, the player might say 'I want to attack the bandit', he rolls successfully, and states 'I jump on the table, parry his attack with my own sword and kick him squarely in the face'. Thus, we do not determine whether the character succeeds in jumping on the table, parrying and kicking, we simply determine whether he succeeds in attacking the bandit, then leave it to the player or the GameMaster to think up what happened exactly. By making the initial statement more or less vague, you can choose the position on the scale between *fortune-at-the-end* and *fortune-in-the-middle* that you prefer.

Realism is not an end in itself. Or rather, it can be an end in itself, but it doesn't have to be. Suppose your character is wearing a heavy chain shirt, and gets into a bar fight. There are two distinctly different ways of handling this. The first way is to say: the armour will protect me in battle; therefore, people are less likely to damage me. This should be incorporated into the dice rolls or something. The armour is used as a modifier for the conflict resolution – the outcome of the situation may depend on it being there. The second way is to say: the armour is a good ingredient for the scene's description, but we're not going to bother and actually use it as a modifier in the conflict resolution. We'll just check who is successful, and when we tell what happens, we'll give the armour a role in the story. Here, the armour is a story element, not a system element. *Eternal Worlds* tries to maintain a sort of balance between these two ways: abilities are setting elements as well as story elements, whereas items are story elements only. Don't be afraid to use the second method whenever it comes in handy. It may be less realistic, but it's quicker and, well, realism isn't everything.

Part II – Core Mechanics

This part will explain all the necessary rules to play Eternal Worlds. After reading it, you should be able to answer the following question:

- How does one create a character?
- What are ‘issues’?
- What are ‘attributes’, and how do I use them during character creation?
- What is a ‘check’, and what do checks have to do with attributes?
- Who decides what happens once a check has been made?
- When are checks made anyway?
- How does a character gain more experience?

Character Creation

Every player plays one character. This character must be created using the rules given below, but that is not where you should start. First of all, you should talk with your game master and your fellow players. The very first question you should find an answer to – together – is this: what kind of game are you going to play? Will it be a traditional ‘dungeon crawl’ campaign, where characters fight monsters and accumulate treasures? Will it be a game of diplomacy and intrigue? A game of puzzle solving? The possibilities are only limited by your imagination, but you should ensure that everyone knows what kind of game will be played. If one player expects lots of combat, another expects cloak and dagger stuff, and the third thinks you’ll be going to play a dramatic story-oriented game, at least two of you will be disappointed. Once it’s clear what kind of game you’re going to play, decide on the setting. There’s a huge difference between a high-magic world filled with dwarves, elves and dragons and a modern-day slightly occult setting – even though both of them feature magic. Once you’ve got a setting, talk about the world. What kinds of people live in it? What kinds of cultures exist? Where in the world do you want to start playing? Every player should try to come up with a character that firmly fits into this world. But more than that, all characters should form a group with a common goal in one way or another. Please don’t underestimate the importance of this concept. All too often, everyone creates a character, and leaves it to the GameMaster to think of a reason why all those characters are in a single ‘party’, trying to achieve a common goal. But in Eternal Worlds, a character is not a pawn to be placed in a pre-made story: the story follows from the emotional nature, the aims and the passions of the characters. A group that is only loosely connected will fall apart very soon.

Example: Sander, Axel, Michiel and Victor decide to play an Eternal Worlds campaign together. Axel will be the GameMaster, and he has already thought up a setting and a world, which is a high-fantasy world inhabited by humans, elves, dwarves and the mysterious faeries. They’ll play a ‘realistic’ game, where the GameMaster simulates a game world and creates interesting situations, which the characters must use to accomplish their goal through intrigue, thievery, combat, or whatever other means they choose. The players decide on a common goal for their characters: they are members of an illegal organization committed to bring down the aristocracy and establish democracy in a more or less peaceful way.

We now have a setting, a world, and even a goal for the characters. This is the context in which the creation of the characters should take place. Think of a character that fits the situation. Why does he or she have the goal you’ve agreed upon? How does he or she want to accomplish it? What is he or she good at? What are his or hers other goals? What kind of personality does the character have? You must be able to answer all of these questions. Try to ensure that all characters are really different from each other – not just in abilities, but in personality as well.

Example: To have some diversity in the group, they choose very different character concepts. Victor will play an idealistic young noble girl who firmly believes that the oppression of the common people by her own class is an evil that should be fought. She is naïve and sweet, and under the impression that the aristocrats will see the error of their ways once a democracy is established. Her skills lie in the diplomatic area. Sander will play a rash young commoner who has been filled with hatred against everything aristocratic ever since his brother was sentenced to death for kissing a noble girl. He is strong, and willing to be violent if it will help the cause. Michiel, finally, will play an older priest whose main concern are the living

conditions of the poor, and who hopes the establishment of a democratic government will bring about a better division of goods.

In a few sentences, we have not only described each character, but we've also given them all a powerful reason for joining the resistance, and we've created lots of potential conflicts. Now it's up to the GameMaster and the players to recognize the issues that may become the driving force behind the story. These should be general issues – let's look at the example once again.

Example: Axel, Victor, Sander and Michiel identify a number of issues that might become themes of the campaign. "Can a revolution be carried out in a non-violent way? Will people be able to set the common good above their individual aims? Is a democracy always better than an aristocracy? How far can you justify 'evil' actions in the name of a far-away 'good'?" These are examples, more issues could be thought of.

You don't have to write these issues down, but be sure to talk about them. This way, everyone will see the true narrative potential behind the setting, the goal and the characters, and everyone can work together to incorporate the issues into the game.

The most important part of character creation has now been done, and all that remains is writing down your character in game-terms. That's what the rest of this chapter will be devoted to.

Write down the following facts about your character: name, age, length, weight, race (human, elf, dwarf, whatever), skin colour, hair colour and eye colour. These things are important, but we won't be using them in the game mechanics. What we will be using however are your character's *attributes*. Attributes are very diverse. Basic facts about your character, such as his strength or his intelligence, are attributes. Acquired skills, such as writing, sword-fighting and swimming are attributes too. Magical abilities are attributes. Even something like 'light sleeper' is an attribute.

Your character has a number of 'stars' in every attribute, which show how good he is in that particular thing. The number of stars ranges from 0 to 5: the more the better. You can't have less than 0 or more than 5 stars in any attribute. So, when creating a character, we must know two things: what attributes exist, and how do you know how many stars your character has in them? We'll start by answering the first question.

There are two kinds of attributes: necessary attributes, and optional attributes. Everyone has all of the necessary attributes, but the optional attributes are, well, optional. There are only 10 necessary attributes: Strength, Health, Dexterity, Balance, Perception, Beauty, Charisma, Wisdom, Willpower and Intelligence. These attributes are so basic that it must be clear how good everyone is in each of them. Having two stars in a necessary attribute is the average for a human being. (In this respect, necessary attributes differ from optional ones, where normal people have 0 stars.) A description of each necessary attribute is given below.

Strength shows how physically strong your character is. It is needed when performing such feats as smashing doors, lifting stones and bending iron bars.

Health shows how physically healthy your character is. It affects the rate at which he heals from his wounds, and how susceptible he is to diseases of all kinds. Furthermore, it reflects the character's fitness: a great health will allow him to run longer, for instance.

Dexterity shows how fast and handy your character is. A character with high dexterity is better at picking pockets, sewing, and other things that require deft movements.

Balance shows how good your character can move his body as a whole; it is needed for tumbling and jumping. It is also of prime importance for dancing and other skills that require a perfect coordination of the body.

Perception reflects the attentiveness and perceptivity of the character; that is, the ability to notice his surroundings. Does he see the torn note sticking out of the book? Does he hear the difference in the sound of his footsteps as he crosses a secret tunnel? Does he notice the fleeting look of distaste on the face of his conversation partner as a certain topic is mentioned? The perception score tells you.

Beauty shows how physically attractive a character is. This in turn changes the behaviour of other people towards him. A great beauty score will result in a generally positive reaction from strangers, whereas a very low beauty score might make the character shunned and despised... without him ever having said a word.

Charisma shows how ‘mentally attractive’ a character is. This changes the opinion that people have of you *after* you have spoken to them. A great charisma will allow the character to get people to help him, to effectively lead a group of adventurers and to be a good diplomat.

Wisdom shows how wise your character is. This includes common sense and insight into human nature. A very wise character will be able to understand people much better than a foolish one; furthermore, his choices will be based on careful thought about the possible consequences of his acts.

Willpower shows the mental strength and stubbornness of the character. It will allow him to keep to a task despite setbacks and shows his resistance against attempts to change his mind, whether by charisma or magic.

Intelligence is a measure of the character’s intellect. It reflects the ability to reason, to be creative, to solve puzzles and the like. A high intelligence is needed to talk about philosophy and science and to put a number of facts together and draw conclusions from them.

The other kinds of attributes are optional attributes. These may be acquired skills, but don’t have to be. There are indefinitely many of these optional attributes. You choose which ones you want your character to have. Some examples would be: ‘good swimmer’, ‘good diplomat’, ‘seducer’ and ‘university education’. Be creative: things like ‘quick to anger’, ‘born liar’, ‘loves horses’ or ‘makes friends easily’ are perfectly good attributes. The only restriction is that your GameMaster must approve.

A few kinds of attributes will receive further discussion later in the book: attributes that have to do with combat, and attributes that have to do with magic. Please look up the relevant chapters.

Once you've chosen the attributes your character will have, you can go on to the distribution of stars. The GameMaster will tell you how many stars you can spend amongst your abilities. Every player should get the same amount. The number of stars should not be less than 25, and should certainly not exceed 50. You can distribute these stars whatever way you want between your attributes, as long as you insure no attribute receives more than 5 stars.

That was it. You're almost ready. You and your GameMaster should decide what your character has in his inventory: write it down, and you're ready to go. Please refer to the chapter on Inventory for more information.

Checking Attributes

So, every character has attributes, with stars rating them. How do we use them? In relevant situations, we ‘check’ them. This means that we will roll a die, and use the result and the attribute’s score to determine whether your character is successful at doing something. The difference between necessary and optional attributes is very important in this process.

There are two kinds of checks: normal checks, and opposed checks. You make a normal check when you’re trying to accomplish something without opposition by another person, and you make an opposed check when you’re actively working against somebody. For example: breaking down a door or understanding a philosophical text would require normal checks, but fighting someone or bartering with a shopkeeper would require an opposed check.

Whenever a check needs to be made, the GameMaster will announce the relevant necessary attribute, or the relevant necessary attributes if he thinks more than one is relevant. (The GameMaster will also announce the difficulty of the check if it’s a normal check instead of an opposed one: we’ll come to this later.) Every player who must make the check chooses which necessary attribute he will use, if the GM has announced more than one to be relevant.

Example: A character wants to smash a door. The GameMaster announces that Strength is the relevant ability, so the player has no choice. A little while later, the character wants to find a specific book in a huge library. The GameMaster announces that both Intelligence and Perception are relevant, so the player can choose which of those he wants to use.

Now, it is up to the players to declare if they want to use any of their optional attributes. Only attributes which could have some relevance in the situation can be chosen – using ‘good swimmer’ when trying to haggle is simply not going to work. A maximum of two optional attributes can be chosen, though none or one should be more common. The GameMaster decides whether they are indeed relevant – if necessary, the player can try to explain how he wishes to use the attribute.

Example: A character wants to find a specific book in a huge library. He has ‘University education’ as attribute, which the player decides to use. This is a relevant attribute, since one can safely assume that one gets some experience with libraries in University.

If a certain attribute seems to be especially tailored for the task at hand, the GameMaster can ‘bless’ it. It will count double. Blessing attributes should be quite rare, and should only be done with rather specific attributes.

Example: A character wants to find a specific book in a huge library. However, he has the optional attribute ‘worked in a library’. This is so relevant that the GameMaster decides to bless it. An attribute ‘good at finding things’ wouldn’t have been specific enough to warrant blessing it.

What happens now? The player adds the number of stars from his necessary attribute to the number of stars for his used optional attributes (if any). This is his ‘target number’. At this point, it becomes important whether the check is a normal or an opposed check. We’ll discuss the normal check first.

A normal check is check against a situation rather than an active opponent. The GameMaster should decide the difficulty of the situation. Depending on the difficulty, he will tell the player to roll a number of dice. The table below shows how difficulty relates to dice:

Difficulty	Dice
Extremely Easy	1d2
Very Easy	1d3
Easy	1d4
Normal	1d6
Harder	1d8
Hard	1d10
Very Hard	1d12
Extremely Hard	1d20
Almost Impossible	1d100

Example: A character wants to smash a door. If the door is old and weak, the GameMaster might set the difficulty at 1d3. If it is a heavy oak door, the difficulty might be 1d8. If it is a heavy oak door reinforced with metal straps, the difficulty might well be 1d12 or even 1d20.

The GameMaster is not limited to this table. If he wants the player to roll 2d6 or 4d4, that's fine.

The player throws the die or dice assigned to the task. If he rolls equal to his target number, or lower, he succeeds. If he rolls higher than his target number, he fails. The lower he rolls below his target number, the greater his success; the higher he rolls above it, the greater his failure. The number of points one rolls below one's target number is one's 'rate of success'. The number of points one rolls above one's target number is one's 'rate of failure'.

Example: John's target number for smashing the door is 6. He has to roll with a d10, and rolls 3. This means he has a rate of success of 3. If he'd rolled 8, the rate of failure would have been 2. The lower he rolled, the easier it turned out to be to smash the door; the higher he rolled, the worse he failed. With a 10, he might well have hurt himself in the process.

Always calculate the rate of success or rate of failure – we're going to need it in the chapter on narrative power.

Next, opposed checks. This could be your character against a non-player character or your character against another player's character – it doesn't matter which. You calculate your own target number; if the other character is a non-player character, the GM calculates his, if it's a player character, the player does. Then, both of you roll 1d10, and add it to your target number. Whoever has the highest total wins; the rate of success is equal to the higher score minus the lower score. If both totals are equal, it's a tie.

Example: Joe and Michael check out who can run the fastest. The GameMaster says that the relevant necessary attribute is Health. Joe has 2 Health, Michael has 4 Health. On top of that, Michael has one star in the optional attribute 'running', and Joe has none. So Michael's target number is 5, and Joe's target number is 2. Joe rolls a 7, Michael rolls a 2. Seems like a tough day for Michael: his total is 7, while Joe's is 9. Joe's success rate is 2, a comfortable victory.

That's basically it for the mechanics behind checks. But, how do you know what happens *exactly*? We'll take a look at narrative power in the next chapter.

Narrative Power

So, you succeeded, or you failed, a check. But what, exactly, happens? It's not very dramatic to say 'you succeed in finding the book in the library'. That could be told in more vivid way, like 'For minutes, you wander aimlessly through the huge corridors lined with books. Sometimes you stop to look at the title of one of the leather bound volumes, but you don't seem to be anywhere near the section on magic. After almost a quarter of an hour, you notice a small door towards a dark room. You hesitate a moment, then go in. The moment you enter the room, it is suddenly filled with a diffuse red glow. Yes! Arcane tomes line the walls, and it takes you only a little while to locate "Secret of the Necromancers".'

But who thinks up these little monologues? Well, we use the rate of success and rate of failure from the last chapter for that. If the check was a normal check, or an opposed check to a character played by the GameMaster, the player thinks up and tells the story if his rate of success or failure is *odd*, and the GameMaster does it if the rate of success or failure is *even* (or zero). Thus, if you have a rate of success of 2, you may tell the story; if it's 3, the GM will tell it.

Opposed checks made by players against each other work a little differently: if the success roll is *even*, the winning player tells the story. If it's uneven, the losing player does. In case of a tie, the GameMaster tells what happens.

Yes, that's right: very often, you'll have to tell about your own failures. Don't hesitate to give your character problems: remember, *Eternal Worlds* is *not* about 'winning'.

You can't just tell anything you wish. If the character(s) used any optional attributes, you *must* use them somehow in your story. If you 'win' a fight by using your 'running' attribute, you should tell how your character succeeds in running away; if you do exactly the same thing using your 'sword-fighting' attribute, your can tell a more violent story.

Don't forget to use the success or failure rate in your story. If it's high, the success or failure should be bigger. In our library example, a success rate of 1 might mean that you spend hours looking for it, while a success rate of 5 means you found it almost instantly.

Be creative: you can add new features to the story as you make up your monologue. Don't ask your GameMaster if there is a small room which contains all the books about magic, just tell that there is such a room. If you're interfering with something the GameMaster has already thought up, he'll stop you and tell you what you should say. Unless he does, feel free to say whatever you wish. Well... not *quite* free. There are a few limitations to your narrative power. Unless the GameMaster says you can, you can't kill anyone in your narrative. And don't be too nasty to your fellow players: it's all about fun, not irritating each other. Finally, the GameMaster can *always* veto anything you say.

There is one exception to the rules given above. The GameMaster can *claim* a certain narrative. If he does, he'll tell the story, no matter what the dice say. This should be done rarely, and only in situations where a plot depends on it.

A monologue is not the best way of describing something in every instance. Sometimes, you'll need a conversation. Maybe you're trying to make a guard tell you something he

shouldn't... you roll a check and succeed. In such a case, it's best to simply play the dialogue, working towards the desired end. (With the GameMaster playing all non-player character, obviously.) You may also want to experiment with telling other scenes together with all the people involved instead of alone.

Now we know how to make a check, and what to do once it's been made. But when do you make a check? Let's go on to the next chapter.

Gameplay and Mechanics

Most of the time you won't be making any checks. It's quite possible to play for an hour without ever making a check. When *do* you make checks? First of all, it's very important to understand that there are no strict rules for this. If the players and the GameMaster don't want to use checks in a certain situation: don't use them. For instance, some people may prefer to seduce someone through talking alone, while others might want to roll a check based on Charisma or Beauty. It is therefore largely dependent upon your own preferences when a check will be made.

Any time a player wants to make a check, he can say so. The GameMaster must allow him to make a check, but can make it as easy or hard as he or she wants.

Example: Anne is trying to seduce a guard so her companions will be able to sneak into the house he's guarding. She wants to make a check for this seduction. The GameMaster tells her the relevant necessary attribute is Beauty, and the difficulty is 1d8. Anne now has to make the check.

Any time a player wants another player or a non-player character to make a check, he can suggest this to the GameMaster. The GameMaster does not have to listen to this suggestion.

Whenever two players are actively opposing each other, either of them can ask for an opposed roll. The GameMaster must allow this.

At any time he or she wishes, the GameMaster can tell one or more players to make a check. In some situations (such as most Perception-checks) the GameMaster may choose not to tell what the check is for. In those cases, the GM should decide if the players can use any optional attributes, and the GM is always the one who tells the story.

Experience

As characters live their lives, and probably have their adventures, they'll gain experience. In Eternal Worlds, this means that every now and then, you'll get some new stars to spend on your attributes. How often this happens is up to the GameMaster. If you play long session, once after each session or each two sessions would be pretty normal. If you play shorter session, once after each two, three of four sessions might be good. Anyway, it's up to the GameMaster.

How many stars do you get? That depends. You can get up to three stars.

- You gain one star if you (the player) were at (most of) the session(s) played. That's right, you get one star just for having been there.
- You gain one star if you can tell what your character has been trying to accomplish during the last session(s), and how he's been doing that. If your character hasn't been trying to get his own goals nearer, that's all right; you just won't get this second star. The GameMaster should be somewhat critical here: the stated goals should be things that are really important to the character. 'I tried to get respect from the people in this town by killing the monster that was terrorizing them' would probably be better than 'I tried to kill the monster'.
- You gain one star if you can recall at least one ethical dilemma that your character has faced. Also tell which choice your character made, and why. If your character hasn't faced any ethical dilemmas, you don't get a star. (Once again: this is not meant as some kind of punishment. I'm not saying you're doing anything wrong if your character did not have an ethical dilemma. You just won't get this star – no big deal.)

The GameMaster will tell you how many stars you receive.

You can spend these on anything you want: necessary attributes, optional attributes you already have, and new optional attributes. However, never increase a necessary attribute without a very good reason to do so. Those things don't change easily. The GameMaster can veto anything you want to do, as always.

It's also possible to *decrease* the number of stars in your attributes. You should have a good reason for this. (If your character lost a hand, that would be a good reason to decrease his Dexterity, for example.) Any stars thus lost can be spent on other attributes.

Abilities you gain *could* be based on things you've done during the game sessions. If you've spent lots of time talking to merchants, you may wish to choose the optional attribute 'haggling'. But they don't have to be. If you create an optional attribute that isn't based on what you did during play, we'll assume you had it all along – you just didn't use it until now.

Part III – Optional Rules

This part contains rules you can use if you like – but they're not necessary for playing the game. Actually, they're not rules so much as suggestions about applying the core rules to the following four areas:

- Combat
- Magic
- Death
- Inventory

Combat

Sometimes, things get out of hand, and you have to resort to violence. Why does combat warrant special attention? For two reasons: historical precedence, and because it's very dangerous. Roleplaying games originally evolved from wargames. These games obviously were about war, and thus, combat. The early roleplaying games, too, were very combat heavy. Heroes wielding big swords, fighting monsters in dark dungeons, that kind of stuff. As a result, most of the rules were about combat. This has not changed all that much over the years – today's best-selling roleplaying game is once again very much combat-based. It has very detailed rules about using offensive and defensive manoeuvres, it has hit points, lists of weapons, lists of armour, etcetera.

Eternal World doesn't. This game is not about combat. Sure, there may be fighting now and then, but we're not going to invent lots of rules for it. We handle it the same as any other conflict situations: we use attributes and check them. (In combat, we'll mostly be using opposed checks.) Still, it can't hurt to give some examples how this could be done, especially since combat has the potential to be deadly and thus has a high potential of disrupting a story.

First of all, you should decide how detailed you want to make your combat attributes. If you're going to play an almost combat-less game, you could decide to use a single optional attribute called 'fighting'. Depending on what a player wants to do, Strength, Balance or Dexterity could be the relevant necessary attribute, and 'fighting' is the relevant optional attribute. Simple, no?

But, maybe you want a more detailed approach. Characters could choose optional attributes like these: sword fighting, using bows, dodging, wrestling, etcetera. This allows for more diversity amongst fighters; some are good with a sword, others have experience in barehanded bar fights.

So, suppose Jack (wielding an axe) and Phil (unarmed) are locked in mortal combat. Jack has 3 stars in the optional attribute 'axe-fighting'; Phil has 2 stars in 'dodging'. Jack's relevant necessary attribute is Strength; Phil's is Balance. They make an opposed check. If Jack wins, Phil is probably going to meet the axe from up close. If Phil wins, he evades the axe, and if he wins with a high success rate, he might even be able to punch Jack in the stomach or something.

But that's not realistic! There are lots of subtleties you're forgetting here! Yes. So? Eternal Worlds wasn't meant to be all that realistic. Let your motto be: combat should be fast, furious and exciting. Not realistic.

All right, but how much damage do I do if I succeed? Whatever seems appropriate. You're not going to sever any limbs with a success rate of 1, and a success rate of 7 will certainly be more than a scratch, but beyond that I'm not going to give any definite rules. Be creative. And remember, only the GameMaster can allow you to describe killing anyone.

Magic

The problem with magic is, of course, that it doesn't exist in the real world. At the very least, not in the way it's most often used in RPGs. Magical abilities are represented as optional attributes, but it's important to decide up front what magic is capable of in your world (if it exists at all), how it works, and which attributes are used to describe it. Let's look at some examples, first of ways in which magic can work.

Ritualistic Magic is magic that works through long and complex rituals. Spell components, strange runes, sacrifices, anything you wish to make a ritual more interesting might be needed to create the desired effect. This kind of magic is slow and difficult. It becomes *Sympathetic Magic* when you need spell components that have a likeness to the desired effect. If you wish to hurt someone, you'd better have a doll that looks just like him or her to stick pins in.

Inborn Magic is magic that is a natural ability for a creature. It doesn't require thought; it's just something the creature thinks of as very natural. So, a dragon flies using magic, but this isn't conscious. Or someone might be able to manipulate fire, just by wishing the fire to change.

Alchemic Magic is magic that works by creating things. The alchemic mage might be able to create a potion that heals someone's wounds, or a sword that fills the wielder with rage at the sight of a goblin. The alchemic mage requires a place to create his magical items, but this could as easily be a witch's cauldron as a wizard's high-tech laboratory.

Spell-based Magic is magic that works with spells – pre-created magical formulas that can be used time and again. Thus a wizard learns a 'fireball' spell, and now he's able to create huge balls of fire. He might have to memorize spells first though, or alternatively the casting may fatigue him.

Intuitive Magic allows its users to change the world through acts of their will alone. There are no pre-determined spells, but the magical effects that can be created aren't inborn either. This type of magic is the one most seen in fantasy literature (think of Robert Jordan, Terry Goodkind, George R. R. Martin, etcetera). Some users may have different strengths than others.

Divine Magic is magic done by divine powers (gods or other supernatural beings). Normal humans (or whatever races you have in your world) can use it by asking the divine power to assist them in an appropriate manner. This might involve complicated rituals, or you might only need to ask nicely.

There are of course other types of magic, but these are some useful examples. Decide which ones you want to use in your world. (You need not limit yourself to one type, of course.) Now, make very sure everyone knows how powerful magic is, and how many people can use it. It is very important to do this. If one player thinks magic can destroy entire cities, and another thinks its use is limited to very small and subtle tasks, at least one of them will be disappointed.

Depending on the power of magic, you may wish to split it into more optional attributes. If you have a very powerless kind of ritualistic magic, just create an optional attribute 'ritualistic

magic'. But if it becomes more powerful, you may want to limit its use (so it won't be the solution to all problems) by creating attributes that only allow someone to achieve certain effects; 'ritualistic fire magic' for things to do with fire, 'ritualistic demon summoning' for summoning demons, etcetera. You might even limit one attribute to one spell or inborn ability. (This only works with inborn and spell-based magic.)

Below is a division of magic, which you may or may not want to use. Magic – of any kind – can be split into 8 optional attributes corresponding to the following 8 'schools of magic':

Conveyance is the school that deals with moving objects or beings from one place to another.

Divination is the school that deals with acquiring information.

Enchantment is the school that deals with changing the properties of existing objects.

Illusion is the school that contains spells that deceive beings into experiencing things that do not exist.

Invocation is the school that deals with *creating* objects.

Mental is the school that deals with changing the minds of sentient beings. Its spells can influence reactions, emotions, desires, etcetera.

Meta-magic is the school that changes other magical effects.

Obliteration is the school that deals with destroying objects.

Feel free to use any kind of attributes you like, though. Divine magic, for instance, might simply use attributes like 'follower of Athena', 'follower of Hecate', etcetera.

Death

When does a character die? The core rules only tell us that the GameMaster is the only one who can say that someone dies, but when should he say this? Basically: whenever he feels it is more fun to have the character die than to have him live. If your character is fighting some monster and rolls a stunning success rate of 6, it's pretty cool if you kill it. If the player rolls a just as stunning failure rate of 6, it's probably not much fun to have the monster kill the player. Player characters are, after all, special.

The following rules of thumb can be used: non-player characters die when the player rolls a very big success, or a streak of smaller successes. This is not a rule to be enforced at all times. If the players merely wish to capture someone instead of killing him, a very big failure might result in accidentally killing the guy. The basic idea is that success rewards the player in some way or another.

Player characters don't die that easily. If they roll failures, just make it hard for them. Give them a few chances to gain the upper hand. If they fail really big a few times, something bad happens. But this might as well be capture, or being knocked unconscious, or losing a hand, as death. In my opinion, players should only die if a) it's extremely dramatic and the story just begs for it, b) the fight going on is a very important one, the climax of many sessions, or c) the player has gotten into this situation through amazing stupidity. I'm *not* talking about character stupidity here – don't punish a player for roleplaying a stupid character well.

Inventory

It's a good idea to write down what your character owns. If you don't you're simply going to forget about that beautiful golden ring showing your allegiance to the Order of the Shooting Stars. But roleplaying should be fun, and unless you have a very different conception of fun than I do, keeping track of the amount of food your character has in his backpack is simply not fun. It's boring.

So, don't write everything down. Don't write down your bedroll, or your food, or anything else that isn't important. What are the criteria for importance? There can be many, so it's a matter of your own judgment. But at any rate, you should write down objects to which your character is emotionally attached, as well as objects which are very rare, very costly, or which play an important role in a storyline.

But if you don't write down whether you have a torch or not, how do you know whether you have a torch when you enter a dark place? Just make it up. Would it be believable and fun for your character to have a torch? Then he has one. It's as simple as that.

Of course, if you *do* wish to keep track of everything, be my guest.

Part IV – Miscellaneous Chapters

This part contains chapters that are only loosely connected. You'll find:

- My explanation of my design philosophy
- A list of people who inspired or otherwise helped with this game
- A legal notice telling you what you can and cannot do with this document
- A character sheet which you can print and use for your own characters

Design Philosophy

I already said what the aim of Eternal World was in the first part of this document, but I'll explain it once again. This will be a bit more technical, so don't worry if you don't understand everything: it doesn't matter.

Though any gamer can enjoy this game, I created it with a specific audience in mind: people new to roleplaying, and the 'D&D'-generation. I wanted to make a game that explains the basics of roleplaying to people, and which uses some techniques not seen in games like D&D. Eternal Worlds will hopefully prove an easy introduction to things like fortune-in-the-middle, shared narrative power, and using a narrativistic Premise. The first part of the document, about roleplaying in general, is not an afterthought – it's a central part of the game design.

The core mechanics are not revolutionary. Nothing in it is very new, but I'm not sure if this combination of elements has ever been used before. However, it's very much based on the design philosophy. Characters are created in a rather traditional way, and there is some kind of 'level up'. Yet the system forces the player to be creative (as you'll have to think up your own optional attributes) and to remain focused on the goals and feelings of their characters (if they wish to get those extra stars). In addition, it forces the player to think up a 'Premise' and a 'Situation' at the very start, thus facilitating the transition from Gamism to Simulationism and Narrativism. (I'm not claiming S and N are better than G – I'm just claiming that the best-selling current roleplaying game is as Gamist as it gets, and S and N can use a careful introduction.)

The additional rules in part 3 are once again written with the target audience in mind. Combat and magic take up large parts of the rules of many mainstream RPGs, so I tried to make Eternal Worlds more accessible by adding some suggestions about those topics. A more 'narrativistic' approach to death and inventory seemed important enough to me for the enjoyment of this game that I gave them a place too.

This game has succeeded if people new to roleplaying understand how to roleplay after reading this document, if it makes people used to traditional Gamist RPGs think about the wider possibilities, and if playing it is a fun experience for those who try it, whether newbe's or veterans.

Credits and Acknowledgements

First of all, I wish to thank those who played the very first Eternal Worlds beta with me. It was a very different system from what it is today, but the experience of those games taught me what I didn't like about the traditional roleplaying games better than anything else could. Don't misunderstand me: it was a lot of fun playing with you, but I now know that hit-points, swing-by-swing-combat and endless lists of weapon properties aren't what I am looking for in an RPG. Thank you Michiel Hermes, Axel Hartog, Sander Bessels, Kevin Haas, Coen Looijmans, Matthias Kusters and Frank van Waveren. I hope some of you will help me test this game too.

Then, the systems that inspired this game. Credits have to go to 'The Window', 'The Pool' and 'The World, the Flesh and the Devil'. There are probably more that have influenced me, but without these immediately come to mind.

The chapter on magic was heavily based on Dan Cope's "Uncle Figgy's Guide to Good Fantasy".

I'd like to thank the people at The Forge, home of independent RPG-creators. Your knowledge of RPG-theory is a treasure like few others. Special thanks to Ron Edwards for his insightful essay "GNS and Other Matters of Role-playing Theory". And thanks to Crayne for pointing me to the forum in the first place.

Elvhenk, I once again wish to express my thanks for the correction of the first 100-page document. I threw almost all of it away when making this new version, but I used your version for over a year of play testing.

The people at the Gathering of Tweakers whom I've talked with about RPGs so much deserve a place here too. Our experiment with forum-based roleplaying taught me some useful things.

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