

24-HOUR RPG 2015

A detailed illustration of a sword. The pommel is a large, circular metal disc with a smaller circular hole in the center. The hilt is wrapped in a textured, grey material. The blade is long and straight, with a curved guard. The word "Ego" is written in a stylized, gothic font across the hilt.

Ego

Is your Ego stronger than that of the character who wields you?

Credits

Ego was designed, written, and barely edited by Maurice (Moe) Tousignant in under 6 hours on October 6th 2015 as part of the RPGGeek.com 24-Hour RPG 2015 contest.

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About Ego and the 24 Hour RPG 2015

I almost didn't submit a game this year at all. My work schedule has been horrific as of late and I didn't think I would have any time take part in this awesome RPGGeek contest this year. That just felt wrong to me as the defending champion from the last two years. So I started this game at about 6pm on the last day of the contest, only giving myself 6 hours to put this thing together (and I'm sure it shows).

There wasn't a set theme for this year's contest (last year was Travel) but there was a random table that you could roll on. I love random tables so I rolled. I got Focus: Object, Theme: Apotheosis and Period: Fantastic. That's where the idea of an RPG where you play intelligent weapons trying to take over the characters that wield them came from. That of course evolved into intelligent items, which I just think makes more sense.

The mechanics were written on the fly while I wrote up the rest of the rules. I had the concept and knew I wanted some kind of test system, but had no idea what exactly do with it. My first thought was something like Drama System from Robin D. Laws, but I tossed that out as I wanted something that would end more quickly with a definite winner. The rules as they stand are fuzzy. I'll admit that, but they were the best I could think of with this time frame.

Overall I really dig the concept of Ego. I love the idea of playing items trying to take over characters, and I dig the thought of playing it as the start to a new game. I only hope that you think it's as cool as I do.

Cover image

The Kingmaker Limited Edition Medieval Sword by [Soren Nidziella](#). A Microsoft word filter was applied to the original image which is released under [creative commons](#) attribution 2.0 license.

Contact Info

Email: gilvanblight@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/gilvanblight

Google Plus: <https://plus.google.com/+MoeTousignant>

Twitter: [@windsorgaming](https://twitter.com/windsorgaming)

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1. Introduction

What is Ego?

Ego is a game that you play before you play your game. It is a Role Playing Game (RPG) that you play before, or rather as part of Character Generation for the RPG campaign you are about to start. At the end of an Ego session (or perhaps multiple sessions) you will have very unique character to play in your new campaign.

You are an intelligent item

In Ego the players take on the role of intelligent items. Intelligent items that have already been found by a group of characters. I'm sure everyone who has played a traditional RPG has run across an intelligent item at one time. They are usually amazing and very powerful magic gear that characters find. A big part of the magic item trope is that these items have a will of their own and will often exert that will and try to control a character.

Ego takes this trope and turns it upside down. In Ego, instead of playing a character who found an intelligent item, you are playing that item that has been found by a character.

You don't like being an intelligent item

It's not fun being an item. You can't move about on your own. Sure you can talk but you can't really interact very well. You need your character to do almost everything for you. Having to rely on someone like that sucks. The one thing you do have, in addition to your voice, is a very strong ego. Hopefully a strong enough ego to supplant the ego of the character that found you.

This is the goal of Ego. To take over control of the character that found you and become a character yourself.

Ego is system agnostic

While Ego was written with your standard sword and sorcery RPG in mind, it should work with any RPG system. The intelligent item trope comes from games like Dungeons & Dragons but there's no reason Ego can't be played before a game of Shadowrun or in a more story telling based game like FATE. There is no reason your item can't be a locket in Monsterhearts or a Lightsaber in Star Wars.

Ego can also be mechanically agnostic

The mechanics of Ego are pretty simple and meant to overlay on top of whatever game you are actually playing. A micro game as part of the full game. That doesn't have to be the case though. Feel free to adapt the mechanics of your game to Ego. Feel free to use the conflict resolution system from your favorite game instead of the Test of Wills as presented here.

Ego can grow

Ego is meant to be something that you play at the start of a campaign. As part of character creation. It doesn't have to end here. The events that happen during Ego can and should be part of your full campaign. Enterprising GMs may even want to have the events of Ego have mechanical consequences in the full game.

2. The Basics

How Ego works

In Ego players will make two sets of characters. One set of characters is made using whatever game system you are about to start a campaign in. The second set of characters are made in Ego. These characters are intelligent items. These are items that the first set of characters have found during their initial adventures, before you, as player join their story. To help keep them apart I will call the initially created characters (the ones in whatever system you will be playing) “characters” and the characters created in Ego “items” since that’s what they are at this point, intelligent items.

Create characters as normal

The first step in Ego is to create the characters you plan on playing in your new campaign. You use all the normal rules for making a character in your system of choice. Make the character type you eventually want to play. You make all decisions about the character mechanics.

If you love someone let them go...

Now that you’ve fallen in love with your new character and you are all excited to start a fresh campaign it’s time to let that character go. Pass your character the player on your left or really any other player, the left thing is just arbitrary. Heck if you want make this a mini game and roll for who gets what character.

That’s right, from this point until the end of Ego, you won’t be the one playing that new character you created. They will be played by someone else.

But what if they don’t play them the way I want them to? Well that’s exactly what we want. The ego controlling that character will be doing a horrible job and it’s up to you to set them straight.

Create your item

After you have created the character you eventually want to play you need to create your item. This is the real you. The actual person you will be playing, both during Ego and once you move on to your full campaign. See the later chapter on item creation for full rules on how to make you, the intelligent item.

Play your game

Now your game starts. You play whatever RPG you chose for your campaign using the full rules of that system (or whatever version of the rules your GM is choosing to use). You are playing both the character that was handed to you earlier and your item. Your task at this point is to exert your Ego on that character with the eventual goal of completely supplanting the consciousness in that character and claiming it for your own.

You will be making all decisions for the character you play as well as for your item. When you don't like what someone else is doing with your character you can try to change their mind. First verbally but if that doesn't work through a Test of Wills. Win enough Tests of wills and you can try to dominate that character and earn the character sheet back as your own.

3. Item Creation

You are a thing

Until you are able to exert dominance over your character you are an it. You are an item. You are a thing. A very smart thing, with a very strong will, but a thing none the less.

What kind of thing are you?

What type of thing are you? Traditionally most people think of intelligent weapons when they think of intelligent items but there is no reason to limit yourself to weapons here. You could be a Helmet, a backpack, a cyberdeck, a steam powered mecha. You can be pretty much anything you want.

You do want to make sure you pick something that a character would have on them a lot of the time if not at all times. Something that the character is going use often or at least be present when not being used. It sucks bad enough being an item, you don't want to spend the entire game packed away in a truck back at the inn.

On an index card write down what you are.

You are also a person

You are not only an item you are also a person. You have thoughts, desires, goals and a voice. You also weren't always an item. You had a life before. You had hopes and dreams. You still have hopes and dreams. Who you are defines you even more than what you are.

You have a goal

This is a goal in addition to becoming a real, talking, breathing person again. What is this goal? What do you want from the adventure you are about to start? Remember to think about the campaign you will be playing. What you and the other players want out of that campaign. Your goal should tie into that.

On your index card write down your goal. When the character who owns you does things that work towards your goal you will get a bonus in a Test of Wills.

You have a belief

Actually you probably have many, but we are only worried about your strongest one. The one that defines your character. Again this should be tied into the campaign you are about to play and should be discussed with the other players and/or the GM.

On your index card write down your belief. Belief's work opposite of goals. When the character who owns you does things that work against your belief your conviction gives you a bonus in a Test of Wills.

You are not perfect

No one is, of course. Here we are looking for a flaw. Something negative about your personality or your drives and ambitions. This is something you aren't proud of about yourself, or something out of your control. Something based on how or where you were raised.

On your index card write down your flaw. Flaws hurt you. Whenever the character who owns you does something where your flaw comes into play you get a penalty in a Test of Wills.

You are not a number!

Sorry, in this case you are. Well at least two parts of you are represented by numbers. Every item starts with an Ego score. A whole number that represents how strong your Ego is and how much will you can exert in a Test of Wills. As this game is currently unplaytested I don't even know what a good number is for this. I'm thinking a number between 6 and 12 would work.

You also have a dominance score. This one starts at 0, but will go up during play.

You are more than this

These five things (goal, belief, flaw, ego and dominance) are the bare bones version of an Ego character. Your group is more than welcome to add as much to those index cards as you want. These three traits are just scratching the surface. In addition feel free to try to tie these things into the game mechanic of whatever system you are using. They work great as Aspects in FATE games, for example.

4. Test of Wills

You aren't going to like what that character is doing.

That person sitting next to you is playing your character all wrong! Seriously just watch them. That's totally not what you would have done is it? It's time to take a stand. They think they own you, they think you are their item, theirs to command, time to show them who's boss.

During the game whenever the person playing your character does something you don't want them to do you should try to talk them out of it. Half the fun of having an intelligent item in a campaign is the conversations that arise during play.

This is pure roleplaying. You play your item, they play your character. The usual back and forth tabletop talk we all love. At some point though words are going to fail. You are going to disagree and that's when it's time for:

A Test of Wills

A test of wills happens whenever you want to force your character to do something they don't want to do. It is a mechanical representation of your trying to assert your Ego over theirs. At the end of a Test of Wills one of two things happen: either the character does what you say, or the character does what their player says they do. There is no grey area here. You win or they win.

Spend an Ego point

Every time you decide to take part in a Test of Wills you must spend an Ego point from your Ego score. There's no way to get Ego back so you don't need to keep track of your original score. You just need to keep track of where you are now. No matter what mechanical system you use for the Test of Wills (see below) you still spend an Ego point.

The only time you don't have to spend an Ego point is if you are all out of Ego. At this point you've spent all your resources and are scrambling for your chance at a real life.

My mechanics or yours

In Ego I provide a very basic system for figuring out a Test of Wills (see next paragraph). This was done to make sure the system was fast and easy (and also because I only had 24 hours to come up with this thing). If you have a better system, please feel free to use it. I'm sure whatever game you are actually running the campaign in probably has a great conflict resolution system. No reason to ignore it. I figure there's probably a really good reason you are playing that game in the first place.

If you do chose to use your own system remember that you still have to spend an Ego point to start a Test of Wills. That part doesn't change.

Roll a die

It's extremely simple. Spend your Ego point as mentioned above then roll. Roll what you say? Well a die, pretty much any die. The die you choose will determine how swingy you want the game to be. A d6 is what I had in mind when writing this but there's no reason you can't stick to the tried and true D20. It's just going to be a lot more random. If you are playing Fate, roll 4DF.

Modify that die

Remember those things you wrote down on your index card. Those come into play now. If what the character is trying to do matches up with your goal, add 1 to your die roll. If what the character is trying to do goes against your belief, add 1 to your die roll. Lastly if your flaw comes into play subtract 1 from your roll.

For all of these keep an open mind. There's no hard or fast rule on whether something applies or not. Talk it over with the table and make sure everyone is on the same page.

Use that dominance

Dominance is another number you wrote down on that index card. It started at 0. Unlike Ego you need to track dominance in two ways. You need to keep track of how much dominance you have and how much you've spent.

After you have rolled your die (or dice) if you don't like the results you can spend one dominance point to re-roll. The more dominance you have gained the more often you get the chance to re-roll. You can only re-roll once for each dominance point you've earned, which is why you have to track how much you've earned and how much you've spent.

The character resists

No one likes to be told what to do, and your character is the same. They will try to resist you in a Test of Wills and they do so by rolling a die. The same die type you rolled. They don't get any modifiers though, just a straight up roll.

Someone wins

Whoever rolled the highest total wins the Test of Wills and they get their way. It's that simple. The highest roll wins. But wait a minute, what about a tie? As noted above, this has to be black and white, someone has to win the Test, so who is it? That is decide by the rest of the table. The table votes on who wins the Test of Wills with the GM breaking any further ties. They should base their decisions on the conversation that led up to the test of wills. The roleplaying that preceded the mechanics.

If you win you gain dominance

Whenever you win a test of wills you gain dominance over the character. Mechanically this means you get to write down another dominance point on your index card. A point that can later be used to re-roll in a Test of Wills. Thematically this represents you slowly breaking down the character who owns you. The slow progression of your Ego dominating theirs. You want dominance, you need dominance. Dominance is what will eventually let you completely take over that annoying character.

5. Domination

Total domination

*S*ure those domination points are great for getting re-rolls and helping you win a Test of Wills but they are also needed for something even more important: Total Domination. Your goal is to leave your mundane item shell and take over that stupid character that's been carrying you around all this time. It's time to try to become your own character!

The build up to domination

*S*ure those domination points are great for getting re-rolls and helping you win a Test of Wills but the main thing you are going to want those for is for the domination roll. In addition to building up as much domination you can you are also going to have had to spend a lot of Ego. The spending of Ego represents your persistence, the amount of times you've tried to exert your will. The more often you have done this the better your chances of finally taking over that pesky character.

There's one more important part to the build up to the domination roll: Roleplaying. This shouldn't be a case of you saying "I try to dominate my character." This should be a big moment with some bravado and speeches. You are trying to replace a characters consciousness with your own here and it's a big deal.

The domination roll

A Domination roll is a special kind of Test of Wills and follow mostly the same mechanics. You are still rolling a die and your character is also rolling a die and the highest roll wins. The difference is in the modifiers. Note you do not have to spend an Ego point to make a domination roll (you will see why in a moment).

You roll your die and add your total domination score (not the amount you've spent but the amount you have earned). The character rolls their die and they add the amount of Ego you still have left at the time of trying the roll. The highest roll wins.

If a character wins the domination roll

That character has successfully fought you off. They have kept their wits and will and continue to be their own character. You on the other hand lose a bit of your grip on that character and must lose a domination point. You are welcome to try again later, but it's going to be a bit harder unless you manage to earn that point back and spend some more Ego.

This mechanic also discourages players from trying domination rolls too early and too often. The risk of losing that point and having to re-earn it should have most players waiting until it's more of a sure thing before attempting a domination roll.

If you win the domination roll

Congratulations you are a real boy! Sorry, character, a real character. Take that character sheet from that player on your left (or whoever had it) and write your proper name at the top of that sheet. Cross off that silly background and write down what really happened. Rip up that item index card and toss it in the trash like the life you are leaving behind.

So what if there's a tie?

Here I have mixed thoughts. Part of me wants everyone to vote on it again, especially if the roleplay leading up to the domination roll was appropriately dramatic. Another part of me wants to say it's a stalemate at this time. You don't get dominance but you also don't lose a domination point. Feel free to try it both ways and let me know how it works out.

Domination is inevitable

Eventually your domination roll is going to work. It's inevitable. At some point you are going to have 0 Ego so that the character only gets a basic die roll vs. your modified die roll. You are going to get enough domination points that there's no way they can win. This is intentional. Domination is the point of the game. The eventual point is to play that cool character you made at the beginning, the one for your new campaign. You don't want to play intelligent items forever, do you?

6. Random Thoughts

Here are some of my thoughts about Ego

As the deadline for the 24 Hour RPG contest draws near and my brain is running rampant with idea for Ego I thought it would be worth putting some of those random thoughts down. Some ideas on how to make my Ego grow.

Not everyone will get domination at once

This is something I haven't found an answer to yet but I have had some thoughts. As the system stands now, it's not only possibly but probably likely that item will gain domination over their characters at different times. What exactly does this mean for the ongoing game?

The easy answer is nothing. The player takes their character and plays it. The character they took it from continues to play their item but now only has to worry about playing one person, not two. This also means they can focus more on their item character and hopefully hit domination sooner due to that.

To speed things up I think it may be worth adding this rule: for every character who has already gained dominance add +1 to all Test of Wills and all Domination rolls. Mechanically this should speed up the transformation and thematically it represents the party of characters losing their cool as their companions are slowly taken over by their items.

Another option is to make it a big scene where everyone gains dominance at once. Once one player gets dominance then every other player then gets to play out a domination scene themselves. A little montage of all the rest of the characters eventually get dominated. This keeps everyone in the game at the same point and lets the actual campaign start right away.

Mixing in campaign game mechanics

I keep thinking it would be really cool to tie Ego more into the game system you are running. The two main ways that keep repeating in my head are to tie in campaign mechanics to the Test of Will system and to give the players some kind of in game reward after they obtain dominance.

For the Test of Wills I want to add in some kind of bonus to the character based on who they are. Like adding their WIS modifier to their Test of Will Rolls in D&D, or being able to invoke an Aspect for +2 in a Fate game. What I worry about though is that this may just drag Ego out longer than it will be welcome.

The in game reward thing comes from when I was first thinking about Ego and making it bigger than I had time to make it for this contest. My initial thoughts were that your Item would have some kind of skill list and so would your character. And that at the end of the game you would get to pick one or more skills from the character to keep when you eventually win dominance. That was before I decide on total system agnosticism. With the system I have now I'm not sure how this would work but I think a creative GM could come up with something.

Backgrounds

I t seems like there's something cool that could be done with character backgrounds here. I'm just not sure what. Maybe something about each player passing around the characters and coming up with some background info. Especially something dealing with how the characters found the items.

They must be cursed

O ne thought that occurred to me in the middle of writing this is this: what's to stop a character from just throwing an item away. That would kill a game of Ego quick, wouldn't it? So I had to go back to the source material, the intelligent item tropes: the items must be cursed. The characters can't get rid of them. Why? Because they are cursed items, that's why. If you want to have the cursed item debate that D&D players have had for years feel free, but the end result is this: no a character can't throw away an item (or destroy one). Besides the cursed thing, I would hope that your group is playing Ego willingly and trying to have the most fun with it and the thought has never entered your minds.

I welcome feedback

If you give Ego a try please let me know. My contact information can be found on the first page. I would love to know how well this thing plays out. I would also love to hear exactly what you did with it, what you modified, what campaign rules you mixed in, what worked and what didn't.

If you have any ideas for improvement I would love to hear those too. I'm sure the game as it stands could use a lot of work and I'm open to any and all ideas.