ERP

Elegant Role-Playing Game System

MASTERY

WISDOM

POWER
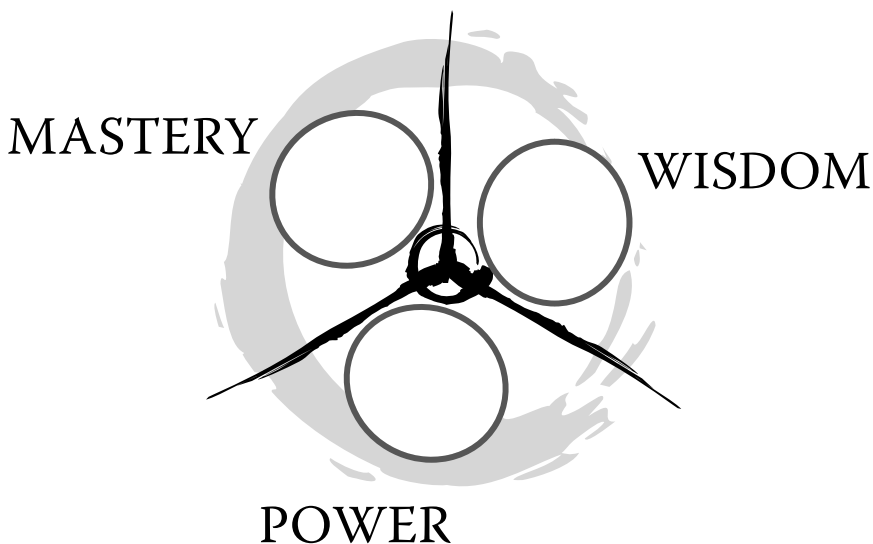
0. CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Elegant Role-Playing (ERP) is a simple game system for role-playing, based on a few basic principles. You will need some six-sided dice (called d6) to play.

This document is made from ERP version 2, with some changes made to, and many deletions from, Sections 2–4. The main addition is Section 5 for playtesting, which truly takes the game back to elegant principles.
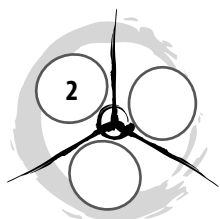
2. CHARACTERS

Characters in ERP are quantified by
- ⊙ Characteristics [Mastery, Wisdom, Power]
- ⊙ Specialities [Attributes, Skills, Gifts]

Characteristics

Mastery, Wisdom and Power are the central Characteristics in ERP and are described in rating points: an average human has a rating of 0, while a mighty hero may have 3 or more. See page 4.

Specialities

Attributes, Skills and Gifts cover a broad range of additional descriptions, termed Specialities in ERP. These further definitions vary from one character to another and are unrated. See page 5.

Further definition is given by
- ⊙ Qualities [Glory, Wounds, Legend, Possessions, Ties]

Qualities

Glory is a measure of your character's 'success' in being heroic and significant to the game world. It is used to raise Characteristics, buy Specialities and affect the ongoing story.

Wounds are a measure of how much injury, stress and fatigue your character has suffered. This guides when a character may die.

Other qualities are descriptive such as your Legend, your possessions and how you came to be Tied to the other Player Characters.
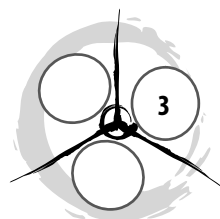
Characteristics

....

Mastery

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

Aspects: dexterity, agility, endurance, strength.

Attributes: *Strong, Agile, Stealthy, Quick, Healthy, Tough, Nimble, Fleet-Footed, Spring-Heeled, Well-Balanced, Sure-Handed, Stout, Graceful, Fit, etc.*

....

Wisdom

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

**Aspects:** knowledge, reason, perception, wit.

Attributes: *Wise, Intelligent, Educated, Alert, Witty, Reasoned, Logical, Inquiring, Clever, Quick-Thinking, Cunning, Rigourous, Perceptive, etc.*

....

Power

Power gauges empathy, willpower and spiritual strength. It is used for tasks with a social or mystical nature, and for protection from stress and emotion.

Aspects: will, charisma, determination, fate.

Attributes: *Charismatic, Attractive, Strong-Willed, Empathic, Persuasive, Radiant, Purposeful, Defiant, Divine, Inspiring, Eloquent, Forceful, etc.*
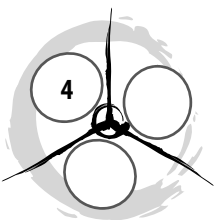
Specialities

Attributes

Attributes describe a character having a particular aptitude for a Characteristic. Each Attribute is linked to just one Characteristic and examples can be found opposite. Having an Attribute allows you to roll an additional die if it is appropriate to the situation.

Skills

A Skill covers a particular area of expertise, training or learning. Skills depend on the gaming world or genre and some examples are: *Music, Athletics, Stealth, Science, Teaching, Manipulation, Armed Combat, Unarmed Combat, Ranged Combat, Art, Ballistics, Forensics, Mechanics, Electronics, Computing, Driving, Medicine, Engineering, History, etc.*

Gifts

Gifts allow a character to have an advantage. Some example Gifts are: *Cult, Wealth, Status, Rank, Allies, Contacts, Patron, Fame, Followers, etc.*

Qualities

Glory

Glory reflects karma, luck, experience, fortune and destiny. It is awarded by the GM for achieving goals and for good role-playing. It can be used to alter in-game dice rolls and to permanently enhance your character.

Wounds

Wounds are a measure of how much injury, stress and fatigue your character has suffered. This guides when a character may die.

Legend, Possessions and Ties

These are additional descriptions that complete the character. What is his or her Legend? Where are they from? What possessions do they have? And what Ties with the other characters?
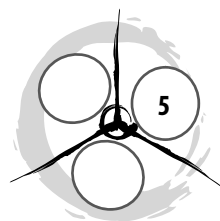
Creation

Create a character using the following guidelines.

....

Method

1. **Mastery**, **Wisdom** and **Power** all begin at 0.

2. Pick **1 Skill**.

3. Spend **10 Glory** on improving the character using the costs listed below.

4. You may save a maximum of 5 Glory for later use, but no more.

....

Limits

Attributes. You may have no more Attributes for a Characteristic than that Characteristic's rating divided by 2 (rounded up). For example, Hecuba has a Power of 1 and so can have up to 1 Attribute associated with Power.

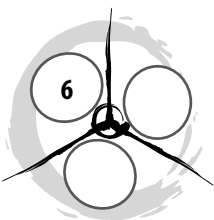**Skills.** There is no limit on the number of Skills that a character can possess.

....

Glory Costs

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
—[new rating + number of Attributes] Glory

Gain a Gift
—5 Glory

6

Ties

Write down how you are Tied to the other Player Characters. For each other Player Character that you have a Tie with you gain 1 Glory. If that Player Character is killed in the game you must remove that Glory point from your character (and if you have no Glory when this happens you take a point of Bad Karma, see p. 14).

Of course, you must also have an idea of your own character's name, what they look like and what they do. Try to create your character with flair. Make them more than just a sequence of numbers and words.
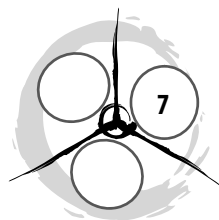
Possessions

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

An Example Character

....

Hecuba

Mastery:	2 (3)	*Agile* (1)
Wisdom:	1 (1)	*Alert* (1)
Power:	1 (1)	*Enchanting* (1)

Skills: Seduction (0), Armed Combat (1)

Gifts: none

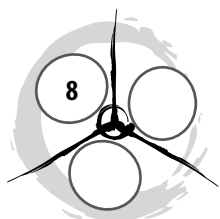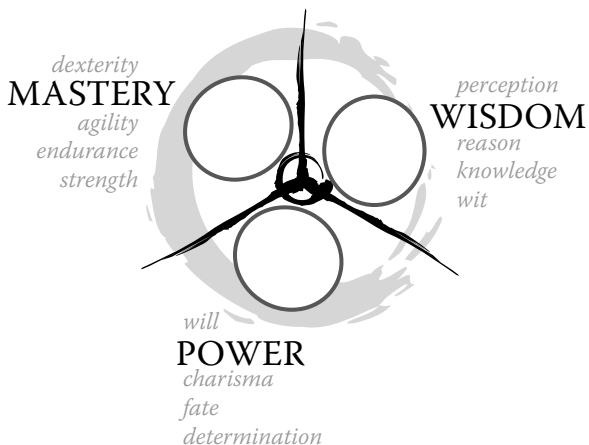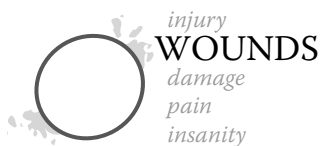**Glory:** 1

Wounds: 0

Possessions: Loose robes, leather armour, sword, dagger, slingbag, sturdy boots, horse, blanket, lantern, flint and tinder. Some small coins.

Glory costs are in brackets, e.g. (3).

Elegant Role-Playing

injury
WOUNDS
damage
pain
insanity

fortune
GLORY
experience
destiny
karma

dexterity
MASTERY
agility
endurance
strength

perception
WISDOM
reason
knowledge
wit

will
POWER
charisma
fate
determination

My Legend

_____
_____
_____
_____

Skills

_____
_____
_____
_____

Possessions

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____	+2 Heavily Favoured
_____	+1 Favoured
_____	±0 Even
_____	−1 Disfavoured
_____	−2 Heavily Disfavoured

3. 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.

Scores

To get a score you roll a d6 and add it to the rating of a Characteristic. There are times where you can roll more than one die. In those cases you choose the die that rolled the highest value.

Results

You want to get as high a score as you can. When in conflict with someone else you compare scores to see who won the conflict.

your score – opposing score = result

A result of 0 or lower means failure. A result of 1 or more means success, higher results yield greater degrees of success.

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 roll.

10
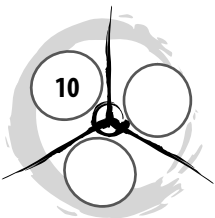
Luck

Glory, in its aspect of Luck, can be used to manipulate in-game scores and events.

Benefit gained	Glory Cost	
Reroll your dice	1	
Add d6 to a score	2	
Lucky Break	1	*Immediate effect*
	2	*Lasts for scene*
	3	*Lasts for session*

....

Damage

When completely healthy a character has 0 Wounds. Wounds can take many forms: cuts, bruises, shock, insanity, stress, a broken heart or even magical injury (if the genre allows it). All Wounds are added (cumulatively) to the same 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. At the end of a conflict where they have been 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.
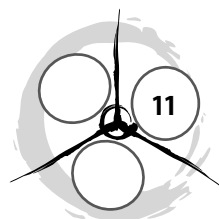
Healing

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).
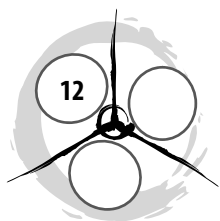
4. GAMEMASTER

The players all have a responsibility to play their characters fairly and with vigour. The GameMaster (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.
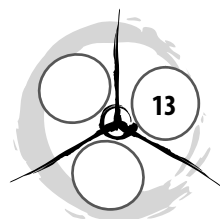
Glory

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 signi.cant 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 Character 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.

Playing Style

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.

14
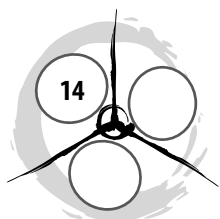
Adventures

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.
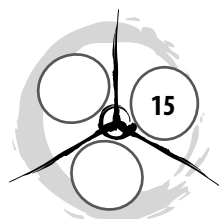
About The Author

Gregor Hutton was born near Glasgow in Scotland. He has been role-playing since the early 1980s. He currently lives in Edinburgh. He has written a diverse mixture of games including *Frenzy* (1995, Venture Press) and *Best Friends* (2006, BoxNinja). He won a prestigious Ronny Award (Full) for his SF game *3:16 Carnage Amongst The Stars* in 2005.

Thanks

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

Copyright and Legal Stuff

Fonts and Software

Typeset in Minion Pro and Myriad Pro.

Created on an Apple Macintosh G4 Powerbook, with Adobe Creative Suite (InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator and Acrobat).

http://gregorhutton.com/erp/
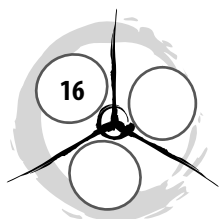
5. DRAFT CONFLICT RESOLUTION RULES

These are outline notes for the conflict resolution system for ERP. Basically, you roll a number of dice and pick the highest one. That is added to a Characteristic (which for normal folks is 0, higher for Heroes) and modified by your favour (-2 to +2) to give a score. Scores are compared to see who has won. Higher scores are best.

If you are active in a conflict you roll 1 die. If you have a relevant Attribute you may roll an additional die (one only, no matter how many Attributes are relevant). If you have a relevant Skill you may roll an additional die (one only, no matter how many Skills are relevant). If you have an appropriate Skill Specialization you may roll an additional die (one only, no matter how many Specializations are relevant). If you have Momentum (see below) you may roll an additional die.

Conflict Resolution

ERP uses a conflict resolution method to resolve in-game events.

Intent

In a conflict, what is your intent?

Find Favour

The GM and players discuss the situation and decide whether any of the participants are favoured over any others in the conflict. The majority of NPCs in the scene are initially taken to be neutral in the conflict with PCs favoured or disfavoured in relation to them. The best situation is heavily favoured (+2 to your roll) and the worst is heavily disfavoured (-2 to your roll).
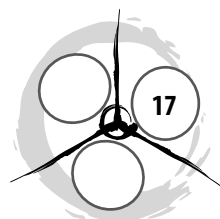
Roll The Dice

If there are intents that no one is opposed to then we can take them as agreed. For everything else we must roll the dice.

Find Victors

Establish the Victors of the conflict, who they are victorious over and by what degree.

Apply Results

The Victors spend their result points and narrating them into the fiction.

Victors, Victory Points and Outcomes

Full Victors

You are a Full Victor if you beat all opponents in a conflict.

Partial Victor

You are a Partial Victor if you do not beat all opponents in a conflict, but you beat at least one other opponent.

Loser

You are a loser in a conflict if you do not beat any opponents in a conflict.

Victory Points

Victory Points are worked out by comparing scores. Victory Points can be spent against any opponents that you have beaten in the conflict. VPs are narrated into the fiction along with their effect in game terms.
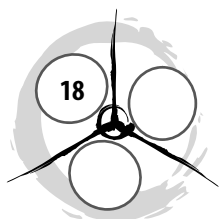
On The Six

If you have rolled a 6 on a die then any additional sixes on other dice add 1 to the score. For example, Gerdes' player rolls 3 dice and gets 5, 6, 6. The highest die is 6, and the additional 6 gives another 1 for a score of 7.

Take Five

For a conflict where a skilled participant is taking their time and putting in considerable effort, which is often aided, then they may choose not to roll the dice and they take 5 as their score instead. For example, Gerdes is taking all of the winter months to bind a demon into his sword. He spends considerable time and effort on this battle with the demon and chooses to Take Five for his score. The demon may be able to Take Five too in opposition, depending on its own situation, support, etc.

Take Two

For a conflict where the participants are rushed and you just want to gauge the likely winner and what results will come of it you can declare that one (or indeed all) of the participants must Take Two as their score. A common example of this would be a fleeing target making a minimal, rushed attempt to avoid blows.

Momentum

All Full Victors gain an extra die to roll in any immediately following and related conflict. For example, in an extended combat conflict you would gain a die to roll for the next roll if you were a Full Victor.
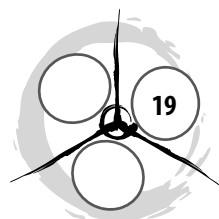
Examples of Play

Gerdes and the Brigand

Gerdes happens upon a Brigand in an abandoned hill fort.

"Ay, there," says Gerdes, trying to gauge the reaction of the Brigand. Still he stays balanced and ready to react—his sword hand resting on his belt, near his scabbard.

"Have at," mumbles the Brigand, drawing his axe and circling towards Gerdes.

We have a conflict.

Intent

The GM asks Gerdes' player: What is your intent?

Gerdes' player declares 'My intent is to draw my sword, close on the Brigand and best him in combat, though I don't wish to kill him.'

The GM declares that the intent of the Brigand is to slay Gerdes and loot his corpse.

So Victory Points will be spent on Favouring and Disfavouring, and Wounding.

Find Favour

The GM declares that both participants in the conflict are on an equal footing and none has favour over the other. So, no modifiers to the scores—they are Even.

20
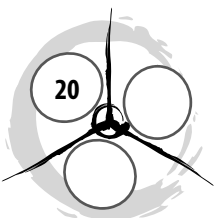
Roll The Dice

Gerdes has a Mastery of 3, an attribute of Swift, and the skill Armed Combat. So Gerdes' player rolls 3 dice and will pick the best value, adding it to 3 to find his score.

The Brigand has a Mastery of 1 and the skill Armed Combat. So the GM rolls 2 dice and will pick the best value, adding it to 1 to find his score.

Gerdes' player rolls 1, 3 and 5 for a score of 8.

The GM rolls 3 and 4 for a score of 5.

Find Victors

Gerdes is a Full Victor in this case and has bested the Brigand by 3. As a Full Victor Gerdes has gained momentum and will roll an extra die in the next directly following conflict.

Spend Victory Points

Gerdes' player spends 1 VP on favouring himself [Gerdes easily sidesteps the Brigand's lunge and moves to higher ground, advantaging himself,] and 1 VP on disfavouring the Brigand [The Brigand tires at swinging at Gerdes and soon his breathing is more laboured]. He also spends 1 VP on wounding [Gerdes' sword slices hard across the Brigand's thigh, cutting through his clothing and into his flesh.]

The Brigand is a loser in the combat and so the GM narrates some unsuccessful swings with the axe into the fiction. The GM also adds some cursing in the coarse language of Hinterlandia, a warlike neighbouring country. The Brigand must also make a test of Mastery against a target of his Wounds to see if he collapses. He has suffered 1 Wound and his Mastery is 1. He 'Takes Two' for a score of 3, which easily beats the target. While wounded he is not unconscious or impaired.

So, at the end of this conflict both participants are still active and wishing to continue. This now leads into to a following conflict, where Gerdes has Momentum.
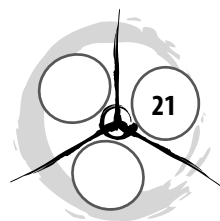
Gerdes, Hecuba and the Brigands

Gerdes and Hecuba are fighting 3 Brigands (called A, B and C). No one is favoured or disfavoured and no one has momentum. Their scores are as follows: Gerdes (7), Hecuba (5), A (5), B(4), C (3).

Victors

Gerdes is a Full Victor, and has 2 Victory Points over A, another 1 over B and another 1 over C. So he has 4 VPs in total and can spend up to 2 against A, 3 against B or all 4 against C.

Hecuba is a Partial Victor. Hecuba has 1 VP over B and another 1 over C. She can spend 2 VPs against C or 1 against B and C.

Brigands A, B and C are losers, though Brigand A only suffers Victory Points from Gerdes and not Hecuba (as he drew with her score).

Outcome

Gerdes spends his VPs as follows: 1 disfavouring A, 1 disfavouring B and 2 wounding C. Hecuba spends hers as follows: 2 wounding C. Brigand C has sustained 4 Wounds in the conflict and must make a test of Mastery not to fall unconscious (he must beat a target number of 4 on his Mastery plus a d6). Brigands A and B are both now disfavoured (i.e. at -1 to rolls) in the conflict until it ends.

Furthermore, Gerdes is a Full Victor and gains an extra die to roll in the next conflict. Note that this extra die only exists for the next conflict. If Gerdes is a Partial Victor in the next conflict then he will no longer have momentum. If he is a Full Victor again then he will have 1 die of momentum for the conflict after that. Momentum does not 'stack', it simply gives an extra die to Full Victors from a directly preceding conflict.
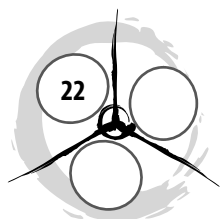
Ending Conflicts

Note that when a Full Victor is Heavily Favoured, all opponents are Heavily Disfavoured then the Full Victor can end the conflict with a single Victory Point.

Or at any time a participant can choose to Give and end the conflict. Though, in doing so, they agree that their opponent's intent comes to pass.
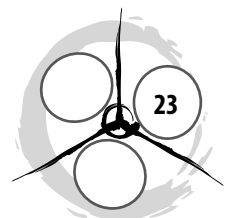
Things To Add

Magic
Weapons list and descriptions
Armour list and descriptions
Examples of Favour and conditions
Full Actual Play
Colour text and artwork
Example conflicts:
–court argument (Wisdom)
–impressing the King (Power)
–fighting a Brigand (Mastery)
World building (themes, issues, baselines)
More granularity: Aspects
Skill specializations
Movement and maneuver in terms of Favour
Clear example Skill list for a setting (Scarab)
Clear example Gift list for a setting (Scarab)