Ellipses RPG

Xalavier Nelson Jr. | @WritNelson

What is Role-Playing?

"You're sitting at a table in a rowdy, well-lit tavern when an orc approaches you and smashes your drink. She seems to think you've somehow offended her friends."

"I persuade the orc to leave me alone."

rolls 20-sided die

"She, uh, punches you in the face."

"Does it do damage?"

"It's more of a warning punch."

At its most basic level, tabletop role-playing is just collaborative storytelling. A *GM* (or *Game Master*) describes the situations players are in, and the consequences of the decisions those players make. Players, on the other hand, use GM descriptions to make decisions and interact with the characters in the world everyone is building together.
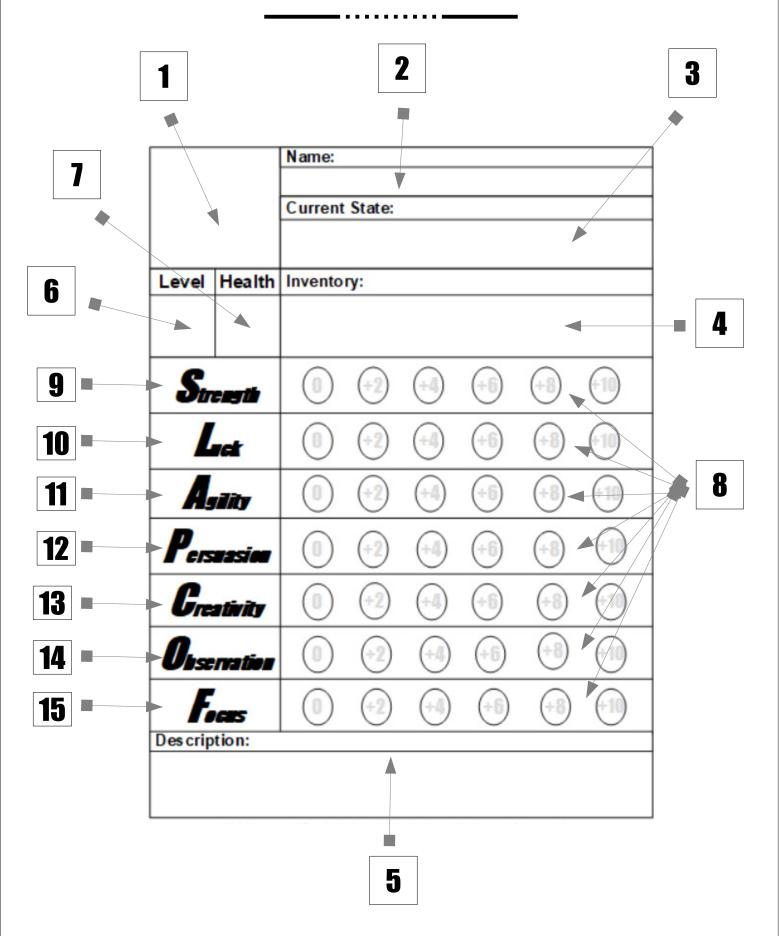
You can use dice or complex rule systems to augment this experience. However, at the end of the day, the ultimate draw of role-playing is the chance to create an adventure with others. Something far more complex, wonderful, and *weird* than you could ever imagine on your own.

What is Ellipses RPG?

Ellipses RPG was designed to bridge the gap between plain storytelling and popular, potentially intimidating role-playing systems by encouraging improvisation.
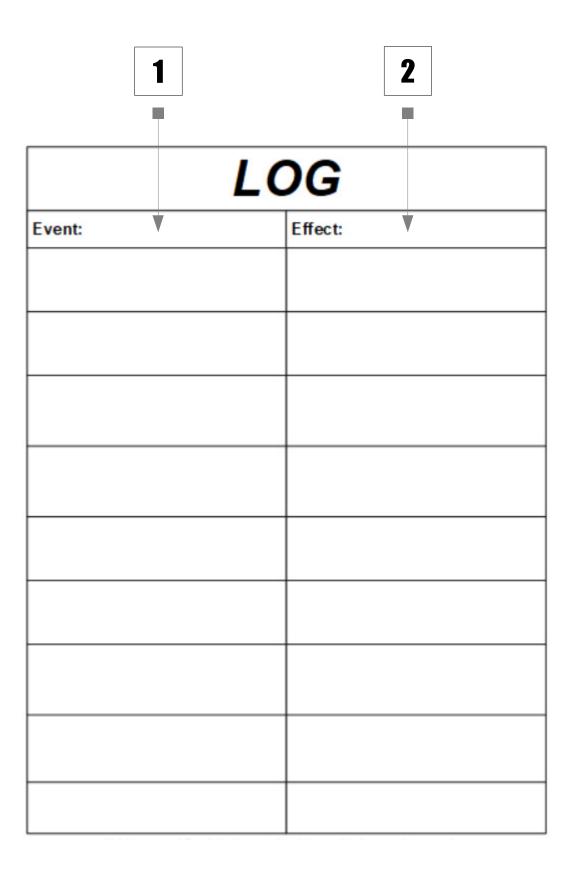
Build a character and start creating a story in the setting of your choice within 15 minutes! All you need is a single 20-sided die (also known as a *d20*), and your imagination.

The Character Sheet

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Name:

Current State:

Level	Health	Inventory:

9 *Strength* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

10 *Luck* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

11 *Agility* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

12 *Persuasion* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

13 *Creativity* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

14 *Observation* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

15 *Focus* — (0) (+2) (+4) (+6) (+8) (+10)

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Description:

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1. You can draw your character's portrait or chosen symbol here.

2. *Name* is where you write the name of your character.

3. Whether rich, undead, or turned into a frog, *Current Status* allows you to keep track of your state at any given moment.

4. *Inventory* is where you track what you're currently carrying.

5. *Description* allows you to describe your character's physical appearance, mental state, and/or background.

6. *Level* tracks how advanced your character currently is, limits how much Health you can have, and determines how many Ellipses you can fill. Player level and advancement is determined by the GM, and the natural course of the story.

7. Calculate your maximum *Health* by rolling a d20 once at Level 1. Every two levels gained afterward, roll another d20, and add the result to your maximum total.

8. These ovals are *Ellipses*—the skills your character possesses. A Level 3 Player can color in three individual Ellipses, starting from the left-most side of a given row. The bonus you get after rolling a d20 to use a skill, is shown within the highest oval filled in the row for that skill. If a Player doesn't have an Ellipses in a skill they're attempting to use, the penalty to their roll is -2.

9. *Strength* allows you to lift heavy objects, among other things.

10. *Luck* can affect whether a landmine you stepped on actually explodes, if a chest contains valuable loot, and so on.

11. *Agility* is used when you need mobility, stealth, or finesse.

12. *Persuasion* helps you communicate with others effectively.

13. *Creativity* can apply to your ability to paint, craft makeshift weaponry, trim shrubbery, etc.

14. *Observation* allows you to see details others cannot.

15. *Focus* is a miscellaneous skill that adapts to the universe you set your story in. It can be everything from magical knowledge in a fantasy campaign, to technological prowess in a neon dystopia.

The Log (Events and Effects)

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LOG

Event:	Effect:

Events and Effects (The Log)

The Character Sheet for *Ellipses RPG* was initially designed to allow improvised, self-contained role-playing sessions to start in as little time as possible. The *Event and Effect* (or *Log*) system was created to allow Players to simultaneously get around this restriction, and directly use their role-playing experiences to augment their characters during the course of a campaign.

1. If you, your fellow Players, and the Game Master agree that an event or action is memorable, catalog it in the Event tab. However, to keep the Log from being a simple journal of your character's experiences, the Event has to have an Effect on your character. Which brings us to...

2. ...*Effects*. Now that you've documented the memorable Event, you, the GM, and your fellow Players can decide upon the Effect it has on you going forward. As an example: if you're bitten by a werewolf (the **Event**), one of the **Effects** of this event may be that you transform into a werecreature during future full moons. The possibilities here are only limited by your imagination, and the journeys you wish for your collaborative stories to create.

Using the Log system, you can expand or condense the ruleset of *Ellipses RPG* to create **your** ideal role-playing environment. Do you like multi-layered combat systems and weapon statistics? Use the Log to give your Players powerful abilities, and items with complex effects and exceptions. Enjoy a more relaxed role-playing experience? Give your Players objects or abilities that eliminate the need for skill rolls, and put the focus of your campaign purely on being in-character.

It's *really neat*.

Example Situation
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Game Master: ...You know this is the third time you've been punched by an orc, right?

Player #1: That many? I could have sworn that last time was a kick.

P. #2: Nope, definitely a punch.

GM: How about this – for your experience getting relentlessly punched by orcs, you are now incapable of taking damage from an orc punch.

P. #1: That...Honestly sounds cool.

GM: Write it in your Log, then.

P. #3: Forget Persuasion – I want to intimidate the orc by breaking the table.

GM: Wait, seriously? You don't have any Ellipses in Strength.

P. #3: Danica.

GM: Yes?

P. #3: The table.

GM: Yes.

P. #3: I want to break it.

Player #3 and GM look at each other for a moment.

GM: Okay...

GM rolls a d20.
The result (minus the -2 penalty), is 17—more than enough for an unusual feat of Strength.

GM: Wow. You, um. You smash the table. The orc looks at you, stunned, and then leaves.

P. #3: So I won!

GM: Not exactly. You see, the tavern owner is coming your way...

P. #2: Oh boy...

Important GM Notes/Tips

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- To determine whether a d20 roll succeeds, I personally use the following scale: a roll (including bonuses) must match or exceed 7 to complete an easy action, 12 to complete a challenging action, 17 for a difficult action, and 22 for an impossible action. Feel free to tweak these numbers depending on the planned difficulty of your campaign, or to mitigate higher Player levels!

- If you want to run longer campaigns, only grant a new Ellipses every 2 or even 3 levels. This, combined with making new Log augmentations somewhat rare and exceptional, should make running a lengthy series of sessions feasible.

- Creating scenarios where Players inhabit a setting that exists regardless of their participation (in contrast to the 'band of adventurers' cliche) can make the game world feel bigger.

- Giving Players reasonable, interesting consequences for their actions makes decisions feel meaningful—even if nothing changes in the bigger picture.

- Don't be afraid to set limits on what behavior you do or do not allow in your sessions. You're the GM, and with that position comes a great degree of responsibility. If every one of your Players does not feel safe, and comfortable to engage with the world you create, you are doing them a disservice.

- Role-playing is inherently chaotic, so don't freak out if your session doesn't go according to plan. Focus on having fun, and improvise along with your Players. Remember: the 'perfect' story isn't one you meticulously script, but the story you and your Players create together.

Important Player Notes/Tips

▪ *Ellipses RPG* was designed to allow you to create nuanced, contradictory characters. You can be an intelligent warrior, an ignorant scientist, a clumsy detective, a beefy hacker—or anything in-between. Feel free to play as the character you want to *be*, rather than define yourself by what skills you've chosen.

▪ If you're having difficulty role-playing your character, try summarizing them with a few simple adjectives (e.g. "shy, paranoid, clumsy"). It's much easier to adopt a few easy to remember traits and grow, than to inhabit a complex, multi-layered character instantly!

▪ Ask questions! Examining your environment and interacting with the characters in the game's setting can often reveal solutions you wouldn't discover otherwise.

▪ Think outside of the box. If you're standing at the edge of a river of lava, and are holding a jug of water, why not pour it out and create a bridge across? In *Ellipses RPG*, anything you can think of (if approved by the GM) is a possible solution. Take advantage of this, and don't be afraid to try something unusual.

▪ Remember that you're telling a *collaborative* story—even if the *scenario* is competitive. Robbing others of their agency, or putting fellow players in positions to be physically, morally, mentally, or spiritually uncomfortable weakens your collective experience. On the other hand, providing a comfortable environment for other Players to contribute to the general chaos allows everyone to create the memorable experiences that define role-playing.

		Name:
		Current State:
Level	**Health**	**Inventory:**

Strength	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Luck	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Agility	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Persuasion	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Creativity	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Observation	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10
Focus	0 +2 +4 +6 +8 +10

Description:

LOG

Event:	Effect:

Special Thanks To...

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My Sister (the original Player), my Parents (the original GMs), Raven Stark (the Artist), The Stark Family, Lee Williams, Martijn Zandvilet, Frank Versnel, Thomas Jager, Joey Jones, Nate Crowley, Verity Virtue, Valerie Minnich, Marc Whipple, Quinn Murphy, Indie Gamer Chick, Greg Johnson, Robert Brookes, the Aethera team, my Patreon patrons, and everyone who has supported this little role-playing system—including YOU!

Feel free to email me at writnelson [AT] gmail [DOT] com *with questions, feedback, and tales of your adventures using Ellipses RPG, or tweet about it using the hashtag #EllipsesRPG!*

Good luck, and happy role-playing!