

ARCANE HEROES

A RULES-LIGHT ROLEPLAYING GAME OF
SWASHBUCKLING ACTION AND ANCIENT MAGIC



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ARCANE HEROES

Arcane Heroes is a rules-light roleplaying game set into a fantasy world filled with magic, wonders and epic adventures. All you need to play is this short document, a couple of polyhedral dice, pencils, paper, snacks, imagination and some friends to play with.

This document assumes you know how RPGs work. If you don't ask your geek friends to tell you or check Wikipedia.

Core Mechanic

Arcane Heroes uses a simple dice-pool system. Whenever the rules (or the game master) asks for a check, you roll one or more six-sided dice. The number of dice to be rolled is determined by the rank of the ability to be checked. Each die that comes up with a 5 or 6 is considered a success. In most cases one success is sufficient to succeed check. Depending on the situation, the number of dice used can be raised or lowered by the GM. The number of dice in a pool can never be lower than one.

Characters

Each player has to create a character at the beginning of the game. The player character or PC is the player's alter ego in the game world. The character's played by the GM are called Non-Player Characters or NPCs.

Character abilities

All characters have a set of abilities ranked from 0 to 5 which determine how well they perform in certain situations. The abilities are as follows:

- *Melee*: The ability to fight unarmed or to wield melee weapons like swords and hammers.
- *Ranged*: The ability to use ranged weapons from simple bows to firearms.
- *Magic*: The ability to channel magic energy to create various effects.
- *Health*: This ability is a measure of a character's

health, vitality and toughness

- *Lore*: This ability is a measure of a character's knowledge and intellectual capabilities.
- *Social*: The ability to interact with other people using verbal and non-verbal communication.
- *Craft*: This ability is a measure of the characters ability to use crafts like lock picking, blacksmithing or even first aid.
- *Stealth*: The ability to hide, sneak and steal.
- *Athletics*: This ability allows characters to run, jump, climb and to perform similar feats.

Wound capacity

The wound capacity (W for short) is the amount of wounds a character can sustain before being incapacitated. A character with zero W is in serious danger of dying. A successful Craft check can stabilize a dying character.

Characters start with 5+Health Wounds.

Heroism

The characters in Arcane Heroes are a breed apart from normal humans. They all have the seed of greatness in them. This is represented by the Heroism stat. Characters can add additional dice to any melee or ranged attack check up to their Heroism rank. The Heroism spent is replenished after combat (or at the end of the encounter). But adding Heroism to an attack roll comes with a cost. The character has to channel his Heroism for one round, during which he can only defend.

Characters start with one point of Heroism.

Character creation

To create a character in Arcane Heroes, you first need a character concept that you discuss with the GM and the other players. After that you distribute 15 points between your abilities (you start with one point in each ability). Then you pick from one of the starter equipment packs and give your character a fitting name and decide on how he or she looks like.

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Combat

Combat scenes are acted out in turns. Initiative is determined by a roll on Melee, Ranged or Magic, depending on what type of attack the character wants to use this turn. The character with the highest number of successes begins. If there are ties, roll 1d6. The character with the highest result acts first.

Characters may walk up to 2 times their Athletic ability in meters per round or run up to 5 times their Athletic ability. A running character can not make any additional actions this turn.

To make an attack, roll the appropriate ability for your weapon plus the weapon's damage bonus. The defending character rolls Health plus either the armor's defense bonus or the Athletics ability, when the character's not wearing any armor. In addition the defender may use his Melee ability to parry melee attacks if he wields a melee weapon. Parrying forfeits the defending character's next action. One success is sufficient to parry the attack and prevent all damage.

The difference between the attackers successes and the one's rolled by the defender are the wounds caused. These are subtracted from a character's wound capacity.

Ranged attack work much like melee attacks but some additional rules apply. The maximum range for rifles is 100 meters and for pistols 20 meters. For each 10 meters distance increment after the first, the Ranged dice pool is reduced by one.

Healing

A character who has at least one W left after a fight, heals fully after a couple of minutes rest. A character who was reduced to zero W must be stabilized with a successful Craft check. When stabilized a character must rest for a full day to recuperate. If a character can't be stabilized, he dies in d6 minutes.

Magic

In order to cast spells a character must wear spell focus gauntlets. A character can wear up to two spell gauntlets, but a special talent is needed to combine spell effects (see talents for details).

Attacking with magic works like a melee or ranged attack, but in this case a character's Magic ability and the spell's spell bonus is used.

Each spell can be cast either as an area effect centered around the player or directly at a target. A spell's description lists the spell bonus of the spell for both cases. Targeted spells can be cast at any target in a line of sight and within 30 meters of the caster. Heroism can be used to increase the attack pool of targeted spells.

Area effects have a range of 2 meters around the caster. Heroism can be used to improve the range by 2 meters per Heroism spent, but it takes longer to cast the spell. See the description of Heroism above for details. Please note that the caster rolls only once, but the successes he rolled count for each target in the area of effect.

Starting gear

Each character may pick one of the following equipment sets during character creation. Later in the game, characters may acquire additional gear.

Melee fighter set:

Hand weapon of choice, normal clothing, scale armor, 50 €

Ranged fighter set:

Pistol, Dagger, normal clothing, 50 €

Spellcaster set:

Fire spell gauntlet, Caster robes, normal clothing

Weapons, Spell gauntlets & Armor

Weapon	WB	Skill	Cost
Unarmed	+0	Melee	N/A
Dagger	+1	Melee	100 €

Designer's Note:

Arcane Heroes is inspired by many (C)RPGs I've played. A lot of the rules in this document (especially the magic rules) are my take on the mechanics seen in computer games like Fable III or Torchlight.

Weapon	WB	Skill	Cost
Hand weapon	+2	Melee	200 €
2h weapon	+3	Melee	300 €
Pistol	+2	Ranged	400 €
Rifle	+4	Ranged	800 €

Hand weapons and 2h weapons can be either swords, hammers, axes or maces. The character decides what kind of weapon it is when he buys it. The weapon type has no mechanical effect in combat and cannot be changed later in the game.

Pistols and rifles can fire 4 times before they need to be reloaded. In order to minimize micromanagement, the game assumes that the character has always enough ammunition. Reloading a pistol or rifle takes 1 turn and a successful Craft check.

Spell	SB ¹	Additional Effects	Cost ²
Fire	+1/+0	Target loses 1 W in the following round if flammable	250 €
Lightning	+2/+1	Target loses next action	500 €
Ice	+1/+2	Target is immobilized for one round	500 €
Storm	+0/+3	Target is pushed back 5 meters	500 €
Life	+2/+1	Target is healed one W per two successes	500 €

Usually you only need to buy each spell gauntlet once. It's not possible to wear two gauntlets of the same type at the same time.

¹⁾ The first SB given is for the targeted spell, the second for the area effect spell.

²⁾ Although a cost is given here, Spell gauntlets are not widely available for sale. Only true heroes can use them to wield magic.

Armor	AB	Cost
Normal clothing	+0	10 €
Leather jacket	+1	100 €
Scale armor	+2	200 €

Armor	AB	Cost
Breastplate	+3	300 €
Caster robes	+1	200 €
Assassin's garment	+1	150 €
Gunner's great coat	+2	250 €

Caster robes are special enchanted robes that add +1 SB to any spell cast.

Assassin's garment is made from verly light but durable fabric and is usually colored black. It grants +1 on Stealth checks.

A gunner's great coat is not only a very sturdy leather coat, but it's fitted with a lot of pockets to store ammunition and other useful stuff. You can add +1 to any Craft checks for reloading or maintaining a weapon.

Character advancement

After each game session, the GM grants the characters experience points. XP should be granted for reaching important character and adventure goals, good roleplaying and overcoming enemies and other obstacles. Since characters also learn from failures, they should get XP for those, too.

After each session (or when the GM deems it appropriate) the players may use their XP to raise their character's abilities and buy new talents.

XP rewards/costs	XP
Participation in a gaming session	+1
Overcoming a dangerous situation/foe	+1
Good roleplaying	+1
Major setback or failure	+1
Raising an ability	- Current Rank
Buying a talent	-5
Raising Heroism by 1	- 2

The Wound Capacity cannot be raised directly. Players must improve their character's Health to raise

Designer's Note:

Since Arcane Heroes takes some inspiration from the video game Fable III, the campaign is set into a country where the industrial revolution started some time ago. Think of „Oliver Twist“ with guns and magic.

the amount of damage they can sustain.

Talents

Talents are special abilities, characters can acquire during their careers. The following list contains a few examples for talents, but GMs and players (with the GM's approval) may add new talents.

Animal Handler

This talent allows a character to befriend animals and even teach them tricks. In order to befriend a wild animal a Social check with at least 2 successes are needed. In the case of domesticated animals, one success is sufficient.

Feather Fall

This talent allows the character to spend one point of Heroism to reduce falling damage. Falling damage is reduced to 1d6 per 4 meters of fall.

Flourish

For spending one point of Heroism, your next melee attack that can't be parried nor dodged.

Heroic Aura

A character's Heroism may affect his looks and his effect on other people. These changes are different depending on the moral choices the character has taken. A good character looks slightly angelic while an evil character looks slightly demonic. When channeling Heroism these changes become more obvious. Heroes with this talent may add Heroism to Social checks.

Heroic Rejuvenation

Real heroes are hard to kill. When a character with this talent drops to zero W he has the option to forfeit the use of Heroism for the rest of the session in exchange to be fully healed instantly. All enemies are pushed back 5 meters and the characters glows in bright light for one turn.

Piercing shot

For spending one point of Heroism, your next ranged attack ignores the targets armor.

Spellweaver

Characters may combine the effects of two spell gauntlets worn. Whenever they cast a spell using spellweaving the additional effects of both spells apply. The spell bonuses don't add, but the highest one is always added to the Magic ability check.

Weapon Familiarity

This talent allows the character to add +2 to any attack made by one weapon type of his choice. This talent may be taken twice, once for a melee weapon and once for a ranged weapon.

Running Arcane Heroes

Arcane Heroes is meant to be epic and cinematic. The characters are larger-than-life swashbuckling heroes with ancient magic at their disposal. The heroes in this game are members of ancient bloodlines that are truly different from the Average Joe.

But in recent times the heroes of old have almost be forgotten. The industrial revolution and always that followed in its wake have changed the known lands and its people. The player characters should be shining beacons of hope (or despair) in a gloomy and downtrodden world.

The rules leave a lot open for interpretation for the GM. This approach harkens back to the old days, where GM ruling where more important than rules. Don't feel intimidated by this and try to make the game your own. If there's something unclear in the rules, decide what makes sense to you and go along with it.

Non-combat hazards

In a game like Arcane Heroes characters shouldn't

Designer's Note:

Arcane Heroes should be fully playable but still lacks a few things to be really „complete“. Game masters should feel free to change the rules as they see fit and add anything they think the game lacks!

be killed by poisons and diseases, so you won't find any rules for this in this document.

Fire damage is one W per round exposed to the flames. It continues to burn for one additional round even after you left the flames.

Suffocation/drowning works similar but there's no lingering effect.

For generating falling damage roll 1d6 per 2 meters fallen. Each success causes one W. The falling character may reduce this damage by a Health check. Armor does not apply.

Monsters and Adversaries

The monster and NPC stat blocks below only list the abilities important for each character. If an ability is not listed it can be considered zero for monsters and one for humans. Exception is Magic which is always zero if not listed.

Monsters can attack with all of their weapons per turn. Human adversaries can only use one attack per turn.

Dog

Melee 3, Health 2, Athletics 3; Wounds: 6, Attack bite +2.

Men's best friend.

Wolf

Melee 4, Health 3, Athletics 4; Wounds: 7, Attack bite +2.

Wolves usually hunt in packs of 2d6 animals.

Lycanthrope

Melee 7, Health 5, Athletics 5; Wounds: 15, Attack bite +3, claws +5.

These bipedal wolf-like creatures are extremely dangerous but are luckily only encountered in cursed forest. Legends say that only silver weapons can defeat them.

Skeleton

Melee 3, Ranged 2, Health 3, Athletics 2; Wounds: 8
These animated corpses can wield any weapon and wear any armor. They are usually encountered on ancient battlefields or near defiled graveyards.

Gnome

Melee 3, Ranged 3, Health 2, Athletics 3; Wounds: 7
Gnomes are small, squat, malicious creatures with dwell in underground caves and tunnels. They can use all kinds of weapons and armor.

Gnome Shaman

Melee 2, Ranged 2, Magic 3, Health 3, Athletics 3; Wounds: 8, Attack: Fireball (see Fire spell for description), Summon skeletons (allows to summon 1d6 skeletons per encounter)

Gnome shamans are the leaders of these creatures. While they are still unbelievably dumb compared to any human they can perform several spells.

Bandit

Melee 3, Ranged 3, Health 3, Stealth 2, Athletics 3; Wounds: 8

Bandits usually ambush traders and other unwary travellers in groups of 1d6+2 bandits. Most bandits wear leather jackets and wield swords or rifles.

Soldier

Melee 2, Ranged 4, Health 4, Athletics 3; Wounds: 9

The common soldier wears an uniform and carries a rifle for ranged combat and a dagger for close combat

Officer

Melee 2, Ranged 4, Health 4, Lore 2, Social 2, Athletics 3; Wounds: 9

Army officers wear slightly more elaborate uniforms and wield both swords and pistols.

Designer's Note:

The monsters listed above are only an example of what kinds of creatures the characters may encounter during their travels. GMs shall feel free to add more monsters and NPCs as they see fit.