E6

The Game Inside the World's Most Popular Roleplaying Game

v 0.4.1

BY RYAN STOUGHTON

CREDITS

WRITING: Ryan Stoughton

LAYOUT: J.A. Dettman

The original EN World thread from which this document was transcribed is available at the following URL:

http://www.enworld.org/showthread.php?t=200754

DESIGNATION OF OPEN CONTENT
All text in this document is declared Open Content, as per Section 15 of the Open Gaming License.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS E6?
Earlier this year Ryan Dancey suggested that d20 has four distinct quartiles of play:

Levels 1-5: Gritty fantasy
Levels 6-10: Heroic fantasy
Levels 11-15: Wuxia
Levels 16-20: Superheroes

There's been some great discussion about how to define those quartiles, and how each different quartile suited some groups better than others.

E6 is a game about those first 2 quartiles, and as a result, it has fewer rules, a low-magic flavor, and it is quick and easy to prepare. I have playtested the system extensively with my crew, and it works as intended. There seems to be a lot of lively debate about ***E6***, and some real interest in how it works, so I've revised it here.

HOW E6 WORKS
Like *the World's Most Popular Roleplaying Game*, ***E6*** is a game of enigmatic wizards, canny rogues, and mighty warriors who rise against terrible dangers and overcome powerful foes. But instead of using 20 levels to translate characters into the rules, ***E6*** uses only the first 6. ***E6*** is about changing one of d20 fantasy's essential assumptions, but despite that it doesn't need a lot of rules to do so.

In ***E6***, the stats of an average person are the stats of a 1st-level commoner. Like their medieval counterparts, this person has never travelled more than a mile from their home. Imagine a 6th-level Wizard or 6th-level Fighter from the commoner's perspective. The wizard could kill everyone in your village with a few words. The fighter could duel with ten armed guards in a row and kill every one of them. If you spot a manticore, everyone you know is in terrible, terrible danger. Against such a creature, the wizard or fighter may be your only hope. ***E6*** recognizes that 6th level characters are mortal, while providing a context where they are epic heroes.

Levels 1 to 6 was the period where a character comes into his own, where a crash course in action and danger transforms them from 1st-level commoners into capable fighting men (or corpses). Once transformed by their experiences, a character's growth is no longer a continuous, linear progression. There are still major differences between the master warriors and the veteran mercenaries, but it's not a change of scale.

RULES

Character progression from level 1 to level 6 is as per *the World's Most Popular Roleplaying Game*. Upon attaining 6th level, for each 5000 experience a character gains, they earn a new feat. A diverse selection of feats should be made available in any ***E6*** campaign, however, feats with unattainable prerequisites under this system remain unattainable.

For the purpose of experience awards, treat each 5 feats as +1 CR (or level), to an upper limit of 20 feats. After this, a ratio of 10 feats to 1 CR can be used, as it becomes more and more difficult to bring all a character's feats to bear in a given situation. Alternatively, and at the GM's option, player-characters with more than 20 feats can simply be always treated as if they were level 10 for experience and challenge purposes.

FOR THE GM

E6 isn't just a change for the players: Monsters are presented differently than in d20. Just as level 6 parties in *the World's Most Popular Roleplaying Game* aren't expected to tangle with monsters higher than CR 10, the mighty monsters of ***E6*** require special consideration for presentation in-game. ***E6*** characters aren't intended to go up against high-level threats under the same circumstances as high-level characters; those creatures, if they can be defeated at all, require the kind of resources and planning far beyond the typical encounter.

In terms of raw rules, CR 7-10 monsters are an excellent guide for what ***E6*** characters can handle. As they rise to around the 20-feat range, the range is more like 7-12. Beyond that, a DM should take monsters in the CR 7-12 range and use feats (and to a lesser extent templates) to advance them. Hit die or class-based advancement beyond CR 12, or base monsters above CR 12 should generally be avoided as straight-up fights.

Of course, not every monstrous encounter is a straight-up fight. For example, insane horrors from another age might be a reason to run, and there is little a character could do in the face of an angry Titan. But these situations don't call for direct confrontation, except with some special resource or amazing circumstance. Perhaps, in a special ritual with the presence of 20 mages, a Titan can be bound to the mortal realm (lowering its stats to an Aspect of Kord), with whom the players can do battle. Again, that's far from a straight-up fight with a CR 20 creature, but we can console ourselves with the fact that it's probably a very memorable encounter.

If, as a result of the restrictions on items, an item cannot be created, then it should not be distributed as normal treasure. Like high-level monsters, such items should be placed carefully and built to make sense in the context of your game. For example,

BENEFITS OF E6

1. Very fast play at every level of the campaign.

2. Focus on planning, not leveling. To defeat the black dragon Zolanderos, the CR 10 terror of Staunwark Island, the heroes will need help, special resources, and information. I want to further encourage party-directed adventuring, and if the heroes want to take on something 4 to 6 CR above them, then that's what they will require.

3. A low magic game that everyone knows how to play.

4. Never a need for meaningless encounters. The players can be involved in a dozen or so major combat scenarios (perhaps more than one encounter each) and have proven themselves and made a major accomplishment. See Lord of the Rings movies, or most fantasy novels.

5. Classic monsters stay classic throughout the campaign; Chimeras and Aboleths start scary, and stay scary. Dragons are always exciting encounters.

a +4 sword can't be made by a human wizard, but it could be crafted by a Titan (which makes for great god-stats). That's a sword that no mortal can make.

E6 will always inherit d20's balance issues at the same level, especially issues that result from scenarios where characters have long periods of downtime. The best approach is to be cognizant of these issues when considering what feats to allow in your ***E6*** game.

ON ALLOWING FEATS

There are 3 philosophies on what feats to allow in an ***E6*** game, each more generous than the last:

1) The Cautious Approach
2) The Gestalt Approach
3) The Lean Upward Approach

The Cautious Approach is exactly what it sounds like – a GM chooses what feats to allow in his ***E6*** game very, very carefully. This GM does not make exceptions or new feats to accommodate players chaacter concepts - he chooses what feats to allow and the players agree to work within that framework.

The Gestalt Approach dictates that if an ability can be learned under 6th level, then it's learnable via some chain of feats. The Gestalt Approach usually means all WotC sources are available, as well as a few extra feats to provide ways to learn class features. These can be done on an ad-hoc basis for a given player or they can be gathered from sources like the Book of Unusual Feats. The Gestalt theory is the one used in playtesting.

The Lean Upward Approach looks at the Gestalt Approach and says "6th level plus many feats is clearly more powerful than 6th level. Thus, it won't be game-breaking to allow feat chains that bring characters from 6th level to 8th level, although this progression should be quite slow." GMs who like the Lean Upward approach might have feats to bring BAB to +8, or to gain 4th level spells, or 8th level class features, additional hit dice, and so on.

EXTRA FEATS

I consider these feats to be necessary even with the Cautious Approach; along with the SRD feats, they provide for a minimal level of continuing advancement for ***E6*** characters, and address issues like removing negative levels.

Expanded Spell Knowledge

Benefit: You learn new spell(s) whose level equals half your caster level (round down, and treat a new 0th-level spell as ½). Thus, a sixth level Sorcerer could learn one 3rd level spell, one 1st and one 2nd level spells, three 1st level spells, or 6 0th-level spells.

Expanded Spell Knowledge [General]

Benefit: You learn 1 or more new spells known, with spell levels totalling to half of your caster level (round down, and treat a new 0th-level slot as ½). Thus, a sixth level Sorcerer could gain one 3rd level spell known, one 1st and one 2nd level spell, three 1st level spells, or 6 0th-level spells. This feat cannot provide spells known of a level higher than you can already cast.

Special: You may take this feat multiple times; each time you take it it provides more slots.

Expanded Caster Stamina [General]

Prerequisite: Character Level 6th

Benefit: You gain 1 or more new spell slots, with spell levels totalling to half of your caster level. Treat 0th level spells as ½. Thus, a sixth level Wizard could gain one 3rd level slot, one 1st and one 2nd level slot, three 1st level slots, or 6 0th-level slots. This feat cannot provide spell slots higher than you can already cast.

Special: You may take this feat multiple times; each time you take it it provides more slots.

Restoration
Prerequisites: 6th level, ability to cast 3rd-level divine spells, Wisdom 18, Healing 9 Ranks
Benefit: You can use Restoration, as the spell (paying the material component), with a casting time of 1 hour.

Stone to Flesh
Prerequisites: 6th level, ability to cast 3rd-level arcane spells, Intelligence 18, Craft (Alchemy) 9 Ranks
Benefit: You can use stone to flesh, as the spell, with an expensive and secret magical ingredient with a market value of 1000 gp and a casting time of 1 day.

Wondrous Rings
Prerequisites: 6th level, Craft Wondrous Item
Benefit: You treat rings as wondrous items for the purpose of meeting item creation prerequisites. You must still meet caster level requirements for any ring you create.

EXTRA FEATS FOR ABILITY ADVANCEMENT
If you want your characters to be able to improve their abilities slightly above their natural aptitudes, then you can use the following:

Ability Training
You spend time honing one of your Abilities: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.
Benefit: Choose one Ability; you qualify for the Ability Advancement feat for that Ability.
Special: You can gain this feat multiple times, its effects do not stack. Each time you take this feat it applies to another ability.

Ability Advancement
Your training pays off, and one of your Abilities increases.
Benefit: Choose one Ability. You gain a permanent +2 bonus to that ability.
Special: You can gain this feat multiple times, its effects do not stack. Each time you take this feat it applies to another ability.

BENEFITS OF E6 (continued)

6. Even legendary heroes remain mortal; while a 6th level fighter who has taken toughness several times can take on a good mob, he isn't invulnerable. The sorcerer's 6d6 fireballs are phenomenal, but not so powerful that he can destroy a village and not fear retaliation.

7. Quicker prep. Make a 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 6th version of a sorcerer, and now you have a whole sorcerous dragon-cult that can last you through your whole campaign.

8. You can put what you've learned of the rules to good use. It's hard to know every 4th through 9th level spell out there; they're the ones we see the least. But we've seen 0th through 3rd level spells many, many times, and mastery over them is relatively simple.

9. E6 is a great system for on the fly GMing. If you're reasonably familiar with what a 2nd level threat looks like, power-wise, you can probably get away with running it without stats handy.

FAQ

Using E6

Q: So characters just stop leveling at 6?
A: That's right. Characters who have reached level 6 have proven themselves, but this extremely rapid growth does not go on forever. Instead, they master specialized techniques, or become more versatile. This stage of a character's development is represented by gaining new feats.

Q: Does ***E6*** change the stacking rules? For example, can I take Weapon Focus twice and have it stack? Can I take Skill Focus twice and have it stack?
A: The stacking rules remain the same as in standard d20.

Q: What if I want there to be a higher level magical effect, but still use ***E6***?
A: The rules for rituals in Unearthed Arcana are an excellent fit for ***E6***, to support things like opening portals to another dimension, higher-level divinations, and so on. When a spell is a 3-day event requiring 20 mages, it's more of a plot point than a spell itself, and that maeks it a great a springboard for challenging the players.

Q: As a DM, I like running things on the fly. Can ***E6*** support that kind of play?
A: Absolutely. A DM that knows how to estimate the abilities of enemies in the low-level range can use that knowledge throughout the campaign. Likewise, familiarity breeds mastery – and for feats, spells, and monsters, there is more chance for a DM to become familiar with abilities in an appropriate range to the PCs, even if he is using a diverse selection of monsters. Furthermore, Dungeon Masters can get much more mileage out of their previous work: The stats of a 5th-level sorcerer written for 4th level PCs is still a useful tool months of gametime later against characters who are 6th level +10 feats.

Q: Can you make high-level items as a low-level caster in ***E6***?
A: No, caster level requirements for magic items are treated as hard requirements.

Q: If a character took multiple classes, or Prestige Classes, suddenly you've got a guy with saves that are seriously out of whack. Is this a game-breaking issue?

A: If you multiclass that much, you're probably doing it to get the saves. In that situation, your saves are your special ability. Moreover, saves are passive abilities; the player doesn't control when their character uses a save, which gives them limited appeal compared to stuff the player can control. So if a player goes after them like crazy, and succeeds in having really exceptional saves – let them have their fun.

Q: I prefer stopping at around 8th level, does that work for this system?

A: The system will probably work about as well at 8th level, but note that "Epic 6th" characters do end up being more powerful than regular 6th level characters. Epic 6th may be what you want for a game that sits at the power level for Level 8, and Epic 8th may cater more closely to Level 10 style play.

Q: Does ***E6*** work with a slower progression to level 6? Does it work when characters are created at 2nd level?

A: Yes and yes. I've tried both during my playtesting period. I'll be starting my new game at 3rd level.

Q: I'm not a big fan of experience points. Do you need a strict XP system to make ***E6*** work?

A: An ad-hoc "gain a feat" approach would work absolutely 100% with this system. I used to do that with other systems (power up when the story makes it appropriate) and given the fact that the upper end of the power curve flattens off, that method should go very smoothly with ***E6***.

Q: Can you use Prestige Classes with ***E6***?

A: I'd recommend taking the same approach you take in your regular d20 game. If you allow Prestige Classes there, feel free to allow them here. Of course, characters capped at 6th level can usually take at most 1 level of a Prestige Class.

Q: With only 6 levels, how do races with a level adjustment work?

A: If you use races with a level adjustment, the 6th level cap is a big issue. Use the point buy rules in the DMG as follows:

LA	POINT BUY
+0	32
+1	25
+2	18
+3	10
+4	00

Thus, +LA races should start with zero LA, but use the point buy listed here. Keep in mind the difference between LA and racial hit dice (the two combine to give starting ECL).

WHY IS E6 DESIGNED THIS WAY?

Q: Where did ***E6*** come from?

A: ***E6*** was inspired by the article Gandalf was a Fifth-Level Magic User by Bill Seligman. The article was published in The Dragon (which became Dragon magazine) in issue #5, March 1977. When I first had the concept of ***E6***, where we used the first six levels for the whole game, my very first step was pitching it to my players. Some thought it was a great idea, and the rest were willing to give it a try, so I gave it a shot. ***E6*** worked really well for our tastes, and we've done lots of playing inside ***E6*** since then. Back then ***E6*** was a lot more convoluted than it is now: there were intricate quasi-gestalt rules and several other little things that weren't so much about the cap as they were about my group's thoughts on class balance. Over time, we found that the only rules we were really using (on both sides of the screen) were the feat rules, and that was producing a great play experience. So when I returned to ***E6*** just recently, that's how I wrote it up: As it was actually played.

Q: Why 6th level for the cap? Why not 12th, or 20th?

A: My experience with the d20 system is that at around 6th level the characters are really nicely balanced, both in terms of balance against other classes, and against the CR system. Also, there was an element of setting assumptions; each class is strong enough that they're well defined in their role, but not so strong that lower-level characters don't matter to them any more.

Q: How did you arrive at the cost of 5000 xp per feat post 6th level?

A: Originally, I considered that if I wasn't giving level 7, maybe 2 feats for the same price would be a good comprimise (3000xp / feat). That way they would have this great feeling of advancement without popping the top off the power level." But in play, the players found it was so fast that they did not have time to enjoy their new abilities. There just wasn't time in-game for their characters to grow, so I upped the cost to 5000 xp, and it works like a charm.

Q: Why not use [system of character points / experience purchases / incremental gestalt rules] instead of ***E6***?

A: Feats, if they don't work out in a particular case, are less controversial to tweak than, say, the XP table. If you find out that the XP table, or stats, or whatever else you've changed doesn't work for some players, it's a big deal to change it because it then affects everyone - and sometimes has effects that cascade through the system.

I have found that if a feat is too good, it's not that big a deal to say "Hey Ned, I think the feat I made for you is too good, but I don't want to take it away from you. I think it should have a prerequisite, like Skill Focus (Knowledge - nature) instead of being straight-up available. I'd like to leave you with it but say that your next feat needs to be that knowledge thing, rather than take it away now. We could do that, or if you want you could swap it out for something else. What do you think?"

It's important to me to keep the rule changes minimal, because players really don't want to read a lot outside of the game and they get frustrated if there's too many house rules.

2 years ago (before ***E6*** was called ***E6***) I worked up these complex gestalt XP-buy rules, but eventually my players and I realized that with all the options available all that was really getting used were feat purchasing, because they were so easy to approach.

Q: Why not just stop advancement at 6th, and have characters just not advance after that, or slow experience down so much that you can game for years and never get higher than 6th level?

A: In my experience, players prefer to have characters that can grow – and have that growth reflected in the mechanics of the game.

Q: I like high-magic, high-powered campaigns. Is ***E6*** for me?

A: Probably not. Just as d20 fantasy can't be all things to all groups, E6 caters to a specific set of tastes.

OPEN GAMING LICENSE

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a)"Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b)"Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d)"Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.
2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.
3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.
4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.
5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.
6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.
7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.
8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.
9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.
10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.
11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.
12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.
13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.
14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

System Reference Document Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

E6: The Game Inside the World's Most Popular Game
Copyright 2007, Ryan Stoughton.; Author Ryan Stoughton