

ZERO DAY RULES

by Arnold Kemp, December 2013

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Dungeon Masters:

This is just a naked character creation packet. It explains how to create a level 1 character and get rolling on the day of the game, but absolutely nothing else. It is assumed that the DM is a badass who can explain the other rules on the fly. This document also hopes to explain a couple of the distinctions that trip up new players (like ability score vs ability bonus).

The rules are shamefully minimal adaptation of an already-minimal game, but it's not so barebones that these characters couldn't easily plug into other retroclones.

Players:

Don't think that just because these rules are simple that the game is straightforward. There are many examples of RPGs that are clogged with rules that make it more complicated (or realistic) without making it more tactical (or giving you more options in combat). The choices that players make in old-school games (like this one) are the choices of heroes in action movies (should I swim to the other boat or try to scare the pirate?) and not a chess player (should I move forward 4 spaces or 5 spaces?)

If you haven't played a tabletop RPG before, just know that it's sort an imagination-powered adventure game. Instead of dividing the world up into a grid and giving you 4 specific options per turn (e.g. Final Fantasy Tactics), this game aspires to give you a wide-open world to explore. Your choices are modulated by your character (whether you are strong or dextrous or wise), but at the same time, if something would be a good idea in real life, it's also going to be a good idea in this game.

If you have played tabletop RPGs before, this might be a departure for you. It's less of a tactical challenge and more of a creativity engine. Combat is fast and deadly. The lack of skill system means that problems must be approached with common sense. And encounters aren't balanced, so running away is sometimes the best option.

DICE SHORTHAND

We'll abbreviate different dice using the convention of XdY, where X is the number of the dice and Y is the size of the dice. So, if you see 3d6, that means to roll a trio of six-sided dice and sum the results.

RACE

You'll notice that certain classes affect how your ability scores are generated. That'll be covered in the next section. Don't worry if you don't understand all this at first. All of the mechanics mentioned here will be explained in the next 5 pages.

Humans

Since humans made this game, they're the most generic and versatile. When rolling ability scores for a human, you may reroll one AND switch two (instead of just one or the other).

Dwarves

+1 Constitution, -1 Charisma.
Speed 3 (other races have speed 4) but your speed can never drop below 2.
Dwarves get +2 to save against poison and disease.
They can "see" heat (infravision), so all penalties for darkness are halved.

Elves

+1 Intelligence, -1 Constitution
Elves get +2 to save against magic and paralysis, but -2 to save against disease.
Once per day, they can speak with plants.

Halflings (Hobbits)

+1 Dexterity, -1 Strength
Weapons and armor must be small sized (human armor = no, goblin armor = yes).
They can fit in small places and get no penalties for fighting in cramped quarters.
Halflings are lucky, and get +1 to save against everything.

Deciding On a Race

Race is meant to help you define your character strongly without having a huge impact on your ability to fulfill your character concept. If a player really wants to make a Dwarven archer, they shouldn't be penalized for it.

Here's another tip: ability scores don't matter that much (player skill does). So think less about how to build the perfect fighting machine and more about how to build the character you think you'd have the most fun playing.

ABILITY SCORES

Even before you learned any skills, you had some defining characteristics. Maybe you were stronger than other people, or smarter. These things are represented by your Ability Scores. You have 6 of them.

Strength is being able to crush a tomato.

Dexterity is being able to dodge a tomato, or throw one.

Constitution is being able to eat a bad tomato.

Intelligence is knowing that a tomato is a fruit.

Wisdom is knowing not to put a tomato in a fruit salad, or notice the tomato before you eat the salad.

Charisma is being able to sell a tomato-based fruit salad.

We'll assign each of these a value by rolling 3d6 for each one, in order. So, each ability score should be between 3 and 18, with an average of 10.5.

And because you should have some flexibility you may either:

- reroll one ability score, OR
- switch two ability scores

After you finalize your ability scores, you can apply your racial ability score modifiers.

We'll use your ability scores to modulate play. For example, stronger characters have a better chance to knock down a door, so we'll factor your Strength into those roll-based calculations.

However, each ability score is a large number, and isn't convenient to add and subtract all the time, so we'll also have a thing called an ability score modifier, which is like a smaller reflection. Each ability score modifier is calculated like this:

Raw Score	3 or less	4 to 8	9 to 12	13 to 17	18 or more
Modifier	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2

Notice that each ability score has a **Raw Score**, which is different from the **Modifier**. Your DM may ask you to roll under your raw scores for certain things, while the modifier is usually applied to different kinds of d20 rolls.

Here's an example of a completed set of ability scores (and modifiers):

Strength	12	
Dex	13	(+1)
Con	7	(-1)
Int	16	(+1)
Wis	9	
Cha	11	

MORE ESSENTIAL NUMBERS

Everyone has a few more numbers associated with their character. We'll calculate these now.

Hit Points

Also, known as HP, this can better be described as “don't-get-hit points”. They represent your ability to dodge, parry, duck, and avoid incoming damage. Some hit points are flesh wounds, that bleed on your tunic. Others tire out your shield arm. Either way, once you are out of HP, all damage becomes lethal, since you can no longer defend yourself. Your DM may allow you to reroll 1s or 2s, but here is the traditional method:

Your HP = $1d6 +/\cdot$ your Constitution modifier.

Save

In the olden days, if a deathspider bit you, you died. Saving throws were invented to give character's second chances, and represent your ability to escape a near death situation by sheer luck or force of personality. If your DM says, “make a save” that means to roll a d20. If the result is less-than-or-equal to your Save value, you succeed, and avoid a terrible fate.

Your Save = $6 +/\cdot$ your Charisma modifier.

Melee and Ranged Attack

This represents how accurate your attacks are in combat. When you want to attack someone, roll a d20 and add your melee attack bonus (if you are making a melee attack). If the result is greater-than-or-equal to the target's Armor Class, the attack hits, and you roll for damage.

Melee Attack Bonus = Strength modifier. (usually used for melee attacks)

Ranged Attack Bonus = Dexterity modifier. (usually used for ranged attacks)

Armor Class (AC)

This number represents how well you can avoid getting hit in combat. The higher the better.

Your AC = $10 +$ Dexterity modifier + Armor + Held Item

Armor values can vary between 2 (for leather armor) to 6 (for plate mail).

Held items can help you parry blows.

- Any reasonable object can help you defend. Even a dagger (or a toaster) gives you +1 AC.
- Shields are even better, and give you +2 AC.

Be aware, however, that wearing heavier armor slows you down, and makes it harder to escape combat.

CLASS

What sort or role do you play in the party? What's your background? Pick one.

Warrior

+1 HP

+1 to attack rolls

1/day, you may sacrifice a held item to avoid an enemy blow

Cleric

You have a faith point that you can use to pray for stuff. It regenerates every day.

Things you can pray for:

Healing Heal someone for 1d6+1 HP or give them a new save vs poison.

Remove Curse Has a chance to remove a curse from an object or person.

Blessing Give someone +1 to hit and damage for 1 hour.

Omens Your god grants you a vision of future events and perils.

Turn Undead Undead creatures flee from your holiness.

This is for a generic cleric. If you want to make a cleric for a different sort of god, talk to your DM about either adding to these 5 abilities or replacing some of them.

Wizard

You can memorize one spell per day. Casting the spell causes you to forget it.

Your spellbook will contain 1d3 of the following spells, determined randomly.

1 - Sleep Put multiple adjacent foes to sleep.

2 - Detect Magic Magical things glow for a few seconds.

3 - Magic Missile Deals 1d4+1 damage to a foe. Never misses, even at range.

4 - Lock/Unlock Instantly lock or unlock something.

5 - Create Fire Light a torch or set something on fire.

6 - Invisibility Become invisible for 1 minute or until you touch someone.

This is for a generic wizard. If you want to be a different sort of wizard, talk to your DM about starting with different spells than the above list.

Thief

You deal double damage when you backstab someone.

You have an improved chance of doing the following things:

Climbing, Picking Pockets, Moving Silently, Hiding in Shadows, Picking Locks
(Not *much* of an improved chance, though. . . so don't depend on thief skills.)

Creating an Off-Label Character

The races and classes presented above are both awesome and pretty classic. Trivia: the original game had only three classes (the Thief came later). But if these don't appeal to you, talk to your DM. Want to be a elf who can turn into a ferret? That's not going to break the game. The DM will probably say yes, and help you hammer out the details.

HEALING

Don't think that you need a healer. You can benefit from each of these 1/day.

Sleeping for the night will restore your HP to full.

Eating Lunch will also restore your HP to full. This takes an hour.

Drinking booze can restore 1d4 HP.

Inspiration (speeches, compliments, slapping a dying guy and shouting "Live! Damn you! You've got to LIVE!") can also restore 1d4 HP.

WEAPONS

Quick Weapons

These use your Dex bonus to attack, and deal 1d6 damage.

Daggers can be thrown.

Stiletos can be easily concealed.

Medium Weapons

These use either your Dex or Str bonus to attack, and deal 1d6 +/- Str damage.

Clubs can be used to knock creatures unconscious.

Swords get +1 to hit humanoids.

Axes deal 3x damage on a crit.

Warhammers deal 2x damage to prone (laying down) targets.

Spears can be thrown.

Powerful Weapons

These use your Str bonus to attack, use 2 hands, and deal 1d8 +/- Str damage.

They also have long reach, which allows you to attack over an ally's back.

Longspears can be readied against a charge, dealing 2x damage if they hit.

Halberds deal 3x damage on a crit.

What to do with Your Other Hand

An empty hand can pick things up or use an item on your belt (e.g. a potion).

You can hold a torch for those dark places.

You can hold your weapon with a double-handed grip and do +1 damage.

You can hold a second weapon and get +1 to hit.

You can hold a shield and get +1 to Armor Class.

You can cast a spell, if you are a wizard.

PLAYING THE GAME

There are three basic types of rolls your DM will have you make to interact with the game. There are others, but these are probably the most common.

Attack rolls are used to determine if you successfully hit a target. You will roll a d20, add your melee attack bonus or ranged attack bonus (as appropriate) and compare your result to the target's armor class (AC). If this sum (your attack roll) is at least as high as your target's AC, the attack hits and you will roll damage based on the weapon. Attacks against you are made against your AC, which is why armor is so good to have (since it increases your AC).

Stat checks are made when you are interacting with the world in other ways (aside from trying to hit it). This is used for actions whose outcome is uncertain. So if you are trying to pick up a rock, the rock is either (a) so small that it's automatic, (b) so huge it's impossible, or (c) challenging but possible, so a strength check is required.

Saves are rolled when something terrible happens to you. They sometimes allow you to escape certain death, like when giant black widow bites you. To make a save, just roll a d20 and get a result equal to your Save value or lower.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

That's all you need for your first session. Things like starting gold and equipment can be handled then.

The most important thing to remember when playing is that common sense always trumps the rules. Your DM should also explain the rules before you commit to any action in the game, so don't if you don't understand something, ask.

Gameplay will occur as the DM explains what sort of situation your characters are in, then you will describe what actions you wish your characters to take. Some actions are impossible, some actions are automatic, and everything else in between is resolved with the dice.

When roleplaying your character interacting with NPCs (non-player characters), think about their motivations. What do they want? What do they fear? NPCs in the game will act according to their instincts and personalities, so treat them that way.

It's an adventure, so go do adventurous things! If you fuck up and die, it only takes 5 minutes to roll up a new character, so you won't be out of the action for long.

And always, always remember that most of your choices aren't written down on your character sheet. There's a whole world out there.

NAME

RACE

CLASS

XP

HP

ARMOR CLASS

SAVE

STRENGTH

DEXTERITY

CONSTITUTION

INTELLIGENCE

WISDOM

CHARISMA

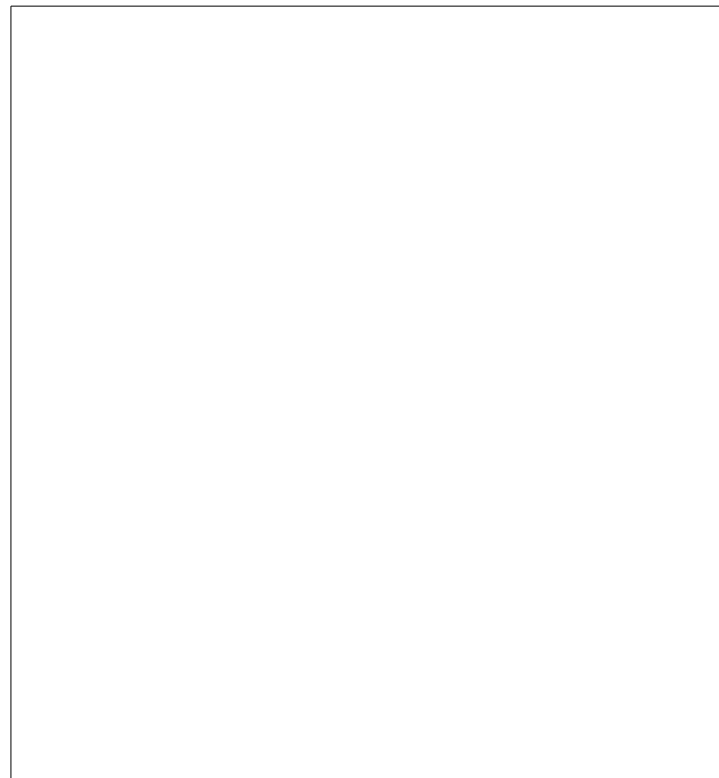
MELEE ATTACK BONUS

SPECIAL ABILITIES

WEAPONS

WEALTH

PORTRAIT



RANGED ATTACK BONUS

INVENTORY