

# Zero Space : Introduction

**zerospace**

*noun*

the gravitational center of a Lorentzian manifold.

## What Is This?

*ZeroSpace* is a space fantasy game which takes place in a vast interstellar empire populated by thousands of strange and wonderful aliens. *ZeroSpace* is only "science fiction" in the loosest sense: any scientific basis for the weapons, vehicles, or aliens is merely to provide a sense of verisimilitude to the setting.

Play is very loose, and players are encouraged to take initiative rather than simply hanging around and waiting for someone to kick in the door. Players are also encouraged to flesh out the setting and be creative, rather than passively accepting what has already been described.

## What Is A Roleplaying Game?

Every roleplaying game has a section at the beginning that attempts to explain what a roleplaying game is, and *ZeroSpace* is no exception. So let's get started! As trivial as it sounds, two distinct elements set "roleplaying games" apart from other things which are not roleplaying games: roleplaying and game play.

First, a roleplaying game involves *roleplaying*. Generally speaking, roleplaying involves taking on a persona or character and making decisions based on what that character would do in a given situation. Does having a character in a game, by itself, make that a roleplaying game? No. The little dog token in a Monopoly game and a Blood Elf in World Of Warcraft are both characters, but Monopoly and World Of Warcraft are not roleplaying games. Can you roleplay as a dog while playing Monopoly? Yes, and you can roleplay as an elf while playing World Of Warcraft. What keeps these from being roleplaying games is that the *roleplaying* is not part of the *game* -- you can't get your Monopoly dog out of jail through unscripted conversation with the jailer, nor can you use roleplaying to convince a cultist in World Of Warcraft to let you pass by without a fight. If the rules of the game do not allow for the possibility that a conflict *could* be resolved through unscripted conversation (however unlikely that might be), then it isn't a roleplaying game.

Second, a roleplaying game is a *game*. Roleplaying games are sometimes compared to improvisational theatre, and there are similarities, but improv theatre isn't a game. How can you tell if something is a game? Games have rules that govern things like conflicts between players and whether something a player attempts is successful. Improv theatre is fun, but there aren't any rules like this. As Drew Carey described "Whose Line Is It Anyway?", it's "the show where everything's made up and the points don't matter." It's fun, but it's not a game, and therefore it's not a roleplaying game.

*ZeroSpace* has more rules than some games, but less than others, and an essential part of conflict resolution involves making decisions that your character would make under the circumstances. Maybe those decisions aren't the most tactically advantageous, but if they are true to what your character would do, and if you are having fun playing, then you are playing correctly, because that's what *ZeroSpace* is all about.

If you would like to read more about who plays roleplaying games, and why and where they play them, check out [The Escapist -- The Five Ws of RPGs](#).

## The Players

In a roleplaying game, each player adopts a persona called a player character, or "PC". The player characters are imaginary people who inhabit the fictional world of *ZeroSpace*.

In many ways, the player is like an actor who chooses their own part and writes their own lines as the play progresses. The game moderator sets the stage and introduces the characters to their world, but the story is driven by the player characters.

## The Game Moderator

The game moderator, or "GM", creates the story and portrays everyone that the player characters encounter during their adventures. These are called non-player characters, or "NPCs". The players help create the adventure by responding to the challenges the GM presents and by pursuing the PCs' own goals. This dynamic creative process creates a story which neither the game moderator nor the players could have created alone.

## Ground Rules

A roleplaying game is fundamentally a cooperative activity. The players (one of whom is the Game Moderator) are not in competition. The goal is not to be the most powerful character, or to win every fight. The goal of a role-playing game is to create interesting stories and to entertain everyone at the table. We hope that you are the kind of player that creates interesting characters and enjoys creating stories with your friends.

# Use Common Sense

The single most important piece of advice we can give you is that you should use your common sense. If something in the rules violates the way you think your game should work, then override it. If the rules permit something ridiculous, or would prevent something completely ordinary, then override them. Do not be one of those players who adheres to the letter of the rules in defiance of common sense.

**Don't use the rules unless you need to.**

In fact, if you can play a fun game session without referring to the written rules, you should. Saying "it works like this" is often a better solution than flipping through a rulebook for an answer.

## Avoid Rule Arguments

It is in the nature of any human activity that differences of opinion will arise. We've tried to make the rules for *ZeroSpace* as simple and clear as possible, but there's only so much we can do. Sooner or later, there will be a difference of opinion among the players regarding what a rule means, or how a rule should be implemented. There is nothing wrong with this: discussion and consensus are healthy. However, the time for rule discussions is between games, not during games. If a rule discussion takes longer than 60 seconds, the game moderator should make an executive decision and table additional discussion for later. If players balk, the GM should be civil but firm, and move on.

## Respect Genre Conventions

*ZeroSpace* is a space fantasy game, and being a space fantasy game, it has certain genre conventions. Robert McKee defines genre conventions as the "specific settings, roles, events, and values that define individual genres and their subgenres."

For example, there are no rules for running out of fuel, or for recharging a blaster. It's not that starships do not run out of fuel, or that blasters never need recharging. Of course they do, and if a character intentionally empties their blaster, then the gun runs out of juice just as you'd expect. It's just assumed that they don't normally run out of juice unless there is a dramatic reason for it. The rest of the time, the character is refueling the starship or recharging the blaster when it's convenient to do so.

Another genre convention in *ZeroSpace* is that main characters almost never die, and only when it is for a dramatic reason, while nameless characters go down after a single hit (maybe they die, maybe they don't -- no one cares, because they are nameless characters).

# Core Mechanics

## Rolling Dice

We assign numbers to characters' abilities so that we can tell what they can do. When a character attempts a task, and the outcome is either contested or there is some random element involved, the player rolls 2d6, counts the dots, and adds the result to the character's action value (AV). This roll is compared to 2d6 plus a difficulty value (DV).

### **2d6 + action value vs. 2d6 + difficulty value**

If the player's roll (2d6 + action value) equals or exceeds the target number (2d6 + difficulty value), the character's attempt succeeds. There is no need to roll for routine tasks: characters automatically succeed at routine tasks. Similarly, there is usually no need to roll if there is no penalty for failure and/or no time limit: it might take months, but the character will succeed eventually.

## Attributes

Each character has six attributes which describe their basic physical and mental abilities.

- **Brawn:** physical might, close combat fighting ability, and general hardiness
- **Agility:** coordination, ranged combat fighting ability, and general flexibility
- **Reason:** ability to analyze data, draw conclusions from the facts at hand, and solve problems
- **Presence:** determination, strength of personality, and understanding of the motivations of others
- **Power:** supernatural might, android power level, psychic potential
- **Endurance:** determination and ability to shrug off physical and mental abuse

See the Attributes chapter for more information.

## Skills

Skills allow a character to apply their attributes to solve a specific problem or accomplish a specific task. Skills cost one character point each. Expertise in a skill costs one additional character point, and it grants the character a bonus die to rolls pertaining to that skill.

When a character attempts a skill roll, the character rolls 2d6 and adds their action value (AV). If the character possesses the skill, the action value is equal to the character's relevant attribute, which is often placed in parentheses after the skill name, such as Athletics (Brawn). If the character does not have the skill, the character's attribute is not added to their action value: their action

value is equal to the rating of the equipment they are using, if any.

See the Skills chapter for more information.

# Rounding Fractions

When in doubt, round fractions down.

# Plot Points

Each player begins each game session with one plot point. A player gains a plot point when they do something particularly entertaining or interesting, when one of their character's complications causes a serious problem for them during the game, or when the GM overrides a roll of the dice to make things more difficult for the characters. Plot points are spent to alter the game world, gain a bonus die, or gain an advantage in combat. See the Actions chapter for more information.

# Glossary

## action value (AV)

the character's relevant action attribute, possibly modified by equipment and/or a special ability

## Advisory Council On Interstellar Commerce

hundreds of interstellar corporations; governed by the Directorate

## Agility (AGL)

coordination, ranged combat fighting ability, and general flexibility

## all-out move

base move x 6

## attack bonus

roll an additional die when attempting an attack (another name for "bonus die")

## attack penalty

roll one less die when attempting an attack (another name for "penalty die")

## attack roll

2d6 + attack value; the total is compared to a target number to determine success

## attack value (AV)

the character's relevant attack attribute, possibly modified by equipment and/or a special ability (another name for "action value")

## attribute

the six basic character traits: Brawn, Agility, Reason, Presence, Power, and Endurance

## base move

normal ground movement based on the character's attributes or powers

## base value

the numerical value of an attribute when the character is fully healed and not impaired in any way

bonus die

roll an additional die when attempting a task or in combat

Brawn (BRN)

physical might, close combat fighting ability, and general hardiness

character point

spent to buy attributes, skills, and special abilities for a character

combat roll

2d6 + attack value; the total is compared to a target number to determine success (another name for "attack roll")

defense bonus

roll an additional die when attacked (another name for "bonus die")

defense penalty

roll one less die when attacked (another name for "penalty die")

difficulty value (DV), opposed

the defender's relevant attribute;  $2d6 + \text{difficulty value} = \text{target number}$

difficulty value (DV), unopposed

moderate 3, remarkable 6, extreme 9, inconceivable 12;  $2d6 + \text{difficulty value} = \text{target number}$

Directorate

the ruling body of the Advisory Council On Interstellar Commerce

Dominion

the Infinite Dominion Of His Divine Shadow

double move

base move x 2

Endurance (END)

determination and ability to shrug off physical and mental abuse

expertise

extraordinary competence with a skill, granting a bonus die

game moderator (GM)

the player who sets the story in motion, plays everyone and everything in the game other than the PCs, and arbitrates any disputes

gift

an exceptional ability that a normal human *can* have, but that most humans do not have

His Divine Shadow

immortal deity and ruler of the Infinite Dominion Of His Divine Shadow

Imperium

usually refers to the New Imperium; sometimes refers to the Old Imperium

Infinite Dominion Of His Divine Shadow

a theocratic totalitarian empire ruled by the bureaucratic priesthood of His Divine Shadow

InterSec / Interstellar Security Command / ISC

an independent police organization funded by the members of the Planetary Union

League Of Non-aligned Worlds

a loose association of independent star systems seeking to maintain the sovereignty of its members states

margin of success

the amount by which a roll exceeds the target number

New Imperium

a united empire of tens of thousands of populated worlds

non-player character (NPC)

a fictional character belonging to and controlled by the game moderator

Old Imperium

a former trans-galactic civilization of millions of populated worlds; predecessor of the New Imperium

penalty die

roll one less die when attempting a task or in combat

Planetary Union

a loose alliance of several thousand populated worlds on the fringes of Imperial space

player

a living, breathing person playing the game

player character (PC)

a fictional character belonging to and controlled by a player

plot point

spent to alter the game world, gain a bonus die, or gain an advantage in combat

Power (POW)

supernatural might, android power level, or psychic potential

Presence (PRE)

determination, strength of personality, and understanding of the motivations of others

Reason (REA)

ability to analyze data, draw conclusions from the facts at hand, and solve problems

run

base move x 2 (another name for "double move")

sentient

capable of perception, problem solving, self-awareness, and anticipation of future events; a creature which is sentient; a person

skill roll

2d6 + action value; the total is compared to a target number to determine success

sprint

base move x 6 (another name for "all-out move")

success

a roll that equals or exceeds the target number

target number

the number the player must match or exceed on a roll; 2d6 + difficulty value

Union

the Planetary Union

walk

normal ground movement based on Agility (another name for "base move")

zerospace

the gravitational center of a Lorentzian manifold (or "warp bubble")