# A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ROLEPLAYING

If you are new to role-playing games, please read this section. If you are an experienced player or GM, this section is optional.

Here are a few questions a newcomer to roleplaying might ask. If you have the good fortune of knowing someone who has experience in roleplaying, he or she may have already

* **What is roleplaying?**

Quite simply, roleplaying is taking on the persona of a fictional character in a game with other people who are also taking on these roles. Just think, you get to be your favorite knight, wizard, or spaceman from the movies, TV, or books! This is essentially extemporaneous radio theater where the various players assume characters in a story (hence the term player characters or PCs). Rather than simply acting out well rehearsed parts, however, the players are all simultaneously writing the story! Note that I said radio theater; this is not about acting out your parts on a stage or your backyard or wherever. All the action is in the imaginations of the players as you sit in comfortable surroundings. Figurines and maps may be used as visual aids and are recommended.

* **What is a roleplaying game?**

The definition above may sound like a recipe for chaos as everyone maneuvers his or her action, so the roleplay is governed by the rules of the particular game being played. These rules provide a framework for the actions of each character and are used to determine if the character succeeds at whatever the player directs that character to attempt. For example, if you are playing a character from a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, you may be in a situation where you (acting the part of the character) are faced with a bunch of Imperial Stormtroopers. As your character, you may choose to run away, hide, or fight. The rules, with the aid of random number generators (usually dice, but electronic devices with the right software do the same) determine the success of your action.

* **How does it work?**

This can be the scary part. One person in the game is not a player! Be afraid! Be very afraid! The Game Master (GM)—a generic term, but depending on the game being played it could be the dungeon master, the narrator, the storyteller, the director, the judge, etc—is responsible for making it all work. The players normally play one character each, although they can sometimes have two or three characters. The GM, however, must play all the non-player characters (NPCs), both good guys and bad, determine the storyline, create all the background, describe the setting, and interpret the rules in case of lack of clarity. The GM must work incredibly hard so the players can have a good time. He is not an antagonist, although he will play antagonists. He is an impartial judge (mostly – see the next paragraph) who makes the rules interpretation decisions and informs the players of the outcome—bad or good—of their character’s actions. These responsibilities mean that the GM spends a lot of time developing the game world and thinking up challenging situations to put the characters into. No wonder some gaming groups refer to the GM as “god.” Unless you plan to be the GM in your game, you don’t need to worry about this for now. Just remember, in the game, the GM’s word is Law! (Advice to GMs: when in doubt, rule in favor of the player characters. Remember, everyone’s there to have a good time.)

And that is my short introduction to roleplaying. Most RPGs have more detailed explanations as well as hints and tips for the GM. There are also several books on the subject. The most important things to remember are: Be fair and impartial, except when those random number generators disrupt the story. The GM is not honor-bound to follow the results of the die roll; sometimes he has to sidestep them. Usually, those times are when the rolls are going against the player characters; then it’s generally more preferable to fudge some rolls rather than having the player characters all wiped out. This strategy, though, is not intended to bail out player characters when they act stupid or silly: only when luck seems to fare against them. Alas, there are those rare times when some or all of the player characters may perish, so the GM should not perpetually bail them out.

The following rules may be adapted for use with other roleplaying games rather easily, simply by multiplying or dividing the base stats so they fit the other system. Use the skill, task, and combat resolution rules instead of those given in the other system.

So now it is time to get started. My roleplaying group has developed, stumbled onto, or otherwise obtained a few guiding principles over the years that both experienced and new players would do well to heed:

1. The GM is always right.
2. In case of confusion, refer to rule number one.
3. Keep moving! You’re all targets.

However, the most important principle is: Remember, it’s only a game! Have fun!