

RULES & ROBERTS

A Democratic Roleplaying Game by Molleindustria

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Introduction

Rules & Roberts (R&R) is a roleplaying game that helps players familiarize with Robert's Rule of Order procedures, and collective decision making. Even though it references a classic roleplaying game, R&R is light on mechanics, focuses on collaborative storytelling, and simplifies the work of the Dungeon Master. It requires at least 3 players and a Dungeon Master but it can be played by any number of people.

Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order is a manual establishing procedures for democratic decision making. It is widely used by a range of American organizations, including nonprofit associations, political groups, and trade unions. Being originally conceived in the late 19th century, its language and processes may appear formulaic and inaccessible to the uninitiated.

Gameplay in a nutshell

A group of people roleplay as a group of adventurers in a high fantasy setting. The player characters (or PCs) are heroes determined to bring justice, peace and freedom in a fantastical realm. Being a radically democratic group, all of their actions are methodically debated and agreed upon.

One player assumes the role of Dungeon Master (or DM) and determines all aspects of the imaginary world except for the characters' actions. The DM directs a story (called *campaign*) starting from a predefined agenda. The campaign is a series of dilemmas and challenges the players have to solve together.

The players can also amend the DM decisions following a Robert's Rules of Order process.

After creating the player characters and determining a goal, a game of R&R unfolds following this basic pattern:

- ❖ The DM describes a scene outlined by the campaign agenda.
- ❖ The players can ask for clarifications, such as tangible information about the situation or the environment.
- ❖ A player (in character) introduces a motion proposing an action that their hero, or any other hero, should take.

- ❖ All the players deliberate on the motion, propose amendments, and eventually vote on adopting it.
- ❖ If the motion *carries* (ie majority votes in favor of it) the action is taken and the DM describes the outcome. If the motion *fails*, players have to come up with another motion.
- ❖ If players are dissatisfied with the outcome, they can propose amendments, and vote them effectively overruling the DM.

Example:

Dungeon Master (DM): After traversing the Swamp of Sadness you arrive, still teary eyed, to the entrance of a dungeon. It's located amidst overgrown ruins. Riotous cries come from deep inside, a stench of neglect wafts to the surface. Down the road to the west you see the smoking chimneys of a small village.

Jason: Does the village look human?

DM: It's certainly human-made architecture.

Kate: Does my character, being an academic wizard, know anything about the dungeon?

DM: You recall reading about this place. It used to be a magnificent castle, but after an economic downturn it was abandoned and fell into disrepair. Only the underground dungeons are still used as prisons. The crisis likely increased crime and incarceration.

Michael (playing as Aroris): I want to explore the dungeon!

DM: That would be an action to be introduced as a motion.

Michael (playing as Aroris): I move to enter the dungeon.

Laura (playing as Xyrro): Second.

DM: It is moved that the party enters the dungeon. Aroris, you can start the debate.

Michael (playing as Aroris): First, I don't like prisons and I want to make sure nobody is unjustly incarcerated here. Second, dungeons often contain treasures and exciting adventures.

Jason (playing as Jasonir): I agree but I'd rather stop by the village first. We will check with the local community and maybe find some proper equipment.

Laura (playing as Xyrro): The cries and the lack of guards make me think there is some trouble happening now.

Kate (playing as Kelfir): I move to amend the motion. We enter the dungeon and only look for a guard or a prisoner to talk to.

Laura (playing as Xyrro): Second.

DM: Are there any objections to the amendment? ...The amendment carries. The motion is now to enter the dungeon with the sole intention of talking to its inhabitants. We are back to the discussion.

Jason (playing as Jasonir): We all know that once we enter it, we'll run into troubles. It's problematic to parachute into a community, trying to bring justice without having any clue.

DM: If there aren't any more contributions we can close the debate. The question is on the adoption of the motion to enter the dungeon and talk with somebody.

Those in favor of the motion, raise hands. Three.

Those opposed, raise hands. One.

You may score your Experience Points.

The dungeon is an unlit tunnel of about ten by ten feet. Nobody is around and the turmoil is getting louder. Your eyes are still adjusting to the dark when you hear a rattling noise followed by a loud thump. A heavy metal portcullis has been shut behind you.

Jason (playing as Jasonir): I told you.

Laura (playing as Xyrra): What's a portcullis?

Setup

Playing R&R only requires the campaign agendas, a character sheet for each player and some pencils.

Character creation

Each player imagines an alter ego in the game's fictional world. *Player characters* are also referred to as PCs, while other characters are referred to as *Non Playing Characters* or *NPCs* and are "controlled" by the Dungeon Master.

Your character's personality and background should determine their behavior in the fictional world and during the democratic deliberations. This consistency, even when it diverges from your values and personality in real life, is what makes roleplay fun.

Each campaign should have heroes with a diverse set of races, alignment and classes. Write your heroes' name, race, and pronouns on the character sheet and proceed to define the other features.

For roleplaying purposes you can assign your character a real or imagined ethnicity or even a non-human race (dwarf, elf-wolf, etc). There are no essential characteristics tied to race in R&R.

Class

The hero's class provides a scaffolding to define their background, personal drive, abilities and flaws. The classes in R&R are:

Social Justice Warrior - Vocal, feisty, adventurist. They are prone to easy outrage and always ready to get into a fight.

Equipment: longsword, light armor, 4 gold pieces.

Magic spell: tiny fireball.

Community Healer - Wise, spiritual, concerned with conflict resolution and mediation. They believe in being the change they want to see in the world.

Equipment: healing potions, bow and arrow, 3 gold pieces.

Magic spell: befriend animals.

Intersectional Paladin – self-implicating, idealistic, cautious. They guard against ideological contradictions and story inconsistencies at risk of espousing “purity politics”.

Equipment: heavy armor, spear, 3 gold pieces.

Magic spell: defensive bubble.

Rogue Worker – practical, street-wise, strategic. They aim for concrete victories and loathe idealism, elitism, and long deliberations.

Equipment: mace, toolbox, 2 gold pieces.

Magic spell: disguise self.

Academic Wizard – erudite, eloquent, thoughtful. They look at the “big picture” and value history and tradition. They always need to establish intellectual dominance.

Equipment: magic rod, portable encyclopedia, 4 gold pieces.

Magic spell: confuse people.

Movement Bard – jovial, artful, unpredictable. They strive to keep morale high and make the campaign fun. They always try to come up with creative solutions, often at the expense of practicality.

Equipment: string instrument, dagger, 1 gold piece.

Magic spell: minor illusion.

Equipment

In addition to the standard equipment on the character sheet, every player can add to their inventory three items of their choice. The items should fit the chosen class and can't be endowed with great magical power. The DM has to approve each of them.

Alignment

In the world of R&R there is no absolute good or evil (or, even worse, “neutrality”) but each PC has an alignment which broadly describes their personal attitudes.

Alignment is a combination of two factors: one identifies the personal drive (*individualist* or *altruist*), and the other describes attitudes toward order (*lawful* or *chaotic*).

Thus, four alignments define the possible combinations: individualist lawful, altruist lawful, individualist chaotic, altruist chaotic.

Aside from providing constraints for roleplay, alignments determine how players score experience points (XP).

- ❖ **Individualist** - scores an experience point for each motion they propose that passes without amendments.
- ❖ **Altruist** - scores an experience point for each motion they propose that passes unanimously.
- ❖ **Lawful** - scores an experience point every time they correctly point to a process irregularity.
- ❖ **Chaotic** - scores an experience point for each amendment they propose that passes.

Since there is no neutrality each player will be able to score points in two distinct ways. You can freely decide your hero's alignment.

Introductions

Once the characters are created, the DM initiates a round of introductions. Each player introduces themselves *in character*, revealing their fictional name, pronouns, race, class, alignment, the three chosen items, and a few fictional background details. Each character should briefly explain how they met the previously introduced characters.

Choosing a Campaign

A *campaign* is an adventure that lasts until the players reach their goal, die, give up, or for any reason, decide to *adjourn* the gathering.

The DM can choose a campaign among the ones provided in the appendix according to time availability and personal taste. A campaign provides:

- ❖ A goal - a “macguffin” that propels the story forward.
- ❖ A modifier - a general condition that affects the world or the characters
- ❖ An agenda - a series of encounters, challenges, and story beats
- ❖ One or more locations - where the event take place
- ❖ An allotted time - the ideal duration of the gathering

The campaign agendas are printed and given to all players so that they can have an idea of the overall duration of the story. Democratic processes are often hampered by long deliberations; having a “to do” list in advance can make the participants more responsible, at the cost of spoiling some plot points.

The DM keeps a more detailed version of the agenda which includes secret information, plot twists, and other notes. The DM campaign sheet should **not** be visible to the players.

See the chapter *Playing as Dungeon Master* for more details.

Playing the Game

Descriptions

After the DM explains a scene from the agenda or the outcome of the last actions, each player (out of character) can freely ask the DM for more information. The questions should pertain to what's immediately perceivable to the PCs.

For example, examining a building from the outside should prompt the DM to describe the facade, the sounds coming from it, and so on.

However, entering the building to see what's inside should be considered as an *action* and should be proposed to the party as a *motion*.

Actions

Being a roleplaying game, you are mainly responsible for the actions of your own character. However, being the party a democratic entity, motions can involve the active participation of other PCs or NPCs.

Anything that can affect the fictional world, **even if executed individually by a playing character**, is considered an *action*.

Looking, listening, smelling, remembering, searching in your pockets are generally not considered actions since are unlikely to affect anybody but the PC in question.

Opening a treasure chest, talking to an NPC, starting a fight, or even doing nothing for an hour, should be considered *actions* and proposed as motions.

Talking to NPC could be considered an action if the characters are initiating the dialogue. Once a conversation starts, players can just roleplay the dialogue without approving every single line.

Motions

In Robert's Rule of Order and in R&R, a motion is a proposal you want to bring to the assembly to discuss and vote.

You can propose a motion only if the DM is not speaking and if no other motions are currently being discussed.

The motions happen diegetically (that is within the fictional world) so you have to be in character when proposing and discussing it. All characters can cast a time freeze spell so they can deliberate for as long as they want even under severe time constraints.

The DM acts as chair, enforcing the process, but they can't propose, discuss, nor vote motions.

If an NPC is involved in the decision making process, the DM can play their role, and even cast a vote. However, an NPC should never propose a motion.

These are all the necessary steps to adopt a motion:

1. A player raises their hand
2. The DM acknowledges them, and says "You may speak"
3. The player makes a motion by saying "I move to..." and describing briefly and clearly the actions they want to pursue. They don't have to explain their reasoning yet.
4. At least another player has to indicate their interest by saying "Second". A *second* allows the discussion to occur; it does not signify approval. A motion without a second does not move forward.
5. The DM can briefly restate the motion by saying "It is moved and seconded that..."
6. The players can now debate the motion starting from the player who made it.

Amendments

6a. During the discussion a player can offer an amendment by saying "I move to amend the motion...". The amendment should be a correction or an integration of the main motion. You can't propose a completely different action.

6b. The amendment has to be seconded and restated, like a motion (analog to step 4 to 6).

6c. The amendment is discussed like a motion, starting from the proponent. The discussion should pertain to the amendment and not to the content of the main motion.

6d. As a shortcut, if the DM feels like there may be consensus around the amendment, they can ask “Any objections?”. If nobody objects, the amendment is integrated without vote and the motion restated. The process goes back to the debate phase (step 6).

6e. When the discussion is over, the DM asks for a vote (analog to steps 7 to 9). The vote is to **amend** the motion, not to **adopt** it. Regardless of the result, the process goes back to the debate phase (step 6). New arguments and new motions can be made.

7. When the amendments are integrated, and the debate is exhausted or ceases to be constructive, the DM closes the discussion and asks for a vote by saying “The question is on the adoption of the motion that...” and then restating the motion.
8. The DM provides voting directions:
“Those in favor of the motion, raise hands”
“Those opposed, raise hands”
9. The DM announces the result of the vote.
10. The players score experience points according to their alignment.
11. The DM continues the narration describing the effects of the actions.

Dungeon Master amendments

R&R is a radically democratic game so even the Dungeon Master’s decisions can be put in check.

Immediately after the DM explained the effects of an action, a player can propose an amendment to what has been just stated. The amendment should be a correction or an improvement of what the DM described, it shouldn’t completely change the original intention. Remember that the goal of the game is to have fun together and the job of the DM is to challenge the players.

The DM amendments are proposed, discussed, and voted like normal amendments (steps 6a to 6e in the previous chapter).

The deliberation should pertain to consistency and storytelling, and does not actually happen in the fictional world. Therefore players should not be *in character*.

Example:

Dungeon Master (DM): The cells all around you are overcrowded with cat people, young and old. Entire families are jailed together. They look exhausted and malnourished. Their normally shiny fur is mangy and filthy. They all appear to be from a faraway land, their idiom is completely incomprehensible to you. Suddenly, a trap door opens beneath your feet. Its bottom is covered in rusty metal spikes.

Kate: Seriously? Spikes?

Jason: Who would put a pit trap in a prison? The corridor is mostly used by the guards.

DM: Perhaps it's a measure against prison escapees?

Laura: It doesn't make any sense. I move to amend the Dungeon Master narration in this way: a trap door has been left open in front of you. Its bottom is covered in bones.

Michael: Second!

DM: It is moved and seconded that the adventurers see an open trap door. A pile of bones can be seen at the bottom of the pit. You can start the discussion.

Laura: I suppose the pit is used to dispose of dead bodies.

Kate: It makes more sense to me.

Michael: Let's vote.

DM: The question is to amend my narration: you come across an open trap door with bones at the bottom.

Those in favor of the motion, raise hands.

The amendment carries unanimously.

Aroris, who is leading the group, almost falls into an open trap door. It's a sordid pit filled with bones and decomposing bodies.

Michael (playing as Aroris): I knew it, this is a concentration camp!

Other Robert's Rules

Motions are the central element in R&R but there are other parliamentary procedures described in the Robert's Rules of Order Manual that can be used in this game.

Adjourning - You can propose to end the session, either ending the campaign or proposing to continue it on a later date, by saying "I move that we adjourn". It has to be seconded and voted by a majority.

Recess - You can propose to pause the session by saying "I move that we recess until...".

It has to be seconded and voted by a majority, and it can be amended.

Point of Privilege - You can interrupt a speaker and directly address the DM/chair by invoking a “Point of privilege!” to complain about issues that are not related to the discussion but are potentially undermining it. It can be excessive noise, room temperature, lack of seats etc.

The DM/chair will determine the course of action.

End the debate - If a debate drags for too long you can say "I move the previous question".

If seconded and voted by $\frac{2}{3}$ of the assembly it immediately forces a vote on the motion or amendment that is being discussed.

Point of Order - you notice an error in the procedure or a personal affront, you can interrupt the speaker by invoking a “Point of order”. The DM/chair will determine the course of action.

Point of Information - you can always raise your hand to ask for more information about the fictional world, but if you have an urgent question about the process you can interrupt a speaker by saying “Point of Information”. The DM/chair will try to answer.

Experience Points

R&R is a collaborative game with no stats and dice rolls. The experience points scored according to characters’ alignment are just a way to spice up the deliberations and create slightly divergent agendas among players.

The DM can reward the collection of experience points by giving the ability to cast a new spell every 5 XP. See the chapter *Magic*.

Playing as Dungeon Master

As Dungeon Master you are in charge of maintaining the continuity of the story as well as ensuring an orderly democratic process. In the language of Robert's Rules of Order, you are serving as the *chair* of the gathering.

Overall, your goal is to provide the players with a compelling and meaningful experience. This entails a certain degree of antagonism when determining the adventure, and a neutral attitude when supervising the adoption of motions.

As DM you don't have to prepare any material in advance since the campaign agenda provides a structure for improvisation. However you need to be well acquainted with the Robert's Rules of Order language and procedures.

The world of R&R

R&R is set in a high fantasy world like that of innumerable fictional works, from the *Hobbit* to *Game of Thrones*. The popularity of the genre provides a shared language (everybody has a general idea of what a dragon is) and the possibility to deploy and subvert well known tropes.

Since the game is targeted to activists and generally progressive players, the classic fantasy building blocks can be used allegorically to talk about contemporary issues and dilemmas.

There is no canon, *Dungeon Master's Guide* or *Monster Manual* in R&R, so you'll probably have to borrow elements from disparate works of fiction. Ultimately, you are free to decide the tone of the adventure (serious or farcical) hoping that the adventurers will play along.

The Setup

The DM is the only person who must be familiar with the rules in this manual. Having all players reading it in advance is preferable but not necessary. If there are new players, take a few minutes to explain the basic principles of roleplay and the purpose of this game before you give away the character sheets.

Don't worry if some players are confused by the motion process, learning Robert's Rules while playing is the main goal of this game.

As the players introduce their characters you are advised to write down their fictional names, pronouns, classes, and races so you can address them properly. You should keep a blank character sheet for yourself, as it provides information about classes and equipment.

Chair and Secretary

Managing the parliamentary procedures while coming up with elaborate fantasy plots can be quite challenging, especially if you are a beginner. It is advised to enlist a second DM to act exclusively as chair of the Robert's Rules of Order: keeping track of the status of the motion, restating amendments, answering point of information questions, and so on. There is a tremendous educational value in the role of the Chair.

Alternatively, to relieve some of the burden, a player can act as secretary. The secretary's role is to write down the motions and the amendments as they are discussed and keep track of the raised hands - also known as the *stack* - ensuring that everybody has a fair chance to speak.

Campaign Agenda

The agenda provides a general outline of the adventure as a series of scenes. They generally represent moral dilemmas that the players are confronted with. In order to stimulate a lively debate, it's best to not characterize them as an obvious good versus evil choice.

When you move to a new agenda item, don't read it to the player. Take some time to think about it and provide a general overview of the scene. The players' questions should give you the time and the structure to detail it gradually.

The details of each agenda item are entirely up to you. Ideally you want to infuse continuity and consistency to the scenes, establishing a causation between past and current events, without making every scene play like a self-contained vignette. Try to make every encounter relevant for the pursuit of the campaign goal. Keep in mind the modifier, and how it can relate to each individual scene.

As DM you determine when a scene is exhausted and when it's time to move to the next item in the agenda. It can happen after a conflict is resolved or because the players decided to move to another location.

Naturally, you can prepare a campaign in advance in a traditional tabletop RPG way. You can make maps, detail events and characters. The agendas are only meant to facilitate a casual, improvisational play.

Actions and descriptions

Players can at any time request descriptions of something immediately perceivable to their characters. You are ultimately responsible for identifying player actions and subject them to the democratic process. If the players are exasperated by the motion process you can skip it for less important choices.

Here is a general checklist for deciding if an action should go through the Robert's Rules or Order process:

Is it an exercise of free will?

E.g. Avoiding a falling boulder is an instinctive response and it doesn't have to go through a motion. Actions imposed by the DM like "you suddenly fall asleep" are also not collectively decided.

Does it have an uncertain outcome?

E.g. Once the adventurers decide to stop at a tavern, sitting on a bench, ordering food and so on, doesn't have to be put to vote unless there is a plan to poison the characters or there are some hostile patrons who may start a brawl.

Does it express a novel intention?

E.g. If the adventurers decided to break into a building, it is not necessary to vote on cascading actions like examining the perimeter, picking a lock, or kicking down the door. Players can declare their actions and you can narrate their outcomes immediately.

Is it directly affecting the world other than the PC in question?

E.g. If a player wants to wear their helmet, other players should not have a saying about it. If a player wants to wear a magical helmet taken from a mummy, the party should probably take a vote.

Are the PCs in a position to make a deliberation?

E.g. Since the debates happen within the fictional world, if one PC splits up or is temporarily knocked out they won't be able to participate. As DM you should discourage the adventurers from dispersing.

Dice Rolls

In traditional tabletop roleplaying games characters possess attributes such as strength or charisma. These characteristics are defined numerically and help players and DMs estimate the probability of succeeding at certain challenges. The outcomes are generally resolved through rolling various dice and comparing the results to tables or mathematical formulas.

R&R is a loose and story-driven system. You will have to judge whether an uncertain action produces the desired effect based on common sense, character backgrounds, and most importantly, on how interesting the outcome would be plot-wise. If some players miss a numeric frame of reference, you can encourage them to ask about their odds of success, which can be unpacked in a narrative way.

Example:

DM: The dungeon janitor examines all of you more confused than alarmed. You clearly don't look like prisoners but you can't be mistaken by guards either.

Kate (playing as Kelfir): I remember taking a rethorics class in Wizard college. Maybe I can convince him that we are government inspectors.

DM: In fact you were also part of the improv student club.

Jason (playing as Jasonir): I move to have Kelfir talk to the janitor and try to convince him that we are health and safety inspectors.

Weapons, equipment, or spells are also not formalized. Each adventurer starts with equipment and magical spells determined by their class. The spells usage, limitations, and effects are left to your discretion. Naturally, PCs can acquire more items and powers during their adventures. Encourage players to keep a list of their possessions on their character sheet.

Magic

Each character starts with the ability to cast a spell. You are in charge of detailing such magical powers, including limitations and side effects.

New spells can be conferred to players as a result of Experience Points. The recommended rate for *leveling up* is one magic spell every 10 XP.

Some examples of spells:

Tiny fireball - about the size of a ping pong ball.
Befriend animals - often results in over-attachment from both sides.
Defensive bubble - you can't hear or be heard while in it.
Disguise self - it's really just about self-confidence.
Confuse people - it works only with people you talk to.
Minor illusion - somewhere between a magic trick and a firework.
Speak language badly - any language, some things may be lost in translation.
Freeze creature - immobilize a living thing for about 30 seconds, once per day.
Brief levitation - only lasts a couple of seconds, slightly better than jumping.
Enhance smell - temporary olfactory enhancement.
One minute divination - see what's going to happen one minute from now.
Clairvoyance - ask the DM a question about something your PC wouldn't know.
Mute creature - prevent a living thing from speaking for one minute.
Read mind - it only works with nearby NPCs.
Whispering wind - send a private 25 words message to any PC or NPC.

Ending a campaign

All gatherings should have a time limit agreed upon at the beginning. If the time is running out in the middle of an important affair, all participants can make a motion to extend the duration of the gathering.

As DM, it is your responsibility to keep an eye on the time and create a good narrative arc within the allotted time. The end of a campaign shouldn't feel too rushed because there's not enough time. If you (or a player) feel like the adventure needs more time, you can propose to *adjourn* the gathering with the intent of continuing another day. The motion is voted following the usual process.