

## Warhammer 40,000 Roleplay: Dark Heresy review – by Craig Pearson

Dark Heresy was the first of the Warhammer 40,000 roleplaying games released by Fantasy Flight Games back in 2008. In this game each player takes on the role of ‘acolytes’, agents of the Inquisition who are sent on various missions to investigate and combat heresy, demons and xenos. The game system itself revolves around the use of d10’s which are form the basis of character generation, skill tests and combat resolution.

The first chapter of the rulebook contains all of the mechanics required for a player to create their acolyte. Here, players can generate a character’s home world, background, gender, age and physical attributes. This can be done by randomly rolling for each or be selected depending on personal preference, should the player have a specific character type in mind. Each of the character’s nine game attributes are then generated:

- Weapon Skill – Hand-to-hand combat proficiency.
- Ballistic Skill – Ranged attack ability.
- Strength – The physical strength of a character.
- Toughness – Resistance to physical punishment.
- Agility – Determines how quickly a character can move, their ability to dodge and perform delicate tasks.
- Intelligence – The character’s ability to use technology, recall facts and solve problems.
- Perception – How quickly a character can notice things and in what level of detail.
- Will Power – Determines a character’s resistance to fear, demonic effects and is used to manifest psychic abilities.
- Fellowship – Used to interact with other people.

A player generates each of their acolyte’s game attributes by rolling 2d10 and adding the total to a baseline determined by their home world (usually 20). In Dark Heresy attributes ranges from 1 to 100 and form the basis of a percentile system by which the player rolls against to determine the success of a skill test. For example, should a character have Weapon Skill 40, the player rolls 2d10 (one dice representing the tens, the second the digits). If the resultant roll is below that of their skill attribute it is successful. Each skill test is further modified at the whim of the Games Master (GM), taking into account environmental factors, the size of an opponent, range of an attack etc.

The final element to character creation is the choice of career path, of which there are eight to choose from:

- Adept – An official, diplomat, doctor, and someone proficient in knowledge based skills and social interaction.
- Arbitrator – A member of the Adeptus Arbites, the Imperial law enforcement, effective in both investigative skills and combat.
- Assassin – Effective killers who excel in both combat and stealth skills.
- Cleric – A member of the Ecclesiarchy trained in a wide range of abilities, but excels at motivation and leadership.
- Guardsman – Members of the Imperial Guard, mercenaries and other soldiers, they are weapons specialists and are skilled warriors.

- Imperial Psyker – An extremely intelligent individual with access to psychic powers.
- Scum – Criminals, thieves and other outcasts, they have a variety of useful skills involving stealth, infiltration and social interaction with less-honest members of Imperial society.
- Tech-Priest – Members of the Adeptus Mechanicus, they are skilled with machines and technology, and have access to bionic implants.

Each career path has access to unique skills which can be acquired through good roleplaying or purchased with experience (XP) awarded by the GM after each mission. There are also general skills that are available to each career, some of which are easier to acquire if they are more relevant to that particular path.

The second section of the rulebook contains all of the rules for the myriad weapons and equipment available to the characters in their battle against enemies of the Imperium. This includes anything from a las pistol to a las cannon, a knife to a power fist, and leather clothing to mighty power armour. Each piece of weaponry and equipment has unique stats and abilities, but with that comes an increased rarity and purchase price, which many low-level characters cannot hope to attain.

The next section is specifically aimed at the GM. This is the person who describes the scenes to the players, oversees the development of the mission storyline and controls the bad guys. Here the rulebook provides helpful tips and suggestions on running a mission, detailed rules for combat, interaction between characters and those around them, fear, and the more unpleasant effects of fighting demons...insanity and corruption.

Dark Heresy takes place in the Calaxis Sector, on the northern most edge of our galaxy. This region of the void contains numerous star systems with which the GM can use and incorporate into campaigns. The rulebook provides vast amounts of information about the principle planets, their environmental conditions, governance, tech-level, and local flora and fauna. It also acts as comprehensive source material for the various organisations within the Imperium, as well as warp travel, warfare, and Imperial faith and superstition.

Roleplaying is a very difficult concept to explain to anyone who has never tried it before, and I myself struggled with the idea until I took part. I would definitely recommend this game to anyone who either enjoys roleplaying games or loves the rich background the 40K universe provides. The rules are very intuitive and simple to pick up, and the percentile system can make interactions run very smoothly. Combat can sometimes get bogged down if several players are fighting a group of opponents, but this can be averted by GM easily enough. Dark Heresy is only one of several other games set in the 40K universe, the others being Rogue Trader, Deathwatch, Only War and Black Crusade. Each core rulebook of the aforementioned games is essentially the same as Dark Heresy, but varies in career path choice, source material, and the overall aim of the game.