

RPG Blog Carnival: Roleplaying Games on a Budget

by loottheroom - Monday, January 08, 2018

<http://loottheroom.uk/rpg-blog-carnival-roleplaying-games-on-a-budget/>



This month's RPG Blog Carnival is hosted by [Renaissance Gamer](#), who set the topic 'Roleplaying Games on a Budget'. To see all the other posts submitted to this month's blog carnival, head to [the anchor post here!](#)

There's no denying that roleplaying can be an expensive hobby. I've been playing tabletop RPGs since the early '90s, and I'd wager I've spent thousands of pounds just on D&D alone: core rulebooks for the five editions since I started playing (AD&D, 3e, 3.5, 4e [which I never played, even though I bought the core books], and 5th); subscriptions to *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines for over a decade; plus heaps of adventure modules, splat books, bestiaries, and whatever else I've collected over the years. That's without even getting to the cost of dice, miniatures, terrain pieces, and the like. And *that's* without getting into... well, all of the above, but for non-D&D games.

And yet, we don't really need all of that stuff to play these kinds of games. Especially these days, with all the knowledge of the world literally at our fingertips in the form of smartphones and tablets, roleplaying games can be played with little to no monetary investment at all.

My instinct when beginning this article was to provide you with ways to reduce the cost of playing specifically 5th edition D&D; sites like [D&D Beyond](#) help reduce the need for the core rulebooks; folks like [Trash Mob Minis](#) and [Printable Heroes](#) take the sting out of the cost of miniatures (and playing theatre-of-the-mind style like I used to as a kid removes the cost entirely); and so on. But I've written about that kind of thing before, and I wanted to do something different. I've also been wanting to branch out from being just a D&D blog a little bit, too, and this seems like a good time to do that.

So, without further ado, here are some RPG systems that you can download and play for free, completely legally.

Open Legend

Let's start with a system you've probably heard of already. Open Legend was a Kickstarter success story, and it's only be getting bigger since its release. [All of the core rules are available for free online](#). They're simple and easy to learn, creating a character is a breeze (no matter how ludicrous your concept), and it uses one of my all-time favourite dice mechanics - [exploding dice](#). What's more, there's an [official adventure module](#) that's available as a Pay What You Want title.

Pros: Completely free; easy to learn and run; tons of fun.

Cons: Not a huge amount of supplementary material beyond the core rules, and not a huge amount of guidance for building adventures and encounters, so new GMs may find it a little overwhelming to begin running games after the official module.

ZWEIHÄNDER

Another Kickstarter success. Although the up-to-date core rulebook with all the artwork isn't free, you can still get Zweihänder's [early access rules for free](#). This game is dark, bloody, and gritty; if you prefer your fantasy in the vein of Joe Abercrombie and Richard Morgan rather than Tolkein and Terry Brooks, this will be up your alley. It uses a d100 system, which might seem strange to people who are used to D&D and its imitators, but you'll soon get used to it.

If I have one criticism of Zweihänder it's that it's not the best-written book I've ever seen, and sometimes the rules aren't as clear as they could be. It's a lot of fun, though, and the free rulebook contains everything you need to create characters and run games (including plenty of monster stats). Plus there's a [free adventure for new players](#), too, as well as a [free collection of pre-generated characters](#).

Pros: Gives enough material to run plenty of games for free; oozing with theme and flavour; gritty, grimdark roleplaying.

Cons: Not a lot of supplementary material; not the best-written game in the world; rules might be a little daunting for new gamers.

Maze Rats

If *Zweihänder* risks being a little too complex for new gamers, [Maze Rats](#) is the opposite. This game takes rules-lite roleplaying to the extreme; the rules consist of one page, with a second page given over to character creation. It's straightforward to learn by reading and really easy to teach, and the rules do a great job of pointing out the important parts for the GM. It's a ton of fun to run and play, and I particularly love the magic system. It's chaotic in a really good way, and does a great job of making players feel like they're messing with forces they don't fully understand. There's also [a free adventure](#) to go with it.

Pros: Fantastically easy to teach; simple, easy to remember rules; a lot of fun.

Cons: Relies heavily on random tables, which may not suit all tastes; geared more towards one-shots than campaign play, though the latter is possible.

Stars Without Number

You didn't think I'd stick entirely to fantasy roleplaying, did you? [Stars Without Number](#) is a fantastically designed science fantasy game, full of starships, psionics, space piracy, and epic space battles. The free version of the rules clocks in at an impressive 260 pages, and gives you absolutely everything you need to run galaxy-spanning campaigns. You could play for years with just this book. There's also a deluxe version that expands the rules even further, introducing options for mechs, magic, and more, [although that version costs \\$19.99](#). There's no free adventure for this system that I've seen, but creating adventures using the free rules is fairly straightforward and the published adventures that do exist for it aren't hugely expensive.

Pros: Simple systems that will be familiar to experienced gamers; great writing and even better artwork; blends gritty adventure with star-faring space opera; lots of existing material.

Cons: No free adventures; organisation of information in the rulebook can be a little unintuitive.

So, there you have my picks for some fun free RPGs you should try out if you're looking to hear something new. I'd love to hear your thoughts on these, especially if you know of any other free RPGs that are worth checking out. Also, don't forget to drop by Renaissance Gamer and [check out the other contributions to this month's blog carnival](#).



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The advertisement features a central image of a character in chains, with the title 'BREAKER OF CHAINS' in large, stylized white letters. Below the title, it says 'Now Available on DMs Guild!'. On the left, there is a smaller version of the cover art with the text 'The unholy is about to be awakened.' and 'A D&D 5E ADVENTURE PRESENTED BY LOOT THE ROOM'. On the right, there are logos for 'DMs GUILD' and 'LOOT THE ROOM'.

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