

Whitehack



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by

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Games by Christian Mehrstam

Whitehack

Whitehack Fourth Edition (2023)

Whitehack Third Edition (2021)

Whitehack Second Edition (2015)

Whitehack First Edition (2013)

Suldokar's Wake

#1: *Æonic Evil Returns* (2019)

#2: *Anatomy of a Zira-Kaan Character* (2020)

#3: *Rules of Inverted Reality* (2020)

#4: *Depths of Devnull* (2020)

#5: *The Screen That Wasn't* (2021)

Suldokar's Wake: Core Arc Omnibus (#1–4, 2021)

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Oktoberlandet (2006)

Lintovaffären och andra oktoberländska texter (2016)

Oktoberlandet: Magisk ångpunk i Tsarens välde (2016)

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For my family, always.

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INTRODUCTION

Where the reader is introduced to the perspectives, dice, and terminology of the game, as well as some examples of play.

WHITEHACK is a game where you get to play a character in a fictional world. The Referee puts you in a situation by serving as the character's senses. Your adventure may begin with the finding of a strange ship in the frozen wastes of Gan-Gala, with a murder mystery in a dagonite enclave, or with something else, somewhere else.

Will you send your homunculus ahead to scout the ship? Will you visit an outcast family to learn what they know about the enclave? You control your character's actions, emotions, words and thoughts. As a result of your choices, the Referee presents a new situation—you encounter a frozen doppelganger at the helm, you are ambushed by enemies of the outcasts, etc. This is how the game goes back and forth between the participants, and how the tale of your character's fortunes and misfortunes gets told.

The rules challenge you by telling you how to handle certain events. They deal with combat, but also with important tasks, experience, damage, magick and many other things. There are also areas where the rules don't nail everything completely shut. Sometimes you will be negotiating the outcome of an action with the Referee. This isn't very different from any other game where the Referee is allowed to set a difficulty for your character's actions, but it creates a shock absorber between the hard coded rules and what your group considers fair and reasonable. It also lets you collaborate a bit on game world creation, either as something new that you build together from the ground up, or as part of an existing world that you settle in. When you use your character's groups (her species, affiliations and vocation), you create or add to what is already known about the setting.

Dice are a crucial part of the game. They let you resolve actions and introduce elements that neither you nor the Referee have considered. However, the choices of your co-players are just

as important in this regard. What the Referee tells you is equal parts pre-written material and improvised responses to character actions and random table results.

You are telling a game story on the setting's conditions, where each agreement serves as a precedent for the next. Even during the course of a single session, you will develop your own borders and content for the open spaces, making this *your* game in *your* world.

About the Book

The book contains a complete role-playing game with its roots in the original rules tradition. It is designed to run just about any material from 1974 onward with little or no conversion. This is the fourth edition, in which the game has been further refined and equipped with new tools.

All of the book is for players and the Referee alike. The chapter about monsters and artifacts can be seen as rumors and lore that an adventurer might have come across.

The book is designed to be read from cover to cover, but it also has an index and an extensive table of contents to help you quickly find your way. Sometimes a word or phrase has been put in **bold**. This follows from experience rather than principle, marking things that have proven to be easy to miss.

New to the Hobby?

A very special welcome to you! *Whitehack* can be a good first role-playing game: you don't have to digest a lot of material before participating, there is little math, and the game leaves some open spaces for your imagination.

However, that last bit can also be intimidating. Try to take confidence in the fact that others have felt the same, but been able to manage just fine, nonetheless. The open spaces aren't overwhelmingly many, and your friends will be helping out. Remember also that **there is no correct way** to use one's imagination. What comes to your mind is valid and works for this game.

In a way, complete beginners are the closest this book comes to a default reader. Everyone else is likely to skip more of it. The only parts that aren't meant for you (but which you can read anyway if you want) are the ones explicitly directed at non-beginners in this

chapter. Optional rules really are optional, intended for specific settings, campaigns and play-styles. Nobody uses all of them in the same game, and neither should you. Try to stick to the regular rules until you feel comfortable with them, or at least until your game really needs something from the optional rules chapter.

A Quick Run-Down for Experienced Newcomers

- This is a “roll under” system. You will be rolling under or equal to the character’s attributes, saving value or attack value in order to do things. The higher you roll while still successful, the better. There are fumbles (20) and crits (hitting your value exactly). Sometimes you roll two dice and pick the best or worst.
- Characters are defined by groups and class, **which are different things**. Groups are the character’s background in terms of species, training and social connections. For example, an Elven Fighter who is a member of a Secret Council is an elf, fighter and member through her groups, *not* through her class. Class is separate—how you resolve things mechanically. You could make your elven fighter in any of the game’s classes, and each would give you a different take on the concept.
- *Whitehack* is generally brief in regard to stats and magick. When dealing with things like spells and abilities in traditional modules, *Whitehack* only uses the titles. Together with the rules and the character class and groups, they will let you **triangulate** what can be done with them. For example, if your character is a Wise Wizard and learns a miracle named “Identify,” you don’t look up and read a specific rules text telling you exactly what that magick does. The title says what it is, and you can imagine what it might look like when coming from a wizard. Unless you want it to do something out of the ordinary or something very powerful, the character will simply pay 1 or 2 HP and learn about the identified item. Then you move on. This doesn’t mean that *Whitehack* is a system where anything you can imagine works without restrictions and limitations. It just means that it makes use of group consensus on small free form patches, circumscribed by rigid rules. Each class has something similar to that example.

- Players have influence over setting creation and development. This is due both to the free form patches and the fact that the Referee is meant to ask for player input. In a high level game, player control over game world aspects can also be formalized.
- *Whitehack* encourages the use of procedurally generated content. This works as usual but is also safe-guarded by **minimum** collective adaptations of rolled content, in the cases where it would otherwise appear shallow and artificial. Also, sometimes you generate Referee *input* rather than output.
- Characters and monsters have relatively few HP, in order to enhance the feel of “living on the edge.” However, there is an extra option for player characters: they can reduce incoming damage by d6 once per battle if they save **or** succeed at a toughness roll. This means that a character who starts the game with a single HP may still have a chance of surviving. Also, when characters die, the Referee has the option of letting them stay in the game in “ghost form” for the remainder of the session or until they are resurrected. This can be a more or less prominent feature depending on the setting.
- There are optional rules for different play styles. This includes various things such as old school rules, the use of grids and miniatures, genre adaptations, corruption and playing with adventuring party bases. These rules come into play selectively.

To the Veteran Whitehacker

As always, thank you so much for your feedback and support! The game has been around for a decade now and has its own identity, which hasn't changed in this book. As with all new editions, there are however additions, corrections and tweaks. Among other things, you will find some new terminology, changes to classes, new dice rolls, roguelike maps, a new rare class, rules for reputation and macros, changes to XP and death, loot rolls, partitioning, a new technique for vehicle combat, named saves and revised rules for crits, reactions and parley.

Nothing will break if you do things the old way. You can discover what is new at your own pace, as you start referencing this book instead of your old one.

Conversions

To convert a second or third edition character, color the save as per the new rules (p. 46), and either move the attribute scores to the nearest new attribute, or keep whatever old attribute array you used by way of the rules on p. 77. Strong characters with an ability no longer in the game should replace it with a new one from the new list. This isn't strictly necessary for the old Berserker ability (it isn't broken), but it is better to emulate berserking using standard special attacks (Charge and Fight Offensively), and use the valuable strong slot for something else.

First edition characters also need to recalculate defense (armor) and get new attack and save values (see the corresponding class table).

This is all there is to it, but due to slightly lowered xp requirements in this edition, a character may have leveled as a consequence of being converted. The rules revisions will also affect how the character plays.

How to Roll & Read the Dice

Whitehack uses two twenty-sided dice (d20) and three six-sided dice (d6).

- If you need to roll and add several dice, it says for example 3d6, where 3 is the number of dice. If something is subtracted or added, it says something like d6+2 or 3d6-1. **In all such operations, however, 1 is the minimum result.**
- If asked to make a **positive** or **negative double roll**, roll two d20s and pick the best or worst, respectively. Getting a pair can carry its own meaning, on top of the consequences of the rolled number.
- If called upon to roll a **d10**, use the d20, but read only the units number, counting 0 as 10.*
- Use the d6 to roll a **d3**. 1-2 is one, 3-4 is two and 5-6 is three.
- To make a percentage roll (**d100**, useful in some modules), roll two d10s to get a 1-100 integer. The first d10 shows the integer's tens number and the second one its units number. Two zeros mean 100.

* Some older d20s function as both d20s and d10s per default. They are marked 0-9 twice, using a period to distinguish between the lower and higher ranges.