

Action Dice

Action Dice represent a way of adding elements of randomness (e.g. good luck or misfortune) into routine play; they are a mandatory element of the Zoria RPG system and have a variety of uses. Each session, each of the players and the Gamemaster begin play with a specific pool of action dice that they may use in any way prescribed below under ‘Using and Spending Action Dice’.

Action dice are a precious commodity, and play a large factor in both balancing scenarios and in storytelling. They can promote the plotline both in favour of the players (and characters) and in favour of the GM (and NPCs). A player may use or ‘spend’ an action die only for players directly under their control with two exceptions:

Some classes permit using an action die to influence another player-character. In these instances, only the player controlling that character may spend an action die to do this. Players may never give away or ‘sell’ Action dice to another player, and any action dice not used during any single session are lost at the end of that gameplay session.

Players may also spend action dice in a limited way to influence other PC and NPC characters, but only by *activating a botch*. This is covered in ‘Using and Spending Action Dice’ described below.

Action Dice by Character level

Each player gains action dice based upon the level of his character as shown the chart below. Players only begin with one set of action dice: Controlling more than one character does not increase the action dice pool of a player, but may modify it, if the GM so chooses (‘see Action Dice: Optional Rules’)

Character Level	Die Type	Number of Dice
0-1/2*	d3	2
1-5	d4	3
6-10	d6	4
11-15	d8	5
16-20	d10	6
21-25	d12	7
26-30	d14	8
31-35	d16	9
36-40	d16	10
41 and Beyond	d16	+1 per 5 levels

The die type never expands beyond d16 dice. If players do not have d14 and d16 dice, please encourage them to buy these types. They are made by Gamescience. D16 dice may be substituted by rolling 1d8 and 1d6. On a 1-3 on the d6, the d8 roll is normal, on a 4-6, the roll is 8-16 (as if it was 1d8+8).. If d14 dice are unavailable, then use a d12+1, which cascades on a 12.

Action Dice for the Gamemaster

A Gamemaster's action dice are always of higher die types than those of the players. Please use the following table:

Player Highest Die Type	Gamemaster Die Type
d3	d6
d4	d8
d6	d10
d8	d12
d10	d14
d12	d16
d14	d20
d16	d24

Utilizing Action Dice

Players may utilize action dice in one of two ways Either by *using* them, which involves actually rolling one of the dice (which removes it from that players' Action Dice Pool, or by *spending* one for a specific effect, which also removes it from his Action Dice Pool. Whether used, or spent, action dice removed from the pool do not regenerate, although the GM may award extra action dice during play (see: 'Awarding Action Dice'). Action dice not used during a game session do not 'carry-over' to the next session of play, so it is not possible to accumulate more over time. Therefore, players are encouraged to use them during the course of a game.

Using Action Dice

A player may *use* an action die, first by declaring that he wishes to do so. This must be done before he receives the results of his actions: A player cannot retroactively use an action die (e.g. if he fails a check or save, then decides to add it). For this reason, it is best for the GM to not disclose DCs where action dice may be required.

In order to prevent GM abuse of the rules, please keep in mind that a GM should not declare results until the player states he has stated the total result of his actions. Players should also remember not to give the total result of any check, saving throw, or other roll if they wish to use action dice to augment or modify it, to avoid confrontations. It is advised to allow novice players a three-strike system, where if they forget about the rules for declaring use of action dice, the GM warns them u to three times, but accepts the use anyway; once past this 'three-strike' limit, the player ought to know better and no leeway should be afforded them.

Using an action die represents any time that the player spends one, but is required to roll it. This is usually done to increase results of other rolls.

Increasing any die-roll: A player may spend action dice to *increase*, but **not decrease** any die roll made for one of that player's characters. This includes increasing d20 rolls made for skill (including weapon skill and defense skill) checks, saving throw rolls, and damage rolls.

You may spend more than one action die to do this, and you may spend them one at a time. (A player need not state he wishes to use three action dice at one time, but may roll one, and if dissatisfied, continue to use as many action dice as he has left in his Action Dice Pool, so long as the GM does not declare a result.)

In effect, any roll that a player makes may be augmented by *using* an action die, then adding the result of the action die roll to his total roll. This includes *initiative-phase* rolls, but only when those rolls are initially made, **before** entering into *initiative phase*. A player cannot alter his *initiative phase number* once it is set.

Cascading

When used to augment a roll, the largest natural roll (e.g. a 6 on 1d6, an 8 on 1d8, a 14 on 1d14, etc.) causes the action die to *cascade*. When this occurs, the player re-rolls the die (spending no extra action dice in the process) and adds the result of both the first and second rolls of that action die to his total. A single action die may cascade an unlimited number of times, and naturally, the smaller die types do so with greater frequency. Thus, as the player gains in level, and gets larger die-types for his action dice, the chance of any action die-roll *cascading* lessens greatly.

Spending Action Dice

In addition to using an action die to augment a die-roll, a player may *spend* an action die for a specific effect, from the following list:

Re-roll any single die roll: This is like augmenting a die-roll, except that the character does not roll one of his action dice, but instead spends it (thus, removing it from his pool of available action dice) to re-roll his last die roll. For example, if he is making a skill check, using a d20 and rolls poorly, he may spend an action die to re-roll that d20 and use the new result in place of the old (even if it is lower). A player may spend as many action dice as he has remaining in his Action Dice Pool to re-roll any single other die roll, one at a time or until he is satisfied with the results. This can be combined with *augmenting* a die-roll, although each action uses an action die. (e.g. one action die to re-roll a natural 2 on 1d20 and then augmenting that roll with another action die by rolling the action die and adding the result to that of the 1d20 roll).

Players may spend an action die to re-roll a potential botch (usually a natural 1 on 1d20, but possibly other numbers and other dice as well). This action does not permit the GM to spend one of his own action dice to activate the botch, but must be declared by the player before the GM decides to activate it. Remember that in Zoria, when making a skill check (including defense and attack skills) where a 1 is normally successful (e.g. a 1 with a +14 modifier to *Defense* is still a DC15 *Defense* check), the

GM may spend an action die to activate that **Natural-1** to create a *botch*. Some actions also have a botch threat that is higher than 1; Weapons may have a botch-factor of 1, 1-2, 1-3 and 1-4, depending on the weapon.

This includes *initiative-phase* rolls, but only when those rolls are initially made, **before** entering into *initiative phase*. A player cannot alter his *initiative phase number* once it is set.

Activate a Botch: The player may spend one or more action dice to *activate a botch* from any other character, whether an NPC or another PC. The number of dice the player wishes to spend must be declared, as the more action dice spent activating a single botch increases the severity of the botch. The desire to activate a botch must be expressly stated, and the number of dice the player wishes to use must be stated at that time. Multiple players may spend dice together to activate a single botch.

Activate a Critical Threat: A player may spend action dice to activate critical threats made by one of his characters, but not other characters (unless his class has a feature that permits this).

The number of dice the player wishes to spend must be declared, as the more action dice spent activating a single *critical success* increases the severity of the botch. The desire to activate a botch must be expressly stated, and the number of dice the player wishes to use must be stated at that time. Critical successes on normal skill checks give the maximum possible result for that check. Checks that involve time-consuming processes usually are reduced in time, or checks gathering information or tasks that will either be successful or fail (e.g. Computer Hacking) are often automatically successful. Knowledge checks may reveal some very rare and useful piece of information.

Activating a critical threat on a check involving combat or defense has special effects: When making an attack, the damage done has a special effect (see 'Combat. '); critically successful defense rolls may gain an insight bonus to defense against that opponent for either the rest of that *initiative phase* or for the foreseeable future; critically successful parry checks permit instant, guaranteed retaliation of some kind, or may sunder the opponents weapon or instantly disarm him.

Obviously, the more action dice a player spends to activate such a critical success increases the positive results he gains from doing so. If activating a critical success can have no special effects (e.g. if nothing can be gained from it), then the GM should declare this and return the spent action die to the player. (In effect, it was never spent because spending it can have no special benefit.)

Activate a Critical Threat (Saving Throws): A character may also activate a Natural-20 as a critical success for saving throws. Where a saving throw would not be possible because of the characters' situation, it becomes possible. If it is possible normally, with *save for 1/2* as the normal result, the character can *save for 1/4* (or *save for zero*, depending on the situation and severity of the circumstances). Obviously, a character can spend two action dice to reduce *save for 1/4* to *save for zero*.

Gain Insight: When a player is perplexed and has no idea what to do in a situation he may request to make an *inspiration check*. If the GM agrees, then he may spend action dice (usually one, though very complex problems may require more) to get a clue from the GM as to how to proceed. A clever GK may use this to further the plot of the story, and the information gained should be useful, even if somewhat cryptic. The more action dice a player spends, the more information he should gain, or the less cryptic the information should be. Under no circumstances should the GM give away information the character would have no way of knowing at all, such as the battle plans of an invading army, unless he has had some way (in the story) to gain such insights.

The GM may have the character make an Insight Roll if he feels it necessary, against an appropriate DC for the desired information. This check for an Insight Roll is **1d20+Character Level+Appropriate Modifier**, where the Modifying statistic is Reason, Intuition, or Knowledge (whichever is most-appropriate to the information requested). Characters may use action dice to augment (or re-roll) this roll, as normal (before the GM determines the results) however if the insight roll fails, the player cannot spend another action die to re-try (although another player may try to make a separate Inspiration Check on the same subject).

Lucky Break

This option is available only to any player who has **spent no action dice during the entire session of gameplay**, no-matter their normal starting total or how many they were awarded during play.

Such a player may spend his entire dice pool either to gain the benefit of *Gain Insight* without having to make an *Insight Roll*, or to stumble upon something important to the character (or the party) by pure folly.

To do this, the player expends his entire action dice pool for the session (and can not be awarded any extra action dice for that session) and the GM will determine what happens that is out of the ordinary or of extreme value. It is up to the character to make the most of whatever situation occurs.

Whatever the result, it occurs as a story event during that game session, so doing this at the very end of a game (that is, doing this just because you didn't have a reason to spend action dice) session has no positive result as there is no time left in that game session to have any event that stems from this, and it does not carry over to the next game session.

Gamemaster Uses of Action Dice

The Gamemaster gains an Action Dice Pool at the beginning of each game session equal to the number of players (excluding the GM) plus the largest number of dice in the Action Dice Pool of any single player. That is, if there are six players, he gains six action dice from this alone, and if one of those players has four action dice, he gains an extra four dice for a total of ten action dice. If there were three players and one had a Level-11 character, the GM would have nine action dice to use during that session (3 from the players and 6 from the Level-11 character's pool of 6d8 action dice). The

Gamemaster also gains one action die every time he awards one to a player.

The Gamemaster may send his dice in exactly the same manner allowed to players, however he may also do any of the following:

Activate a Potential Botch or Critical: The GM may activate a potential botch or critical for any character, PC or NPC that is involved in the story whatsoever, even characters that the PCs aren't (yet) aware exist. The GM may also activate a special botch by spending an action die for a check made by any player that fails by 5 or more (e.g. rolling a check of 13 on a DC18 *Climb* check). The special botch will have an additional, undesired effect, but not as great as those posed by a natural botch roll (usually a natural-1 on 1d20).

Like the players, the GM may spend multiple action dice to achieve a greater effect for either a botch or a critical success.

Remember: Critical botches can lead to new story arcs as well. This is especially true if a character breaks or loses an important item, weapon or piece of data and a new story twist is in order to repair, replace or recover it.

Saving throw Botches and Critical Successes: He may also activate a botch on a saving throw for an additional undesired effect for any character, or a critical success on a saving throw for any character, which usually renders any effects to be negated (some that are save for ½ become save for zero, others save for ¼).

Dark Agenda: The GM should consider using his action dice on Inspiration checks for his NPC villains as well. This will give them insight into their plans or possibly into the actions and motives of the PCs. These checks should be noted and tracked by the GM, but not announced to the players.

Awarding Action Dice

The starting Action Dice Pool is always in flux: Generally, players spend all of their action dice each gaming session, but it is also possible to earn one or more action dice as ad-hoc awards during the course of a session...

When a player does something spectacular, especially something that advances the story, pieces together clues that help the party, puzzles out a nasty riddle, finds a secret room, discovers how to use a piece of alien technology, or does something generally positive or rewarding, The GM should award an action die.

Of course, the GM shouldn't give out action-dice willy-nilly, but in terms of awards (especially with the system standard 'No-XP' set-up), awards for performance and even awards for 'acting true to form/in-character' are given as bonus action-dice. The player adds these to his Action Dice Pool as normal and the player may accrue as many as the GM awards; this allows a player to gain more action-dice than his starting amount, though the die-type does not change.

The GM should award clever or amusing character actions solely for in-game events; out-of-character discussion and banter never merits an action die, and in fact, excessive banter generally warrants forfeiture of earning action dice during a game

(due to breaking up the gameplay). Remember: Awarding action dice is a tool used to re-enforce positive play and reward players for insightful ideas and take actions that you want them to repeat on a regular basis. They serve as an inspirational incentive and aren't just some token currency (although some...ahem...*less scrupulous GMs* may award a bonus starting action die to any player who bribes him with premium beer or the like).

Some classes give extra (bonus) action dice to a specific character. It is important to track, —at least if a player is running multiple characters— to which character that specific action die can be used. A player who controls a Wizard that gains a *bonus action die per gaming session* that also controls a Scientist can use his basic starting action dice (and dice awarded by the GM for either character, but the bonus die from the Wizards class ability can be used by *that* Wizard alone.

Under no circumstances should a GM award an action die from any action that directly stems from using or spending an action die.

Action Dice: Optional Rules

In the case of a player that controls characters of differing levels, the GM may decide one of the following:

The player gains action dice appropriate to the highest-level player that he controls.

Alternatively, the GM may elect to use a more balanced style of action dice appropriation: If the characters are within three levels of each-other, the player gains action dice for the highest-level character, but if the characters are four (or more) levels apart, then he gains one either die less of the type allocated to the player or one extra die, but based on the type allocated to the lower level character.

A third option is to assign action dice from each character, but divide the number of dice allocated to that player by the number of controlled characters, so a player with a 2nd-Level character and an 8th-level character would gain 1d4 and 2d6 action dice. Remember that smaller action dice have a greater probability to cascade.

Under no circumstances does a player gain extra action dice for playing multiple characters.

Prohibited Uses

A player cannot use action dice to re-roll or augment his character's physical statistics with action dice. Not only is it illogical (as an un-made character has no action dice), but it is game un-balancing. He may also not use them to augment or re-roll any increases to abilities (including physical attributes, aptitudes, MEA, PPE, etc.) and he cannot force the GM to re-roll a die (or dice) **for any reason**, even if it is due to something happening to him (such as taking damage). Action dice must be used on the player's own characters, with the only exceptions being activating a botch (which he can use on anyone) or if he has a class-ability that permits specific uses of action dice on other characters.