

# ZWEIHÄNDER

GRIM & PERILOUS RPG

PLAYER'S HANDBOOK





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# ZWEIHÄNDER

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PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

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Daniel D. Fox



Andrews McMeel  
PUBLISHING®

## ZWEIHÄNDER LEAD DESIGNER

Daniel D. Fox

## RULES DEVELOPMENT

Adam Rose & Daniel D. Fox

## ADDITIONAL WRITING

Matt Fulbright, Tanner Yea & Walter Fulbright

## EDITING

Dave Shaw, Jennifer Ford, Ken Duquet, Matthew Pook,  
Paul Snow & Walter Fulbright

## ART DIRECTOR

Ken Duquet

## GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Milena Lakicevic & Sierra S. Stanton

## COVER ILLUSTRATOR

Jussi Alarauhio

## INTERIOR ILLUSTRATOR

Dejan Mandic

## BRAND MANAGER

Holly Stayton

## MARKETING COORDINATOR

Alyson McNaghten

## LEAD PLAYTESTER

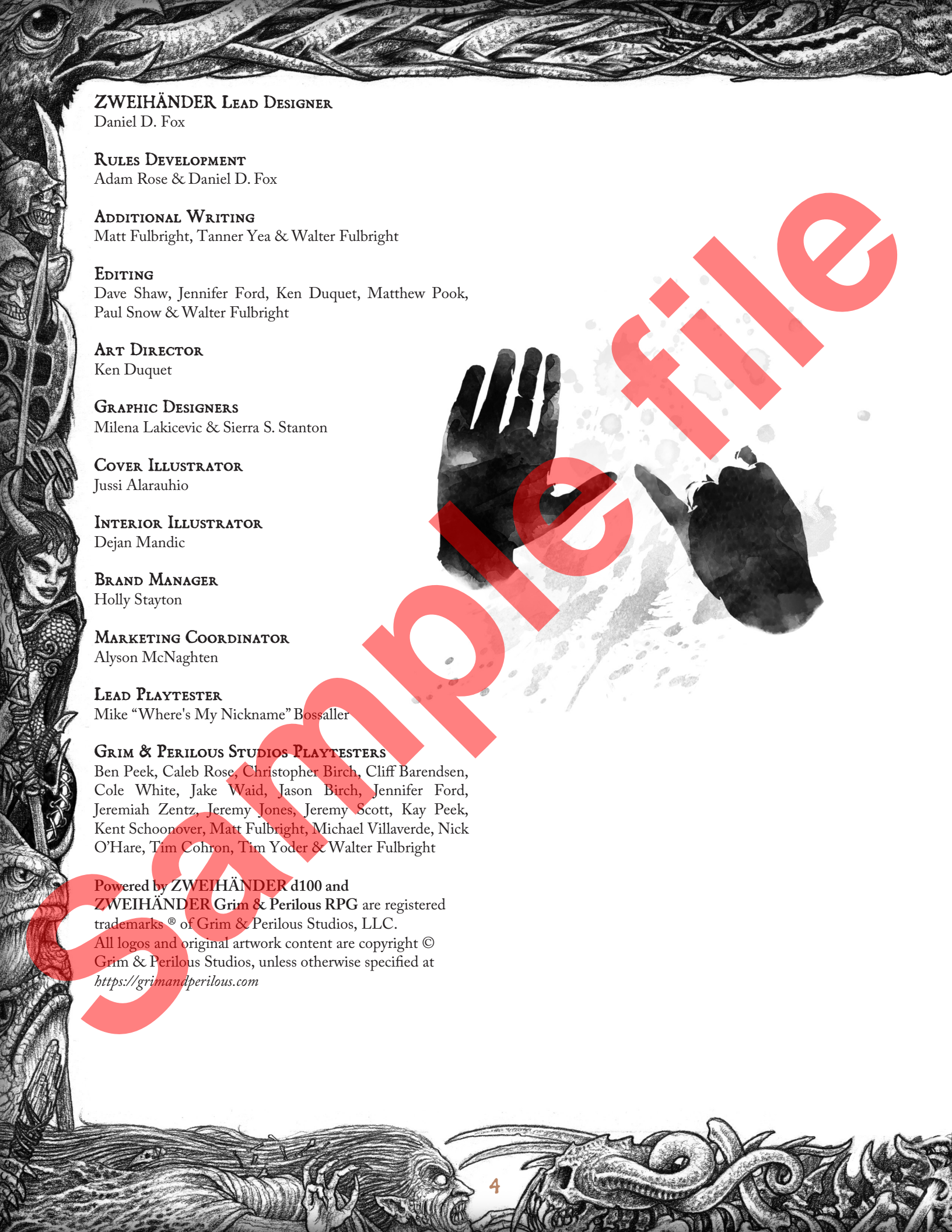
Mike "Where's My Nickname" Bossaller

## GRIM & PERILOUS STUDIOS PLAYTESTERS

Ben Peek, Caleb Rose, Christopher Birch, Cliff Barendsen,  
Cole White, Jake Waid, Jason Birch, Jennifer Ford,  
Jeremiah Zentz, Jeremy Jones, Jeremy Scott, Kay Peek,  
Kent Schoonover, Matt Fulbright, Michael Villaverde, Nick  
O'Hare, Tim Cohron, Tim Yoder & Walter Fulbright

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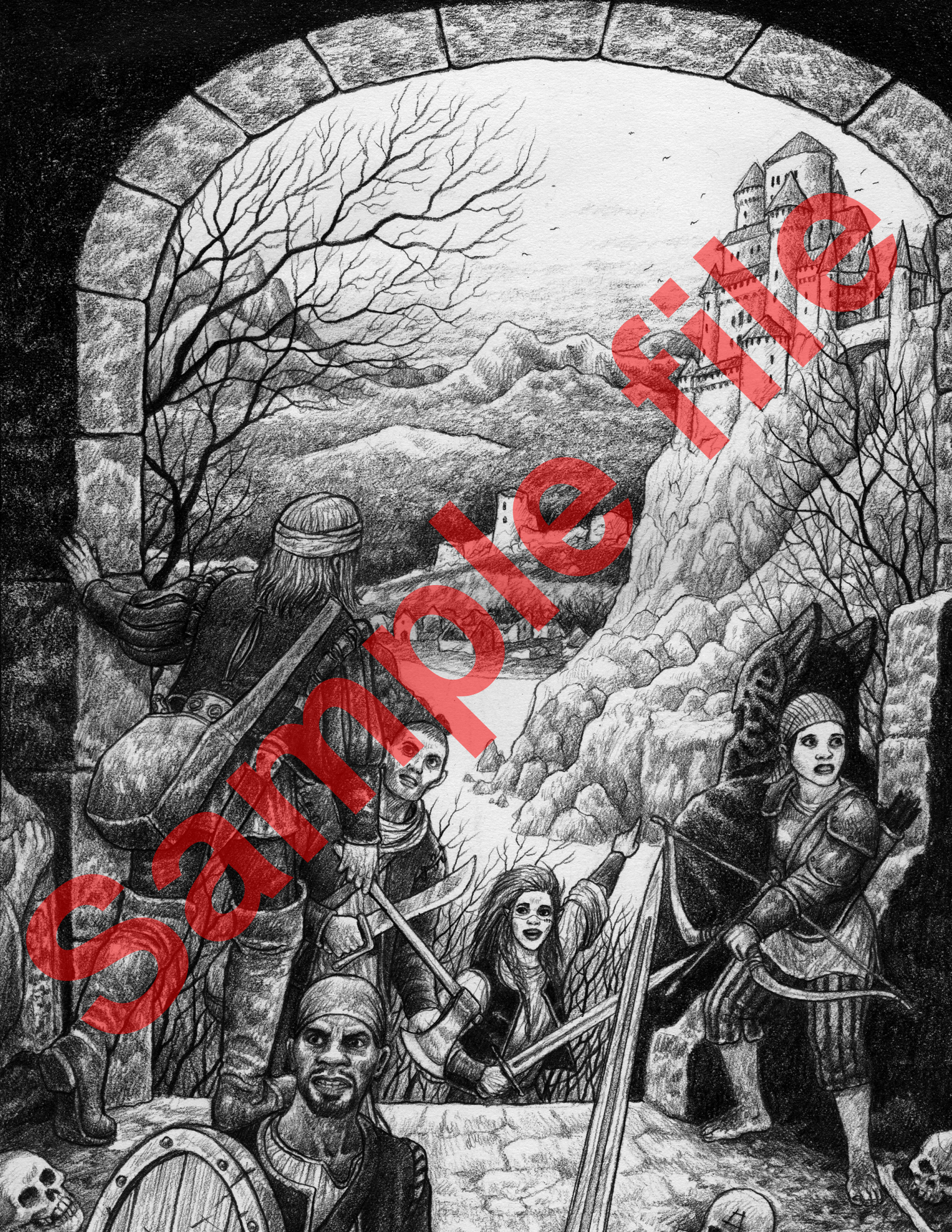
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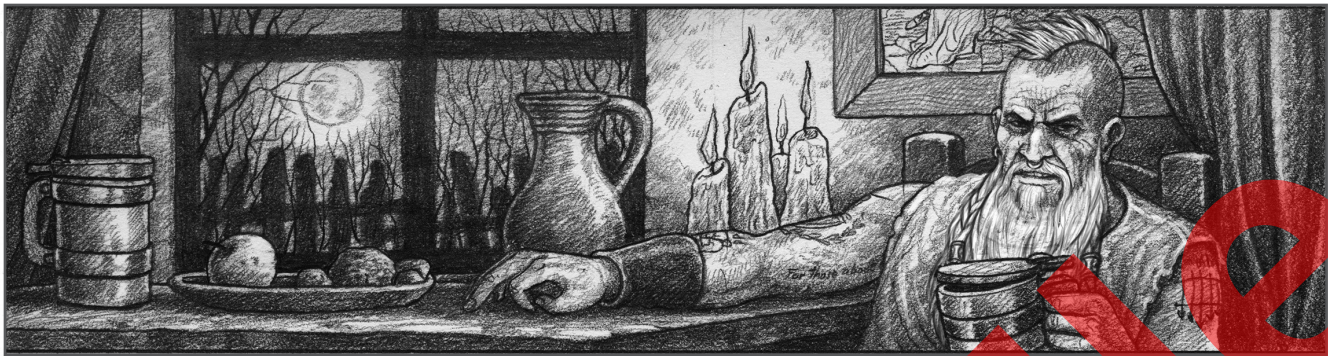
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My name is Danziger Eckhardt, and I used to be a lot like you: a model citizen, a dutiful son, a stalwart soldier, a devoted husband and a loving father. But that was a long time ago. I'll tell you something right now: life has many hard truths to teach a man, and most of them have been beaten into me. And with each lesson, the feeble trappings of 'civilized' life grow dimmer before my sight, revealing their pathetic, contrived nature. Now if you'll keep your mouth shut, I'll tell you the three most important lessons in life.

The first lesson you have to know is this: **YOU CAN'T EARN ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD.** I spent my life in obedience, following all the rules, doing my duty to my country. As a soldier, sometimes that means doing terrible things. Make no mistake, war is not some noble pursuit; when some poor bastard is spitted on your blade, spewing blood and piss and shit... well, you're not thinking about your ideals, your country or your gods. You're just trying to survive. But I'm not telling you this so you'll feel sorry for me. The point is that at one time, I would have done anything for my country. I was a patriot, committed to the causes of our land. I gave everything to them, sure that they would value my service. But the time came when it was convenient for someone in power to use me, to dispose of me. And that's exactly what they did. Someone gave the word, and they cast me into hell. I don't even know his name; sometimes I wonder if he ever knew mine.

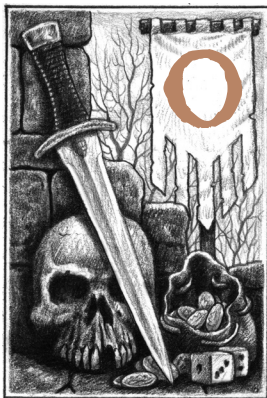
Lesson two: **A MAN WILL DO ANYTHING HE CAN TO SURVIVE.** I've spent almost half my life in a prison pit with the insane, the bloodthirsty and the depraved. And in those years crawling about in the dark, drenched in my own filth, I should have died. I gave up every night, let myself go, closed my eyes and prayed that the gods would take my broken life from me. And yet every morning I would awaken, and some spark within refused to let me die. I have seen the black truth that hides itself in the soul of every man, the root of all that is vile and horrible in this world. In the depths of those dungeons, I did things you couldn't imagine... things best left unspoken. And as I did these things, I would tell myself every time that I was only doing what was necessary to survive. I had convinced myself that someday I would be a free man, that there were still things in life worth fighting for, worth living for. The whole time, somewhere deep down, I must have known it was a lie and that each vicious act was eating at my precious humanity bit by bit. But my delusions continued, and one day, after all the blood and the savagery, I was set free.

And it was only then that I learned the third and most important lesson: **LIFE IS PAIN AND DEATH.** We spend all our days acting out some charade of an orderly life. We play out our roles, we say our prayers and we make our plans. We trust in others: our families, our neighbors, our superiors, our priests. We put our faith in the gods, we try to live good lives and we trick ourselves into believing that somehow all of this will safeguard us against the oncoming storm. We think we have some control over this life, but we don't. And we never will. Life isn't some children's story, with heroic deeds and some tidy moral lesson and a happy ending. Life is cruel. Life is callous. Life will take everything from you, and then it will kill you. The most you can hope for is that you have something to believe in, some last bit of hope you can use to deceive yourself before the end. But in the meantime, we will all root in our own filth and betray each other, and worse... oh, so much worse... because a man will do anything he can to survive.

Now, you'll save yourself a lot of wasted effort if you start living by those three rules. But I know you won't. You want to run and hide behind your values and false hope. Well, mark my words: pain is coming. Death is coming. And there's nothing you can do about it. Now get out of my sight, before I kill you myself.

— DANZIGER ECKHARDT, SOLDIER AND EX-CONVICT

◆ DESIGNER'S NOTE ◆



One of the challenges we have heard from people who've considered trying **ZWEIHÄNDER Grim & Perilous RPG** is that the Revised Core Rulebook is physically intimidating and not easy to tote around. Our initial goal when we wrote the Revised Core Rulebook was to create an omnibus that contained a player's handbook, Gamemaster's guide, a fully illustrated monster manual and a fully-fleshed out adventure. While we stand by our decision to make a monstrous tome that can be used by everyone (it is called **ZWEIHÄNDER**, after all), we know that getting players to create a character from a 672 page book is a big ask, particularly whenever a Gamemaster really wants them to try the game. Thanks to your feedback, we are proud to present a slimmer volume intended for players.

In your hands is the **ZWEIHÄNDER Grim & Perilous RPG: Player's Handbook**. Abridged from the first ten chapters of the 2018 Gen Con award-winning **ZWEIHÄNDER Revised Core Rulebook**, it contains everything you need to create a character: from professions & advancement, to backgrounds & skills, for intrigue & combat, to exploration & trappings, and magick spells & rituals. It also includes expanded rules for professions and mutant ancestries, previously found in the **Game Mastery** chapter of the Revised Core Rulebook. This means you can now play the lizard-like **Aztlan**, cloven-hoofed **Grendel**, porcine-like **Orx** and mysterious rat folk called **Skrzzak**. We've even filled the book with all-new artwork from our chief interior artist Dejan Mandic, with updated layout using our sepia tones to further call out traits, talents and spells. Plus, in the back of the book, you'll find fully updated character sheets. The sheets are in horizontal and vertical formats, and allow you to tell the tale of your character using a Mad Libs-styled background introduction. Best of all – the character sheets are perforated for easy removal from the book for photocopying.

Using the **ZWEIHÄNDER Grim & Perilous RPG: Player's Handbook**, you will embroil your character in dark & low fantasy adventures, inspired by the worlds of *Berserk*, *Black Company*, *Dark Souls*, *Game of Thrones*, *Gentlemen Bastards*, *Solomon Kane*, *The Witcher* and other Renaissance-styled "grimdark"-inspired works.

With 72 Professions, 43 expert professions, 10 ancestries, numerous backgrounds, a myriad of weapons, perforated characters sheets in both horizontal & vertical format, and over 160 magick spells & rituals, you'll have countless ways to create your version of a grim character ready to embark upon perilous adventures.

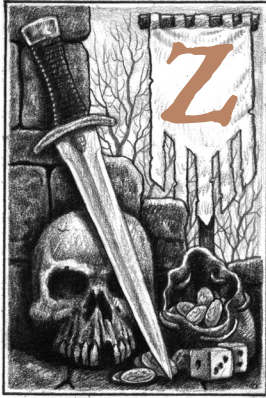
**ZWEIHÄNDER AWAITS, AND THE FATE OF YOUR GRIM & PERILOUS TALE HANGS IN THE BALANCE!**

Daniel D. Fox





## ◆ INTRODUCTION ◆



**WEIHÄNDER** is a pastiche of many familiar themes found throughout low fantasy literature: the gritty portrayal of a society replete with clandestine conflict, political intrigues, vicious reprisals and terrifying supernatural elements. The Gamemaster (called a **GM**) will impose dramatic, tense situations upon players using intrigue, dangerous fights, the perils of the wilderness, heart-pumping chase scenes and more. These are the

foundation of this book, as any one of them can prove lethal in very different ways. These challenges frame the drama of the adventure. As the GM calls upon you to mold the flow of events, you roll the dice to determine success or failure.

Most readers will already be familiar with tabletop role-playing games and how they work. For the uninitiated, a role-playing game is basically a story or adventure, otherwise an organized, cooperative game of pretend called a **game session**. In essence, you and your friends share an interactive story where your choices drive the action, drama and suspense by taking on the role of someone else. You resolve actions during the game session using dice to determine whether choices were successful or not.

But a role-playing game is much more than just a series of arbitrations between numbers on a sheet of paper or a puzzle of arithmetic to be plotted out and solved. The lifeblood of your game will be expressed through role-playing, subtlety and complexity, for which dice alone are woefully inadequate. Personalities within the game will be comprised of moral strengths and flaws; in other styles of game, the rewards for success are based on successfully manipulating situations confronted towards the former and away from the latter. The strength of your game will not be in the overcoming of obstacles, but frequently in the act of simply facing them. Their spirit is as crucial as the dread they face; after all, the darkest recess is always found just outside the range of the flickering candle.

There are many dark themes you'll find within these pages. The system and its game mechanics are written to describe a motif of brutal violence, political intrigue, profane sorcery and unimaginable horrors from beyond. Disease runs rampant throughout cities. Towering asylums upon the edge of civilization ring with the howls of the demented and damned. Tales of twisted monstrosities are whispered in firelight, talk of an all-consuming chaos that rests below the earth and beyond the stars. It slumbers until stirred by intrepid fools, or waits lurking in the deepening shadows of a nearby alley, biding its time. Villainy lies within the hearts of women and men, who engage in all manner of violence and deceit in

the name of progress. It is a world where the upright perish, the unjust linger and grim attitudes rule. People live in a state of decay and paranoia, scrambling to keep what little has been afforded them by the higher social classes. The gods are petty and quick to anger; their fickle gifts bestowed upon a vexing few. Those who call themselves priests are often venal charlatans, consumed by the very sins they preach against. Far from the prying eyes of others, sorcerers risk their sanity and their souls to harness the mysterious power of cosmic disorder by striking Faustian bargains with gods, diabolical servants and other less palatable entities. All of these terrible things manifest into Corruption (both a thematic element and a game mechanic); a world-eating blackness that can utterly twist its victims both physically and spiritually.

These same elements are very portable, as any GM can easily integrate **ZWEIHÄNDER's** rules into their own homebrewed world. They can use the rules to craft adventures set in a low fantasy version of the Thirty Years' War, the politically-inspired intrigues of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the racial tensions of Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher*, the criminal underworld of Scott Lynch's *Lies of Locke Lamora*, war torn adventures set in Glen Cook's *The Black Company* and other 'grimdark'-inspired campaign settings.

**WHAT ZWEIHÄNDER IS NOT**

This system isn't really designed for the traditional dungeon romp. While these rules can support that style of play, death is almost a certainty. Injuries sustained in **ZWEIHÄNDER** often have nasty consequences, requiring prolonged periods of recovery and care. Creatures are incredibly dangerous and rarely taken down without lasting wounds. In a grim & perilous world, common peasant rabble (when gathered into large enough groups) can drag a veteran knight off his steed and beat him to a bloody pulp. We don't wish to thwart this style of play, but you have been warned!

**PLAYER'S ROLE**

You and your friends will share an interactive story where you drive the action, drama and suspense by taking on the role of someone else. To start, a group of people use the book you're holding in your hands right now to each create a player Character (called a **PC**), an alternate fantasy personality. Players are actors within the shared story, portraying their Character using first and third person perspectives during a game session. They can change the outcome of the story by making decisions 'In-Character', using the persona they've created. Players portraying their Character's personality using active and descriptive role-playing perspectives during a game session. Active role-playing means a player declaring things as if they were their Character, such as, "*I march across the chamber to skewer the highwayman, declaring loudly FIE!*".



Descriptive role-playing means a player describes the actions their Character is engaging in, such as, “*Wilhelm marches across the chamber to attack the highwayman, shouting a battle cry*”. Both are appropriate ways to role-play in **ZWEIHÄNDER**. These decisions drive the challenges, resolved by using dice to test success and failure.

## GAMEMASTER’S ROLE

The GM presents the world Characters live within. They act as the narrator of this world, keeping things organized, authoring the challenges within the adventure, providing exposition and portraying the other personas and creatures (called a non-player Character or NPC). Additionally, the GM makes up details and information about the setting and those within it. They also serve as referee to the decisions players make as their Characters, promoting fairness and fun in equal measure. The GM will adjudicate the results of dice rolls and produce a narrative that encapsulates what the Characters are experiencing. And when the interpretation of rules is called for, the GM is responsible for making the final decision.

Veteran GMs will likely develop a lengthy story arc known as a **campaign**, which is a malleable blueprint that highlights the themes, people and places within game sessions while allowing the aforementioned elements to be molded by the choices players make with their Characters. Oftentimes, they will even create their own persistent **campaign worlds**,

further immersing themselves and the players within its deep and robustly imaginative framework. Some GMs may even adopt elements from popular television shows, author an alternate history derived from our own world’s history, adapt stories from material found in popular fantasy novels or use published campaigns created by other role-playing game publishers.

## THE GOLDEN RULE

One rule above all others is held in the highest regard around the gaming table – have a good time! This means that the GM and players should never let the rules prevent the story from moving forward. If a rule gets in the way, work with your GM to change it by turning it into a house rule, personalizing it for your group’s preferred style of play. While rules act as tools, rulings are far more important on the GM’s part rather than strict adherence to the book. **ZWEIHÄNDER** is built with modularity baked into the rules and able to be modified without upsetting the inherent balance of the system. In other words, don’t let the rules bog down gameplay and fun on the part of players and the GM.

If for some reason you or the GM have forgotten a specific rule, ignore it and look it up later. Stopping the game to find the exact language (or even argue about its interpretation) only creates frustration around the table. The GM and the players shouldn’t position themselves into adversarial roles.

Above all else, a role-playing game is a cooperative game, with an agreement between the players and the GM that they will play fairly, placing fun above all else. And while the GM has the final say on how all rules play out, you should be mindful of your choices and discuss any issues you may have with a particular mechanic or interpretation outside of the game session. Don't ruin the fun for you and everyone else around you by dragging the GM into an argument over how a rule is used. Save discussion of the point for the end of the game session or the beginning of the next.

Additionally, dice rolls alone do not solely dictate how the story plays out. Dice add an element of random chance to the game. It may create moments of excitement as you succeed at a difficult challenge to overcome some deadly obstacle. Other times, it can be exceedingly harsh, as when a dice roll results in the death of a Character. While dice add a threatening element of chance to the game that may be beneficial or ruinous, the narrative, story and role-play should be the core focus. While grim & perilous games tend to be far grittier and unrelenting than other role-playing games, you should do your best to emulate this same style of gaming by relying less on the dice rolls you make and look more towards the role you play. In fact, the game is designed to offer the most rewards for doing just that!

### GENDER NEUTRALITY

Throughout this book, you'll note that we use the singular 'they' (along with its inflected forms like them or their) for indeterminate gender. However, our play examples will typically reference the gendered pronoun appropriate to the gender of the player or their Character.



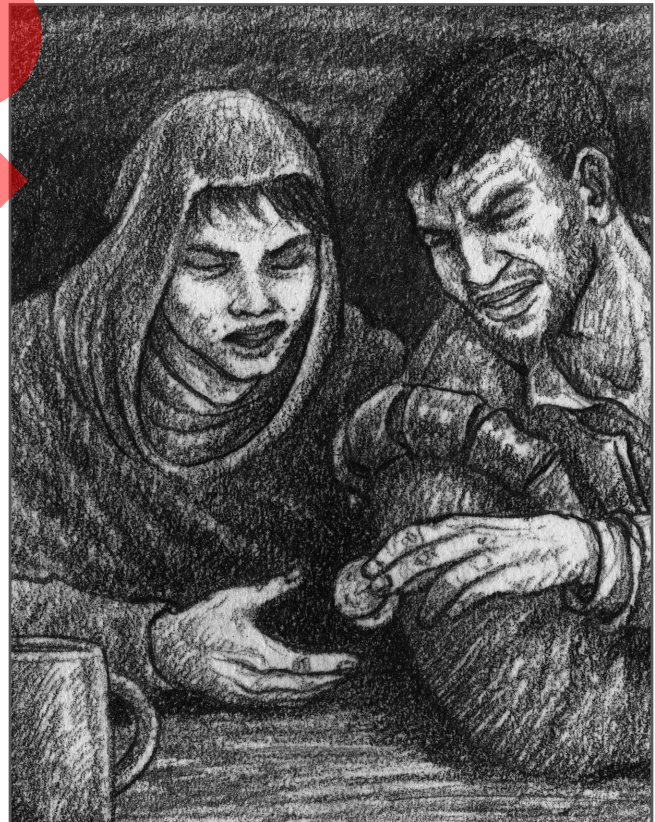
### YOUR ZWEIHÄNDER GAME

Although ZWEIHÄNDER has several implied thematic elements, you are encouraged to adjust them to fit your vision of grim & perilous adventures. Feel free to select them piecemeal or ignore them completely and create your own elements. Take a moment, let yourself go and envision how your story might unfold:

- ❖ Will it be an epic struggle between the roving adherents of disorder and a noble empire of scattered provinces?
- ❖ Will it be a dark meditation on real-world ethnic cleansing and land grabs in foreign countries between fantasy races?
- ❖ Will it be a street-level crime drama, taking place entirely in the streets of a Renaissance-inspired metropolis that's dominated by factions both small and large?

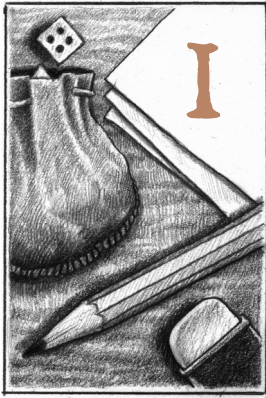
- ❖ Will it explore a perilous frontier of scattered city-states, entrenched in localized sorties between petty warlords?
- ❖ Will it be a sacred pilgrimage that takes its adherents through a terrible and strange land during a cataclysmic apocalypse, testing their faith as the world crumbles around them?
- ❖ Will it be a world replete with backstabbers, schemers, sycophants and money-grubbing petty nobles vying for power while the tides of Magick have begun to arise once more?
- ❖ Will it be a story of a realm riven by civil war, where corrupt noble houses attempt to unify their people beneath the banner of monotheism?
- ❖ Will it be a survival horror game, where Characters either race toward madness or simply try to survive the onslaught of unimaginably terrifying entities from beyond the stars?
- ❖ Will it be a game set in a desperate region stuck in the throes of feudalism, ruled beneath a corrupt monarchy where knights mete out their own brand of justice in service to a goddess of a mythic lake?

With enough imagination and creativity, the possibilities are endless. ZWEIHÄNDER awaits, and the fate of your grim & perilous tale hangs in the balance. We can't wait to hear how it turns out! Please share your experiences on our forums at [GrimAndPerilous.com](http://GrimAndPerilous.com).





## ◆ HOW TO PLAY ◆



In a grim & perilous world, Characters will find themselves engrossed in intense scenes as you face the machinations of socialites and their lackeys, lethal back-alley knife fights, adrenaline-pumped chases and horrific confrontations with aberrant creatures.

Your Characters are able to overcome various challenges by calling upon raw abilities and some innate aptitudes. And naturally, all challenges have their own measure of risk. The threat of failure is a constant reminder that no one, no matter how far along in age or experience, may avoid the turn of fortune's wheel.

Whenever you try to perform a task or action which has a dramatic or direct effect in the gaming world, your GM will ask you to make a Skill Test (sometimes simply called a Test) to determine whether you succeed or fail. Additionally, Skill Tests can render Critical Successes (granting an additional positive effect) or Critical Failures (incurring an additional negative effect). Your GM will determine if some tasks are too difficult for success to be a possibility.

**ROLLING DICE:** The GM will impose challenging situations upon you in various ways. These challenges vary widely, including courtly intrigue, wilderness exploration, chase scenes, combat and more. These are the foundation of **ZWEIHÄNDER**, as any one of them can have serious consequences... or even prove lethal. These challenges form the drama of how your Character interacts with the campaign world. Whenever the GM calls upon you to influence an outcome, you roll the dice to determine success or failure.

Most rolls you make during a game session will be for Skill Tests, generated using dice. To make a Skill Test, you will roll percentile dice using two 10-sided dice, referred to as 'D100' throughout the book. Before you roll, be sure to indicate to players and the GM which die represents the tens die and which represents the units die. If you rolled a face '6' on the tens die and a face '1' on the units die, you generated a result of 61%. When you generate a result of '00', it is equal to 100%. Rolling equal to or under the Total Chance for success means you succeed at your Skill Test. Rolling over the Total Chance for success indicates failure.

Danziger Eckhardt needs to make a Skill Test. His Total Chance for success is 64% or lower. Grabbing D100, Danziger rolls a 34% and succeeds! If he had rolled a 64%, he would still have been successful. However, rolling 65% or higher would have resulted in a failure.

## SKILL TEST SUMMARY

Whenever you make a Skill Test, you'll reference these guidelines. You should commit these steps to memory, as you're going to be called upon to make a number of Skill Tests during a game session:

- ❖ First, you must determine the Skill that's being tested. Generally, your GM will call upon you to Test a specific Skill as you role-play within the campaign world. However, you may also request to use a specific Skill to change events into your or another's favor. Each Skill is related to a Primary Attribute.
- ❖ Once you've identified the Skill to be tested, now determine the Base Chance to use it. First, add the Primary Attribute value to bonuses conferred by Skill Ranks. Then, apply any penalties your Peril Condition Track may confer. This may cause you to ignore some or all of your Skill Ranks. Add modifiers from Talents and Traits that apply. The sum of these determine your Base Chance. The maximum total modifier that can be applied to the Primary Attribute value is +30, while the minimum total modifier is -30. Should the total modifier add up to greater than +30 or less than -30, it is treated as +30 or -30 respectively.
- ❖ Other conditions of the environment and outside influences will have an impact on your ability to succeed or fail. These are ambient bonuses or penalties imposed upon you by the drama of the situation by your GM, called the Difficulty Rating. The GM will tell you the final adjustment you must apply.

Credence Redding is attempting to use a Coordination Test. Coordination is an Agility-based Skill. His Agility is 45%, while he has 3 total Skill Ranks in Coordination. This gives a Base Chance of 75% (45 + 10 + 10 + 10). However, Credence is suffering from "Ignore 2 Skill Ranks" on the Peril Condition Track. This means that his Base Chance is now only 55% (45 + 10).

- ❖ Add all of the modifiers together to determine the Total Chance for success. While some modifiers may negate one another, your GM will always clarify these situations.
- ❖ Grab D100, call out to the table what your Total Chance for success is and roll. If the rolled number is equal to or less than your Total Chance for success, you have succeeded at the Skill Test. If the results are greater than the Total Chance for success, you have failed the Skill Test.

We will speak more in upcoming chapters about using Skills.



Leopold attempts to Charm his way past a city guard. Unfortunately for him, the city is on high alert, and the GM imposes a Difficulty Rating of (Hard -20%). This is applied to Leopold's 81% Base Chance, meaning his Total Chance of success on this occasion is reduced to 61%.

### PERIL CONDITION PENALTIES

Your Peril Condition Track may impose penalties to your Total Chance for success. If you are Unhindered or Imperiled, you suffer no additional penalties. However, if your status on the Peril Condition Track is "Ignore 1 Skill Rank", "Ignore 2 Skill Ranks" or even "Ignore 3 Skill Ranks", you must subtract the bonuses your Skill Ranks normally confer to you. However, if you are Incapacitated!, you cannot even roll dice, as you cannot succeed at any Skill Test. You will learn more about the Peril Condition Track in **Chapter 9: Hazards & Healing**.

### DIFFICULTY RATING

Clambering over a manse's garden wall to abscond away with riches may prove to be a relatively easy task should there be creeping vines to aid you, but scaling the sheer face of a tower to infiltrate the count's personal chambers is considerably more difficult. While both require an Athletics Test, it is clear that the second example is more challenging. But do you know what the level of challenge is of the first example? This is where the Difficulty Rating comes into play.

Circumstances directly affect your ability to succeed or fail with a Skill Test. Your GM will always assign a Difficulty Rating to a particular task you wish to attempt. These bonuses help distinguish how easy it is to climb up the manse's wall or perhaps how hard it is to scale the face of a mountain. However, you may individually gain benefits from, or be penalized by, your Character's Ancestral Traits, Professional Traits, Talents or even the Qualities of the trappings you carry. In cases where there are unique modifiers, apply them to your Total Chance for success.

You'll note that there are several different steps along the Difficulty Rating Chart. Whenever your GM determines the Difficulty Rating of the Skill you're about to Test, consult the table below to determine the final modifiers to your Skill Test. A GM will generally call out the Difficulty Rating for the Skill Test, instead of telling you the bonus or penalty. You can quantify the modifier from the Difficulty Rating using the chart on the bottom of your Character Sheet:

### DIFFICULTY RATING

DIFFICULTY RATING	DESCRIPTION
(Arduous -30%)	Apply a -30% penalty to Base Chance
(Hard -20%)	Apply a -20% penalty to Base Chance
(Challenging -10%)	Apply a -10% penalty to Base Chance
(Standard +/- 0%)	No penalties or bonuses
(Routine +10%)	Add a +10% bonus to Base Chance
(Easy +20%)	Add a +20% bonus to Base Chance
(Trivial +30%)	Add a +30% bonus to Base Chance

**OTHER MODIFIERS:** Under special circumstances, there may be situational modifiers in play when making a Skill Test. Your GM will tally these situational modifiers on their side and give you the Difficulty Rating. You should concern yourself only with your Character's immediate Base Chance to use a Skill and let the GM worry about any other ambient modifiers. A GM will likely be willing to share with you the modifiers following your Skill Test's dice roll.

Hamish Claviger watches along the edge of the woods for signs that anyone followed him. It is dark outside and Hamish has no light. The GM considers the situation to determine the Difficulty Rating, telling him that it is a (Hard -20%) Awareness Test.

### TOTAL CHANCE FOR SUCCESS

Whenever it is time to make a Skill Test, the GM will announce the Difficulty Rating. However, these results may not be all that encouraging. For instance, you may have a 75% Base Chance to use Skulduggery, but because you're trying to lift someone's purse while surrounded by watchful eyes, the GM has determined that the Difficulty Rating is (Arduous -30%). This reduces your Total Chance for success to 45%.

Once you have announced what your Character intends to do and the GM calls out the Difficulty Rating, you must commit to your intended action.



### SITUATIONAL DIFFICULTY RATING

**ZWEIHÄNDER** does not provide a complete list of every single Difficulty Rating for the situations your Character may be thrust in. Most of these decisions rely on the GM's adjudication of the rules, relying solely on contextual interpretation. Describe what you wish to attempt accurately as you can, so that the GM can assign an appropriate Difficulty Rating. The Difficulty Rating descriptor is not an arbitrary word. If you can explain why your Character would find the task easy to overcome, then you may expect an easier Difficulty Rating. While the GM will attempt to be fair, don't be surprised if your Tests are considerably harder if you're not fully describing in detail what you wish to do.



Leopold Coventry is perched atop a roof, and needs to get away from his pursuers; he must jump! His player tells the GM that Leopold will jump from one rooftop to another, crossing the gap using his Athletics Skill. The GM tells him that it is an (Arduous -30%) Difficulty Rating. Knowing that this will drastically reduce Leopold's Total Chance of Success, the player tells the GM he doesn't want to do it. The GM reminds him that once he asks to do something and the Difficulty Rating is set, he must commit to his action. With an audible sigh, the player picks up the dice to see what fate lies in store for poor Leopold.

### CRITICAL SUCCESS & FAILURE

In certain cases, you may generate a Match with your D100. A Match occurs whenever you generate the same die result on both the tens and units dice (e.g. 11, 22, 33, 44, 55, 66, 77, 88, 99). These can have a dramatic impact on your successes and failures.

**CRITICAL SUCCESS:** If you succeed at your Skill Test and the dice Match, you incur a Critical Success. This may mean you may dole out additional wounds upon a foe, gain a temporary beneficial effect, add a bonus to your ally's next Skill Test or do a number of other things. These are generally contextual and the GM will announce any additional benefits or penalties tied to a Match. Your Talents and Professional Traits may confer other effects as well.

Grover Caldwell has a 55% Total Chance for success. Rolling D100, he generates a 33% — a Match! Because it's below the Total Chance for success, it qualifies as a Critical Success. The player announces that Grover has succeeded at the Skill Test with a Critical Success.

**CRITICAL FAILURE:** Should you fail your Skill Test and the dice Match, you incur a Critical Failure. The effects of Critical Failures are generally to your detriment. Your GM will tell you what the effects of these sorts of Matches are as you play. Sometimes, they may not even describe the terrible effect until it really matters. These negative effects always dramatically enhance the story and your trials and tribulations.

Natasha Steeples is wanted for crimes she didn't commit. Cornered by a bounty hunter, Natasha attempts to convince them otherwise. Natasha has a 55% Total Chance for success. Rolling D100, she generates a 66% — a Match! But, because it's above her Total Chance for Success and it's a Match, it qualifies as a Critical Failure. The GM notes that it is a Critically Failed Skill Test and considers other complications.

**SKILL TESTS OVER 100%:** In rare cases, it is possible to have a Total Chance for success in excess of 100%. However, your Total Chance for success can never be more than 99%. A result of 100% on D100 is always treated as a Critical Failure.

**SKILL TESTS LOWER THAN 1%:** There are times when your Total Chance for success calculates to less than 1%. However, your Total Chance for success can never be less than 1%. Roll a Skill Test regardless. A result of 01% on D100 is always treated as a Critical Success, despite not being a Match.

### AUTOMATIC SUCCESS & FAILURE

Any time you intend for your Character to attempt a dangerous action, you'll make a Skill Test. However, there are many mundane things your GM will not have you make a Test for. Otherwise, this would make for a very boring, drawn-out and unpleasant gaming experience for you and other players. Tasks without risk such as climbing up ladders, driving a cart along a well-traveled road, writing in your Character's journal in a foreign tongue and the like likely require no Tests, and you should assume that they are passed automatically. The GM will be the final arbiter, as always, in these cases.

Lyndon Geneveux is riding his horse down a cobblestone road. Knowing that he has a Skill Rank in Ride, the player asks the GM if he needs to make a Skill Test to see how well he is controlling his horse. Since Lyndon isn't on a rough road and there aren't any real drawbacks for failure, the GM simply rules that Lyndon is riding very well, and allows him to show off his skills to his friends while they ride alongside.

### RE-ATTEMPTING FAILED TESTS

Failed Skill Tests may have other setbacks as a result. The GM may rule that a failed Athletics Test results in exhaustion. Similarly, Critically Failing an Athletics Test



could result in a nasty fall. Yet, this is not to say every failed Skill Test necessarily results in immediate, inevitable failure. Some Tests can be reattempted, but generally at a cost the GM dictates.

If you fail a roll, there may be a legitimate reason to re-attempt a failed Skill Test. However, not all Tests can necessarily be retried. For instance, if you fail a Tradecraft Test, the result has already been determined – you failed to craft something effectively and it is of shoddy quality. Another time, you may want to really, **really** get over a wall, despite the fact that you failed the first Athletics Test. Consider using an alternative Skill or think of a more creative way to grant additional bonuses to your Test.

Whenever you re-attempt a failed Skill Test, the penalties rely on narrative changes or the imposition of other mitigating factors as determined by the GM. For instance, you may have failed an Athletics Test to climb over a wall. Your GM may decide that a rope or other climbing implement would allow you to re-attempt the failed Skill Test. Other situations may not allow you to re-attempt the Skill Test until time has passed, particularly if you wouldn't know if the initial Skill Test had failed. For instance, you may have failed a check to cleanse and scrape off contagion from a comrade's wounds, noted only because the patient's disposition grew worse. Some failures may even work against your mind, demoralizing you. Only by gaining help, finding better equipment, waiting an appropriate amount of time or increasing your number of Skill Ranks allows you to re-attempt the failed Test.

Liem DuFrasne is amongst a crowd, tailing a local magistrate through the market. He needs to pilfer a seal the magistrate has hidden on his person. Using the bustle of the crowd for cover, a Skulduggery Skill Test is rolled and failed. However, Liem is determined to pick the magistrate's pocket. As the townsfolk swell around him in the market, it provides Liem another opportune moment to try again.

There are some exceptions to these rules, particularly in combat. Every swing and shot against an active enemy promotes a new set of circumstances. We'll talk more about how this works in **Chapter 8: Combat**.

### SOME SKILL TESTS TAKE TIME

Most Skill Tests require only mere moments of attention to succeed or fail at. However, some require a longer expenditure of time and energy. For Skill Tests that require longer lengths of time, your GM will indicate how long it takes to attempt it after they've announced the Difficulty Rating.

### EXTENDED TESTS

If you decide to triple the amount of time required to try a task, your chances may increase. For instance, mending a person's wounds with the Heal Skill takes ten minutes. However, if you instead dedicated thirty minutes to clean and dress the wound more carefully by taking **greater care**, the chance of you succeeding increases.

Anytime you are beset by circumstances where you take your time with the Skill Test, your GM will impose a more favorable Difficulty Rating, based on narrative circumstances.

### HASTY TESTS

Some Skill Tests may need to be made in a hurry or under some duress. Anytime you are beset by circumstances where you wish to rush through the Skill Test, your GM will impose a less favorable Difficulty Rating, based on narrative circumstances.

### SKILL SYNERGY

Some Skills can be used to benefit one another in the right circumstances. These situations are always determined by the GM, but you should feel encouraged to think about how you can pair up Skills together to take advantage of this. In these cases, you may add a +10 Base Chance to your Total Chance for success.

Credence Redding has recovered a stolen painting. He wishes to evaluate whether it is a forgery or not with the Counterfeit Skill. Fortunate for Credence, he has a Skill Rank in Tradecraft with a Focus in Artistry. The GM decides to let Credence add a +10 Base Chance when he makes the Counterfeit Test, in order to determine whether or not the painting is legitimate.

### ASSISTED TESTS

Fortunately, your Character is not alone in their adventures. There are times in any grim & perilous game session where your own capabilities aren't enough; a physical challenge too demanding or a social situation too perplexing. Rely on your allies to provide additional help while tackling the challenges presented to you by your GM.

However, you must adhere to these few basic rules whenever you provide assistance to others' Skill Tests:

- ❖ An assisting ally must at least possess one Skill Rank in the relevant Skill to assist another, regardless of whether it is a Common or Special Skill.
- ❖ Whenever an ally intends to assist your Skill Test, they must hand one of their D100 (their tens die) to you. This die is called an Assist Die and can replace the tens die result of the next Skill Test you make.

- ❖ Roll your D100 and the Assist Die along with it. When determining results, you may reference either the original tens die or the Assist Die with the results you prefer (typically the lowest result). This means that if you roll D100 that comes up with a '45%', and your Assist Die comes up as face '3', your new derived result is '35%'.
- ❖ Always assume the best result when gaining assistance with an Assist Die, unless it is a Critical Failure.
- ❖ Only one ally can assist a Test. This means no matter how many allies are assisting, you cannot gain more than one Assist Die to a Skill Test.
- ❖ Assistance requires full attention and effort. A player can't simply announce that they're assisting a Skill Test. The assisting player must describe the actions their Character is taking to illustrate to the GM how they intend to help. Simply stating that you wish to assist a Charm Test likely won't garner a vote of support from the GM, but declaring that you intend to gaze admiringly and subtly seduce the lady-in-waiting that your ally is engaged in conversation with will.
- ❖ Assistance with a Test can be announced by another player after the Difficulty Rating has been called out by the GM.

Hamish Claviger has crashed the group's coach into a low ravine. He and his friends are trying to figure out how to drag it out without harming the horses. Hamish knows something of how to prepare a wagon's creatures for travel, given that he spent time loading trunks for 'bigwigs' in the 'big city'. He asks the GM if he can roll a Handle Animal Test to determine whether there's an easier way to unhitch the horses without causing any further injury. The GM announces that the Difficulty Rating of the Skill Test will be (Challenging -10%), which means Hamish's Total Chance for success is 55%. Leopold Coventry immediately pipes up, indicating that he has raised horses his entire life and may be able to provide some assistance with the work. The GM tells Leopold he can confer an Assist Die to Hamish's Skill Test. Hamish rolls a '63%' on his D100, and a face '3' on Leopold's Assist Die. Hamish swaps the face '6' for a face '3', with his derived result now a '33%' – a Critical Success!

## OPPOSED TESTS

In **ZWEIHÄNDER**, most Skill Tests assess a binary outcome of success or failure; the wall is either climbed or not. For instance, whenever you strike a foe with an attack, they may elect to defend themselves. They need not 'beat' your results; the foe must only succeed on their roll. The same can be said when using the Intimidate Skill to terrify your enemies. Although you may have succeeded, your enemies may make a Resolve Test on their Turn to shake off or simply ignore its effects. However, there are certain situations where these sorts of rolls may not do the trick or both tests are successful and result in a tie.

Should there ever be a time where an Opposed Test is absolutely required (such as in a contest of strength or when gambling), not only should you succeed at the Skill Test, you must also reference your Degrees Of Success. You determine Degrees Of Success by adding together the tens die (a result between 1 to 10) and the relevant Primary Attribute Bonus the Skill is derived from. For example, if your Character has a Primary Attribute of 45%, your Primary Attribute Bonus is '4'. Whoever succeeds at their Skill Test and has the highest Degrees Of Success automatically wins the Opposed Test. If the Degrees Of Success match, make another Opposed Test until one side is declared the winner. In cases where you automatically succeed at a Skill Test, simply roll a 1D10 and add the related Primary Attribute Bonus as above.

Grover Caldwell is sneaking through a merchant's camp at night. Although most are asleep, a scullion boy has been charged to clean up and watch their wares. The GM decides to have Grover and the scullion boy make an Opposed Test. Grover's Stealth Test is (Challenging -10%), whereas the scullion's Awareness Test is (Routine +10%). Grover has an [AB] of 4. He then rolls 35%, succeeding at his Skill Test. Grover has generated 7 Degrees of Success (4 + 3). The scullion boy's [PB] is 2. He then rolls a 22%, a Critical Success! A Critical Success always wins in an Opposed Test.

Any time a Skill Test in an Opposed Test results in Critical Success, that participant automatically wins the contest. If both participants roll a Critical Success, reference the Degrees Of Success to determine the winner. But, if the Opposed Test results in a Critical Failure, the participant automatically loses the contest.

However, in some cases the GM may rule that the Opposed Test should play out in a tense manner. These sort of Opposed Tests take place over several rolls. The highest result will win the contest. Characters who wish to participate will roll a series of Tests, tallying their individual results. Whomever generates the most Degrees of Success will win.



Danziger Eckhardt bellies up to the bar, attempting to engage in an arm wrestling contest against the local champ, “Gutboy” Barrelhaus. The GM says that the first to succeed their Athletics Tests and to reach the Target Number of 20 wins. Both Danziger and Gutboy make opposed Athletics Tests. Both succeed at their Athletics Tests, so it’s time to compare Degrees Of Success. Danziger rolled a 45% and adds his Brawn Bonus [BB]\* of 5. Danziger’s total Degrees Of Success is 9 (4 + 5). Gutboy rolled a 35% and adds his [BB] of 7. Gutboy’s total Degrees Of Success is 10 (3 + 7). The GM makes a note of the current Degrees Of Success, and the match continues on. Danziger rolls another Athletics Test; unfortunately, he fails his roll (and doesn’t generate any Degrees Of Success). Gutboy rolls his Athletics and generates another 10 Degrees Of Success! Gutboy takes Danziger over the top, winning the arm wrestling contest.

\* See *Chapter 3: Character Creation* for more information about a Character’s Brawn Bonus [BB].

Alternatively, the GM will announce how many Degrees Of Success are required to win (called the Target Number), and each participant will take turns, making the relevant Skill Test, counting up their respective Degrees Of Success. The first to exceed the Target Number with their Degrees Of Success wins.

## SECRET TESTS

Sometimes, the GM may not want you to know whether you were successful or not. Tests to ferret out hidden agendas (such as with *Scrutinize*), Tests to proficiently copy a document (using *Counterfeit*), Tests to hide holdout weapons on your person (using *Skulduggery*), Tests to change your appearance (such as with *Disguise*) and other kinds of Tests that the GM would rather secretly know the results of falls underneath the auspices of a Secret Test.

Generally, these are used to hide the mechanics beneath the narrative, making certain that you as a player don’t know the immediate result. Under these circumstances, you’ll already have described what your Character is doing. Should you possess a Talent or Trait which allows you to flip or otherwise modify the Skill, be sure to tell the GM. From there, you will announce your Base Chance and then roll the dice; the GM will record the results secretly from you. The GM will only ever reveal the result if you generate a Critical Success or Critical Failure. Otherwise, the GM will interpret the dice and explain in narrative terms what happens. It all boils down to perception – if the GM feels that you shouldn’t know the exact details, they’ll obfuscate the result within the narrative without directly revealing if you succeeded at the Test or not. No matter the situation, a Secret Test can never be given the benefit of an Assist Die.

Grover Caldwell is attempting to use an ancient ritual to summon an Abyssal demon to serve him. Although he has taken the proper precautions, the minds of diabolical servants rarely bow to mortals. After successfully casting his Magick, the creature appears in all its wickedness and grotesquery from a thick plume of sulphurous smoke. The GM secretly determines what the Difficulty Rating is, and asks Grover to make a Secret Test using the Bargain Skill, in order to determine if his force of will is enough to command the demon to do his bidding. Recording the result in secret, the GM will enact its outcome as Grover commands the creature to cower to his wishes...

## FLIP THE RESULTS TO SUCCEED

Under some circumstances, an ability may allow you to 'flip the results to succeed' at a Skill Test and take the better result. Whenever the result of your Skill Test is a failure, you also swap the units and tens die with each other to determine if you were successful. You always accept the better of the two results. If you have two or more traits that confer the ability to flip dice, you can only take advantage of one or the other.

Natasha Steeples is attempting to listen in on a conversation in a bedchamber next to hers. Pressing a cup against the wall, she tries to discern what the people next door are saying. Natasha knows this is an Eavesdrop Test and has a pretty good chance of succeeding. However, she fails her Skill Test by rolling an 81%. Fortunately, Natasha also possesses a special Trait, which allows her to flip the results of a failed Eavesdrop Test. Natasha flips the dice, making the 18% instead.

## FLIP THE RESULTS TO FAIL

In rare cases, you may be called to 'flip the results to fail' a Skill Test and take the worst result. This mechanic is generally only used for use of Special Skills in which you possess no Skill Ranks in. Whenever the result of your Skill Test is a success, you swap the units and tens die with each other in order to see if you fail. When flipping the results to fail, you always accept the worst of the two results.

Credence Redding, bereft of his weapon, picks up a zweihänder sword. This particular weapon requires use of the Martial Melee Skill, which Credence possesses no Skill Ranks in. His Total Chance for success is 34%. He rolls D100, generating a 34%. Unfortunately, he must flip the results to fail, so Credence instead considers the results to be 43%, failing his Martial Melee Skill Test.

Finally, should you possess an ability that allows you to flip the results to succeed and it's opposed by another's ability or situation that forces you to flip to fail, they simply cancel each other out, as you attempt a normal Skill Test.

## USING COMMON SKILLS

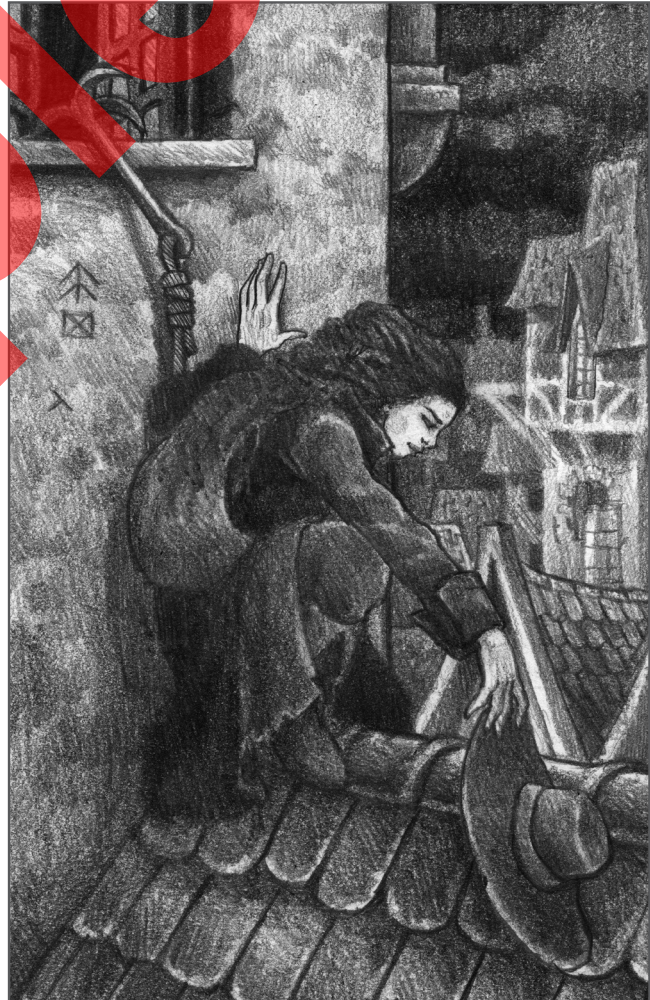
In **ZWEIHÄNDER**, it is impossible to have Skill Ranks in every Skill. This is entirely intentional; no matter how you grow your Character, you will only possess Ranks in a fraction of the total Skills available in the game. Yet, Common Skills can be roundly used by everyone.

Even though you may not have any Skill Ranks in a Common Skill, reference your Primary Attribute to determine your Base Chance. However, Talents and Traits may further modify the Base Chance (which you'll learn more about later).

Lyndon Geneveux needs to abandon the boat he was piloting earlier and swim to shore. The GM announces that it will be an (Easy +20%) Athletics Test to swim. Given that Lyndon doesn't have any Skill Ranks in the Common Skill of Athletics, he can only reference his Brawn to determine his Total Chance of Success.

## USING SPECIAL SKILLS

Special Skills require a deeper understanding and a more specific set of knowledge to effectively use them. These are typically indicated on your Character Sheet with an asterisk beside them. Even though you may not have any Skill Ranks in a Special Skill, you may reference your Primary Attribute to determine your Base Chance. However, you must flip the results to fail the Test.





Leopold Coventry steals his foe's blunderbuss and takes aim. The GM announces that it will be a (Hard -20%) Martial Ranged Test to fire. Given that Leopold doesn't have any Skill Ranks in Martial Ranged, he can only reference his Combat to determine his Total Chance of Success. Furthermore, when calculating results, he must flip the results to fail this Skill Test.

## FURY & CHAOS DICE

Throughout this work, you'll see mention of D6 Fury Dice to generate Damage for melee and ranged weapons. In particular, Fury Dice will be referenced in **Chapter 8: Combat**. Anytime you roll for Damage, if it generates a face '6' on the Fury Die, add an additional 1D6 Fury Die to Total Damage value. If that Fury Die then generates another face '6', it continues to 'explode', generating yet further additional 1D6 Fury Dice. Fury Dice can explode as many times as you can generate face '6s'. Calculate all results together to determine Total Damage.

Liem Dufrasne successfully strikes with his shiv. Liem's Combat Bonus [CB]\* is 3. He rolls a 1D6 Fury Die, resulting in a face '6'. He now adds 1D6 Fury Die, generating another face '6'. He rolls yet another Fury Die, resulting in a face '1'. Liem inflicts 16 Total Damage (3 + 6 + 6 + 1).

*\*See Chapter 3: Character Creation for more information about a Character's Combat Bonus [CB].*

Similarly, you may see mention of D6 Chaos Dice. Chaos Dice are used for special situations that dictate something terrible may happen whenever it lands on face '6'. They are generally referenced when determining if an Injury occurs, but the GM may impose a Chaos Die in other circumstances where there is the possibility that unintended things may happen. You'll learn more about Chaos Dice in **Chapter 8: Combat** and **Chapter 10: Grimoire**.

## FORTUNE POOL

The tides of order and chaos are in a constant tug of war. All are bound to the wheel of fortune as it turns, turning treacherously for both the villainous and the chivalrous alike.

Protagonists in **ZWEIHÄNDER** often face unexpected twists of fate and misfortune. Whether stumbling upon a creature's den whilst heeding the call of nature, breaking the axle of a wagon while fording a river, making an offensive quip to a blue-blooded lady of the court, getting caught with a handful of shillings you 'found' in someone else's purse or even just being at the wrong place at the wrong time, Skills

alone won't necessarily remedy every situation. Fortune's wheel continues to spin as blind chance and dumb luck favors the foolhardy and brave alike.

At the beginning of every game session, place one token, plus a number of additional tokens equal to the number of players participating, into a bowl. This means that if there are five players, a total of six tokens must be placed in the bowl at the beginning of the game session. These tokens are called Fortune Points and the bowl is referred to as the Fortune Pool.



Note that Fortune Points do not accrue between game sessions. The Fortune Pool always refreshes at the beginning of a game session, regardless of any leftover Fortune Points from a previous session.

Players should feel encouraged to spend Fortune Points as needed, but judiciously weigh each situation all the same. After all, you'll never know when you need Lady Luck to intervene on your behalf once more, particularly in situations where you're staring down the business end of a blunderbuss or trapped within the grasp of a ravenous monster.

## USING A FORTUNE POINT

You can use Fortune Points in several ways, moving the odds into your favor as fortune smiles upon you:

- ❖ Immediately after failing a Skill Test, spend a Fortune Point. You may then re-roll to generate a better result, but must accept the outcome. Note that you cannot use a Fortune Point to re-roll a Critical Failure.
- ❖ During combat, spend a Fortune Point to gain one additional Action Point on your Turn.
- ❖ Immediately after rolling a D6 Chaos or Fury Die, spend a Fortune Point to treat it as a face value of '6'.

## MISFORTUNE POOL

As the wheel of fortune turns, it works both into the favor of players and the GM alike. Whenever a player uses a Fortune Point, it immediately converts into a Misfortune Point and is then contributed to the GM's own Misfortune Pool. The GM may employ the Misfortune Pool to take advantage of the same benefits as mentioned above for NPCs and creatures they control. However, once Misfortune Points have been spent by the GM, they are simply cast aside permanently from their Misfortune Pool.





## ◆ CHARACTER CREATION ◆



ou will create an alternate persona: a protagonist (or perhaps antagonist!) of the story - your Player Character or PC.

Character creation is relatively simple, but the choices you make during this process have long-term implications. Several themes dominate a grim & perilous game:



- ❖ Dire circumstances recast your fate. You were a normal, everyday person (or as normal as you could be in a Renaissance-inspired, low-fantasy world). However, something in your immediate past dramatically changed your life's path. You now find yourself among others of similar disposition.
- ❖ Retribution and violence are the hallmarks of your unfortunate birthright. The world you live in is largely uncaring, cruel and selfish. The fetid stink of the corrupt wafts from every cobbled street and echoing hillside. The people are bound to strict social strata and rarely break free from the yoke of servitude. You likely know little of the world beyond where you were raised, but have grown accustomed to the grim nature of your environs.
- ❖ Ethnic identity binds communities together. It can also build barriers between them or tear them apart from the inside. Sometimes, prejudice manifests despite the safeguards of tradition and religion. In other cases, prejudice results from class conflict or economic issues. Rarely is it driven solely by Ancestral differences. Perhaps in your case, it's related to the caste you were born to and your envy of your betters.
- ❖ Superstition is the foundation of faith. People genuinely believe that wearing charms made from dried cat eyes or talismans wrought from oddly green-glowing Wytchstone shards will actually ward away riotous spirits, and if one prays hard enough for rain, it will. Like everyone else, your Character likely believes these things. Behind the myths lies a kernel of truth.
- ❖ Religious ceremony and pagan rites dominate every facet of society. You pray hard and sacrifice to your own gods so that they may save your soul from damnation. Most look upwards towards the stars in the Vault of Night for meditative guidance, but some look below into the endless hellhole of the Abyss for quick solutions.
- ❖ Medicine is esoteric; its practitioners few and far between. Quackery dominates the profession, where

snake oil salesmen make up the bulk of the field. True physicians are generally at odds with the church, believed to be necromancers with their odd pursuit of vivisection in the name of scientific understanding. It may not be uncommon for your Character to imbibe unusual concoctions or other questionable remedies to maintain balance of the four humors. Some even pay the same level of 'tithe' to a local barber-surgeon as they would a preacher.

- ❖ Sorcery is reviled by all and those who would dare call themselves true wizards are often burned at the stake for heresy. If you pursue these higher mysteries yourself, these gifts must be hidden from the ignorant and stolen from others who are of your ilk. One does not simply stumble across a grimoire or develop an understanding of sorcery. Magick is a well-hidden secret and those who can employ it jealously guard this knowledge from each other and outsiders. Fortunately, an invisible 'membrane' called the Æthereal Veil mostly protects the world from the terror of raw Magick pouring forth.
- ❖ Ancient monsters and festering mutants doubtlessly exist upon the periphery of civilization and in the darkest of recesses. Those who seek to abandon their former lives to become adventurers will likely have to contend with them at some point. These same creatures also have their own social hierarchy, clawing their way through the pecking order to ascend to dominance. However, not all monsters are truly monstrous, and not all civilized folk are truly civilized. The worst sort of 'monsters' oftentimes exist within the walls - and not without. Beware the enemy without, within and beyond!
- ❖ Capricious and sinister forces vie for agency over the world's people from the Abyss - the pit of destruction where all chaos is born. Their influence - called Corruption - can physically, mentally and spiritually twist those who come under its influence. Behind the curtain, these dark powers play puppet master, pulling the strings of both cast-asides and the well-bred alike. They whisper into the ear of those chosen for a darker purpose. Perhaps you have heard their whispers, too.

Grim & perilous role-playing is not a story about people who change the world. It is instead a story of a world that changes the people within it. Given these considerations, it's easy to believe that a nihilistic principle guides your Character's life. However, there is a glimmer of hope. Not all is lost and fortune has smiled upon your Character for one reason or another. There is a greater role for you to play in the grand scheme of things. It may not result in changing the world as a whole, but a path has been set before you. Fate has something in store for you and your motley crew of comrades.



Ultimately, you must ask yourself how these circumstances will change your Character's primary motivation. Will they rage against the dying of the light as a flickering glimmer of hope, knowing the considerable risks they bear will likely breed pain and helplessness? Will they struggle in the morass of compromise, torn between justified violence, questionable intentions and unyielding dogma? Or, will they simply embrace these dark times for their own opportunistic ends, building legacy and lucre for themselves off the suffering of those less fortunate and clever? The answer is not simple, but it is the definition of what the **ZWEIHÄNDER** role-playing game is all about.

The GM may incorporate additional themes that define the campaign world your Character will experience and influence. Keep in mind that not all of the campaign's secrets need be revealed by the GM, as your story has yet to completely unfold. In short, an idea of where you would like to go with your Character is helpful; an idea of where they've been is a necessity.

### DICE, PENCIL & CHARACTER SHEET

You're going to be recording several kinds of information during the Character creation process. You will need three 10-sided dice, a pencil, and scratch paper. Everything you take down should be written in pencil, so any necessary changes can easily be made along the way during and after this process. You can use the Character sheet presented at the end of the Appendix in **ZWEIHÄNDER Revised Core Rulebook**, or download it directly from our website over at [GrimandPerilous.com](http://GrimandPerilous.com).



### CREATION OVERVIEW

Below is a guideline to follow whenever you create a Character:

- ❖ Step I: Begin Basic Tier
- ❖ Step II: Primary Attributes
- ❖ Step III: Sex & Ancestry
- ❖ Step IV: Archetype & Profession
- ❖ Step V: Secondary Attributes
- ❖ Step VI: Background
- ❖ Step VII: Hand Of Fate
- ❖ Step VIII: Alignment
- ❖ Step IX: Build Your Profession

## STEP I: BEGIN BASIC TIER

Before you begin, it is important to understand the distinction between Tiers of play. A Tier is a measurement of competence, representing a Character's experiences over the course of their adventures. Each Tier represents choices you've made over the course of the story. In **ZWEIHÄNDER**, there are three Tiers – Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Tier. Whenever you first create a Character, you begin in Basic Tier.

Each Tier has a certain number of requirements a Character must fulfill before moving onto a new Tier. The Basic Tier requires you to spend Reward Points on benefits (otherwise called Advances), outlined in your Profession's description. Characters gain promotion into the next Tier by fulfilling all required Advances from the previous Tier. For now, go to the first page of the Character sheet and record Basic Tier.

## STEP II: PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES

Primary Attributes are the building blocks of creation, governing a Character's raw potential and capabilities. They represent physical, mental, and social characteristics. The higher the value, the better the raw ability.

**PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE BONUSES:** Primary Attributes also have a related bonus. These Primary Attribute Bonuses are applied to game mechanics in various ways. These bonuses are equal to the tens digit of the related Primary Attribute, plus any related Bonus Advances or positive/negative modifiers by Ancestry. Each Attribute Bonus is generally referenced by its abbreviated name throughout the book:

- ❖ Combat Bonus [CB]
- ❖ Brawn Bonus [BB]
- ❖ Agility Bonus [AB]
- ❖ Perception Bonus [PB]
- ❖ Intelligence Bonus [IB]
- ❖ Willpower Bonus [WB]
- ❖ Fellowship Bonus [FB]

For example, if a Character has a Brawn of 37%, they would have a [BB] of 3. As you play your Character, these Attribute Bonuses will grow independently from your Primary Attributes. They may be modified with Bonus Advances you earn during Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Tiers. Additionally, all player Ancestries have an intrinsic bonus or penalty to the Primary Attribute Bonus.

## COMBAT

Combat represents your Character's overall proficiency while fighting with weapons in close quarters and from afar, as well as defending yourself. It also determines your Base Chance for success with the Martial Melee, Martial Ranged, Simple Melee and Simple Ranged Skills. Your [CB] directly affects Total Damage inflicted with melee and ranged weapons.

## BRAWN

Brawn represents your Character's physical prowess, muscle, durability and overall endurance. It controls your ability to overpower others using might and force, withstand pain and carry equipment without being encumbered. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Athletics, Drive, Intimidate and Toughness Skills. Your [BB] directly affects Damage Threshold and Encumbrance Limit.

## AGILITY

Agility represents your Character's speed and nimbleness. It controls your ability to outmaneuver others and allows you to duck out of the way from falling hazards. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Coordination, Pilot, Ride, Skulduggery and Stealth Skills. Your [AB] directly affects Movement.

## PERCEPTION

Perception represents your Character's mental acuity and insight. It controls your ability to observe the world around you. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Awareness, Eavesdrop, Scrutinize and Survival Skills. Your [PB] directly affects Initiative and Distances for ranged weapons.

## INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence represents your Character's ability to learn and memorize. It controls your ability to understand the written word and recall important facts. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Alchemy, Counterfeit, Education, Folklore, Gamble, Heal, Navigation and Warfare Skills. Your [IB] directly affects the number of Magick spells that can be learned and number of Focuses acquired.

## WILLPOWER

Willpower represents your Character's resolve and fortitude. It controls your ability to act decisively in the face of hardship and exercise self-control in dangerous or frightening situations. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Incantation, Interrogation, Resolve and Tradecraft Skills. Your [WB] directly affects Peril Threshold and several miscellaneous modifiers for Magick.

## FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship represents your Character's charisma and social savvy. It controls your ability to persuade others, adapt to social situations, and project personal confidence. It also determines your Base Chance to succeed at Skill Tests with the Bargain, Charm, Disguise, Guile, Handle Animal, Leadership and Rumor Skills. Your [FB] is the first number of the Primary Attribute, which directly affects how many people you influence with Fellowship-based Skill Tests and how many languages you may speak.

## GRIM & PERILOUS METHOD

Now that you understand what each Primary Attribute does and the Skills they influence, it's time to generate them using the Grim & Perilous Method. This is the standard method for allocating the basic attributes your Character possesses: an inborn, natural set of seven characteristics. Determining your Primary Attributes, will create a compelling mix of strengths and flaws that reflect the bleak nature of the world your Character inhabits and illustrate the fortune and misfortune of your birth.

Roll 3D10 and add each face value to 25 which generates a percentage result. This means if you roll 3D10 and the dice land on face '4', '3' and a '9', you end up with a 41% (25 + 4 + 3 + 9). As you generate each result, record it in the following order by Primary Attribute: Combat, Brawn, Agility, Perception, Intelligence, Willpower and Fellowship. By the time you're finished, you will have seven separate total values.

Sierra is ready to generate Primary Attributes for her Character. Rolling the dice, she generates a 37, 32, 50, 41, 35, 28 and 37. With these results, she has a 37% Combat, 32% Brawn, 50% Agility, 41% Perception, 35% Intelligence, 28% Willpower and 37% Fellowship.

## ASSIGNING PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES?

The die has been cast by fate, favoring no woman, man, or person above another. PCs are bound to the same wheel of fortune and misfortune as the rest of the world. Naturally, you may want to roll all the values and assign them as you please. Merciful GMs may allow you to assign your dice rolls at your discretion, so that you may 'min-max' Primary Attributes. However, this does not capture the spirit of ZWEIHÄNDER and we urge careful thought before considering this option.

