



ZEFERS

A complete roleplaying game
Compiled by Mark Krawec, from
Original Rules by David "Zeb" Cook



Zeb's Fantasy Roleplaying System

A complete rules system for role playing games

***Adapted by
Mark Krawec
from the original rules by
Dave "Zeb" Cook***

ZeFRS: “Zeb’s Fantasy Roleplaying System”

Adapted from original rules by Dave “Zeb” Cook

By

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More information can be found at:

<http://www.midcoast.com/~ricekrwc/zefrs/>

-and-

<http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?t=327143>

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Introduction

Welcome to **ZeFRS** (Zeb's Fantasy Roleplaying System), a complete rules set for gritty, cinematic, swashbuckling swords-and-sorcery role playing games. You won't find pansy elves, drunken dwarves, or cutesy halflings or gnomes in these rules. Rather, here you'll find hulking brutes of men throttling the unholy life from demons with their bare hands, voluptuous pirate women slicing foes to ribbons with rapiers as razor-sharp as their wits, dark wizards who become just a little less human with every spell they cast, and monsters from the darkest bowels of Hell and beyond. This isn't **Lord of the Rings** or **Harry Potter**. This is **Conan** and **Lankmar**.

In fact, the original source for these rules was a wonderful game put out by TSR in the 1980's, written by Dave "Zeb" Cook and based upon the **Conan** licensed property. That game endeavored to capture the feel of not only Howard's original stories, but the **Conan** comic books that were so popular at the time. It did its job well, and in the process gave us a game that was well ahead of its time, and very underappreciated. These "obfuscated" rules are an effort to put that system, sans anyone's intellectual properties, back out there for people to use and enjoy. We hope you enjoy playing it as much as we've enjoyed putting it together. See the credits page of this document for web links where you can find support and more information!

A Roleplaying Game?

Most of you downloading these rules already know what a roleplaying game (or RPG) is, but for those new to the game, this is an exercise in cooperative storytelling, combined with a small element of improvisational theater. Remember playing war with your buddies as a kid, waving toy guns around and yelling, "I shot you!" only to have your friend reply, "Nuh-uh! I'm wearin' bullet-proof armor!"

A roleplaying game is like that, only with two exceptions. First, in this type of game you

don't generally run around in the back yard waving toy guns (though there is a type of roleplaying where people do just that; it's just not in this game). Second, there are rules in place to adjudicate whether or not you shot your opponent and whether he or you is wearing armor. In a roleplaying game, one player acts as the Referee, or Game Master (GM), who sets the stage for your adventure and the stories you're going to tell. The Referee controls everything in the game—from the weather today to the persona of the shopkeeper you meet in the market, to the evil serpent you need to get past—that isn't a character run by a player.

The players, in turn, each control a single (usually) character, called a Player Character, or PC. This character acts as your eyes and ears in the world crafted by the Referee. It is the PC that reacts to the situations the Referee throws at you, guided by the rules of play in this book. All it takes is a little imagination, and you'll be on your way! Trust us; it's easier than it sounds.

What do I Need?

To play you'll need a GM and at least one player, but preferably two to four extra players. Gaming is a social activity. Besides that, keep a pencil, paper, the character sheet found at the end of this book, and a pair of ten-sided dice, called **percentile dice**, handy. You will roll these dice to generate a number between 1 and 100. Some percentile dice have a "tens" die (with numbers 10 to 00) and a "ones" die (numbers 0-9). If you don't have a "tens" die, just use dice of different colors, and designate one to represent the tens (always before you roll). When making a test to see if you can do something, you'll roll these dice and compare the results with a resolution chart. More information on this is found on page 23.

And really, that's all you need to know to get started! Now go on; what are you waiting for? There's demons to kill and wenching to be done!

Chapter One: Creating Your Character

To play ZeFRS, you must have a **character**, an imaginary person whose actions you control. Since you, a player, make the choices for this character, the character is called a **player character** (PC). You determine everything your character does.

The referee controls the actions of **many** different characters in the game. Since the players have no control over these characters, they are called non-player characters (NPCs).

Talents

To play, you have to know your character's **talents** - his physical abilities, knowledge, and skills. These talents determine the feats your character is capable of and how likely he is to succeed at them. Some talents are innate - abilities your character is born with. Other talents are learned through study and practice. As you play the game, your character can learn new talents or improve ones he or she already has.

When you create your character, you choose the talents he or she has and how good he or she is with each talent. This is indicated by a number following the name of the talent. The higher the number, the more skilled the character is with that talent.

Talent Pools

Talents are grouped into **talent pools**. The talents in each talent pool are related. The six Talent Pools are:

- **Prowess:** All your character's physical abilities (other than fighting) are grouped into this pool. **Strength, movement, swimming, and climbing** are some Prowess talents.
- **Fighting:** This pool consists of all the combat abilities of your character, including the different weapon proficiencies, **wrestling, and brawling**.
- **Endurance:** These talents indicate how much punishment your

character can take. Talents such as **stamina, damage endurance, and poison endurance** are included.

- **Knowledge:** Your character must study these talents in order to use them. The Knowledge Pool includes **spells, engineering, reading, writing, and languages**.
- **Perception:** This pool contains talents that require both training and natural ability. Such talents as **shadowing, pocket picking, and animal training** are included here.
- **Insight:** These talents all require inborn ability. Some Insight talents are **natural magic, poetry, and telepathy**.

Not having the talent that governs an action doesn't mean that you can't attempt the action; it only means that your chance of success isn't as high as that of someone who has the talent. Suppose Esmis the warrior has the Sword Fighting Talent, but not the Halberd Fighting Talent. He can still fight with a halberd, but he is not as proficient with it as he is with a sword.

Creating Your Character

Your character has a background, a history of his life prior to adventuring. This includes information about his parents, his homeland, and what he did as a youth. These things affect the appearance and ability of your character and should be recorded as a story, not just a few lines of facts. To enjoy your character to the fullest, you should also record his later adventures as a story.

Naming Your Character

First, decide if your character is male or female. Then give him or her a name. Sword-and-sorcery names are seldom more than one word. You can make up any name you like.

Birthplace

Decide where your character was born. This affects the appearance of your character and any special knowledge he or she might have. A hero born in a Nordic-type land would be tall, fair-haired, and pale, and have light-colored eyes.

The birthplace you choose is the homeland of your character's father. Your character's mother doesn't have to be from the same land as her father.

Your character automatically speaks the language of his homeland.

Parents

The next step is to name your character's father and mother. The names are totally up to you. Fathers and sons (and one presumes mothers and daughters) often have the same or similar names). After giving the parents names, select an occupation for the father. You can choose any non-magical talent from the list of talents. This choice affects the abilities of your character (see **Choosing Talents**, below), so choose carefully! Although there are no restrictions on your choice, consider the homeland of the father. Natives of a remote mountain land are unlikely to have much need of men trained in sailing. They might rather be farmers, miners, or foresters.

You're now ready to fill in a Character Folio. Record your character's sex, name, homeland, parents, parents' occupations, and any other information you want to keep. For example, a PC from a country in an analogue of Africa might have a Folio like this:

Dural Besh of Marumasaj, son of Dural Hab the praise singer and Dural Ima the weaver. Dural grew to a moderate stature, with a wiry frame and long, nimble fingers.

This description lists his name, his homeland, his parents' names and occupations, and his general appearance.

Choosing Talents

After you have chosen the background of your character's parents and his homeland, you must choose your character's talents. These represent his pre-adventuring experiences and studies.

Your character starts with 35 points to spend on talents¹. You can spend your points on any talents you want, with the following restrictions:

1. You cannot start the game with more than 5 points in any one talent.
2. You must have at least 1 talent from each Talent Pool.
3. You must spend at least 1 point on your father's talent.

You can increase the number of points available for talents by selecting weaknesses. A weakness is a flaw in your character's personality or physical abilities. It prevents him from performing certain actions and may occasionally force him into actions that are not in his best interests. Choosing a weakness means you must play your character according to the dictates of that weakness. Be prepared to face the consequences!

The advantage to choosing a weakness is that for each weakness taken, your character receives 10 extra points to spend on talents. You are not required to take any weaknesses.

The weaknesses listed below are the only ones a PC may choose. Some weaknesses restrict the choice of talents for your character. These restricted talents are also listed below.

Weakness	Restricted Talent
Accident prone*	
Color blind*	
Fear of animals	Animal Handling

¹ That number always struck me as leaving the characters a little underpowered. I would at least lift the cap on initial Damage Talent, especially if you're using the original damage system. Otherwise a starting character faces the very real possibility of taking 80% wounds from the first hit of her first combat.

Fear of heights	Climbing
Fear of magic	
Fear of water	Swimming, Sailing
Foppish*	
Gambler*	
Glutton*	
Miserly*	
Night blind*	
Rash*	
Taciturn*	
Tone Deaf	
Weakness to drink*	
Weakness to women/men*	

*A complete explanation of this weakness can be found under Talents and Weaknesses (p.9).

When you are done, your character's Folio will look much like the ones already completed for the sample characters.

Initial Character Talents

Initial Character Talents	
Prowess	Fighting
Acrobatics Animal Reflexes Climbing Movement Strength Swimming Throwing	Brawling Weapon (from weapon list) Wrestling
Endurance	Knowledge
Damage Magic Poison Stamina Will	Arcane Languages Blacksmith Carpentry Goldsmith Herbalism Language (choose language) Lockpicking Lore Navigation Reading/Writing (choose language) Sailing Siegecraft Survival (choose environment) Trapping
Perception	Insight
Animal Handling Medicine Minstrel Observation Pocket Picking Tracking	Animal Senses Danger Sense Directional Sense Hypnotism Magic Sense Personal Magnetism Telepathy Weather Sense

Creating New Talents

The preceding list of talents is not everything a character might know. While the usefulness of unlisted talents is limited, you may want your character to have some unusual ability. Explain the talent to the referee and ask if he will allow it. He will decide if the talent is something your character could learn. He will also decide the Talent Pool to which it belongs.

An unlisted talent is treated like any other talent. You must spend points to give it a rating from 1 to 5. You may also increase your rating in that talent as you would in any other.

For example, perhaps you want your character, Galya Eyepeircer, to have a talent in brewing. You tell the referee that Brewing Talent gives Galya basic knowledge about the methods of brewing and the ability to recognize the ingredients of various drinks by taste. The referee decides this is a talent Galya could learn and that Brewing Talent belongs in the Knowledge Talent Pool. You can add this talent to the Knowledge Talent Pool and spend from 1 to 5 points to give Galya a rating in brewing. In the story section of Galya's Character Folio, you could note:

Galya learned brewing as an apprentice in a meadhall.

General Talent Scores

After you have chosen all the talents for your character, you must find his General Score for each Talent Pool. Add the ratings for all talents in the Talent Pool, then divide by 10, dropping all fractions. The result is the General Score for that Talent Pool. Do this for all six Talent Pools.

The General Score becomes your character's rating for every talent in which (within that Talent Pool) he does not have a rating. The General Score is used whenever

your character tries to do something that is not one of his listed talents.

For Example: Jackal the Reaver wants to try to read Urumxi, something he does not have a talent for. His rating for this attempt is equal to his General Score for the Knowledge Pool.

General Scores can be increased during play, so don't worry if your character's General Scores are low at first.

Starting Equipment

The last step in creating your character is choosing the equipment he starts out with. As you play your equipment list will change, so it is best to write this information on your Character Folio in pencil.

To equip your character, choose one item from each column below:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
any weapon	100' rope & grapple 2 weeks of food dirk cloak saddlebags & bridle steel helmet	horse, saddle chainmail shirt quilted leather armor 5 gold coins bronze cuirass

Your character is now ready for his first adventure in dangerous and wild lands. But before he leaves to find his fame and fortune, you will want to know how well he fights. This is explained in the Combat section (p. 25).



Chapter Two: Talents and Weaknesses

Note that wherever the terms "Minor, Moderate, and Ultimate" appear in descriptions (generally involving Magical Talents), these refer to the result on the Resolution Chart (p. 23) required to achieve a given effect in that category, representing green, yellow, and red, respectively on the base chart.

Accident Prone (Weakness)

Bad luck dogs your character's steps. Every time you roll a 99 or 00 on a resolution check, some disaster befalls her - her weapon may break, she may read a warning as an invitation, she may lose her grip and fall on the person below her while climbing a wall, and so on.

Acrobatics

Talent Pool: Prowess

This Talent is used for any sort of athletic or gymnastic movement, such as vaulting an obstacle, leaping a gap, or walking a tightrope.

Alchemy

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Prerequisites: Arcane Languages, Herbalism

This Talent is used to create magical compounds, whether they be potions, powders, magical alloys, or gases. Three months of study are required to learn Alchemy. The student must also select a Magical Weakness. Some representative items that can be produced using Alchemy include:

- Minor
 - Stupefying powders
 - Love potions
 - Sleeping draughts
- Moderate
 - Knockout gas
 - Poison gas
 - Antidotes
- Ultimate

- Healing elixir
- Insanity potions

Animal Aversion (Weakness)

Something about characters with this weakness is inherently unsettling to animals and humans who possess the Animal Senses Talent. Any such animal or person within 10 feet of your character instantly becomes nervous, skittish and irritable.

Those who suffer from Animal Aversion suffer a two-column penalty on reaction checks when dealing with characters who have the Animal Senses Talent. A character who has Animal Aversion cannot learn Animal Handling or Natural Magic.



Animal Handling

Talent Pool: Perception

Animal Handling allows a character to train and command animals. It is used for resolution checks involving riding mounts or driving draft animals. It also allows a character to train an animal to obey simple commands, if the animal is reared from birth and taught for a period of at least one year. The trainer may still travel and adventure so long as the animal in training goes along.

Animal Handling is a prerequisite of the Natural Magic Talent.

Animal Reflexes

Talent Pool: Prowess

Your character has amazing cat-like reflexes. The Combat section explains how this Talent is applied.

Animal Senses

Talent Pool: Insight

Characters with this Talent possess senses that are far sharper than a normal human's. They get a bonus advantage level in combat, sleep so lightly that they spring fully awake in the blink of an eye, and are sensitive to the presence of individuals who suffer from Animal Aversion. They also gain a +2 column shift on all Tracking, Trapping, or Danger Sense resolution checks.

Arcane Languages

Talent Pool: Knowledge

The Arcane Languages Talent represents study of the long-forgotten tongues in which tomes of arcane knowledge are invariably written. It is used whenever a character attempts to read a text dealing with magic. The degree of success on the Arcane Languages resolution check represents how well the reader grasps the meaning of the text. Incomplete or, worse yet, faulty understanding can have very grave consequences indeed.

All magical Talents have Arcane Languages as a prerequisite .

Artisan

Talent Pool: Perception

Characters with this talent are trained in pottery, weaving, painting, or sculpture. They may also appraise items from their craft. Each craft must be taken as a separate Talent. Make a resolution check to determine the quality of each item the character makes. A failure indicates that the product is a piece of junk; a heroic success means a masterpiece.

Berserk

Talent Pool: Insight

Berserks are filled with a mighty battle rage that enables them to ignore the effects of ordinary wounds. Specific wounds still cause their normal effects. A character with the Berserk Talent does not need to make resolution checks to stay conscious when his Damage rating drops to 0 or below. Instead, he fights on unimpeded until his Damage rating reaches the inverse of his Berserk rating.

Jackal the Reaver's vision fills with red mist as he lays about him with his broadsword. Jackal's Berserk rating is 5; he fights undaunted until his Damage rating reaches -5.

Unfortunately for the Berserk, once his Damage rating falls to that point, he drops



dead.

To enter a Berserk state, the character must make a resolution check against his Berserk rating and get a total or heroic success. To leave the Berserk state, he must get a total or heroic success on a resolution check against his current Damage rating (!). Those who fail to leave the Berserk state keep on fighting even if the only people left standing are allies. If the Berserk's Damage rating is negative when he leaves the Berserk state, he falls unconscious.

Blacksmith

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Those who have this talent can forge metal tools, weapons, and armor. They cannot, however, create artistic items or work precious metals. Blacksmiths must have access to smithing tools to work metal. They can also evaluate the quality and workmanship of non-precious metalwork, especially in iron and steel.

Brawling

Talent Pool: Fighting

Brawling is a catchall Talent used for fistfighting, bashing opponents with chairs, battering them with mugs, and so on. See Combat for a more complete explanation of brawling.

Carpentry

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Given the proper tools and materials, your character can build virtually any wooden item, from furniture to sailing vessels. The degree of success on the carpentry resolution check determines the quality of the resulting product. She can also identify various types of woods and knows their places of origin.

How long it takes to build a given item is up to the referee. Several carpenters may be able to work together on a large project; some may be impossible for a single carpenter to accomplish.

Climbing

Talent Pool: Prowess

Your character is practiced in climbing all types of surfaces.

Color Blind (Weakness)

Your character has very limited ability to distinguish one color from another. This weakness has no rating, but will make any task requiring identifying items by color impossible. It may also have some negative social consequences, such as an inability to put together an tasteful set of clothes.

Damage

Talent Pool: Endurance

Damage is the measure of how much injury your character can withstand before running the risk of dying. For a complete explanation, see Combat.

Danger Sense

Talent Pool: Insight

Your character's awareness is so keen that he can sense impending danger. Whenever she is threatened by a hidden enemy or trap, the referee makes a resolution check against her Danger Sense. On any degree of success, the character feels a vague sense of menace. Danger Sense provides a moment's warning but nothing identifying the nature of the threat. Characters who also have the Animal Senses talent receive a +2 column shift on their Danger Sense check.



Directional Sense

Talent Pool: Insight

Your character has an innate sense of which way north lies. He can make a resolution check against this talent to find his way when he has become lost.

Disfigurement (Weakness)

Those with this weakness have been scarred or otherwise mutilated, either by injury or as a side effect of their magical studies.

Sorcerous disfigurements are often strange warpings of the body such as shrivelled limbs, bizarre scarring, eye discoloration or loss, transformation of hands or feet into claws or hooves, and so on. Disfigurements are permanent and always blatant, but can be hidden with some work. Characters with disfigurements also suffer some social disadvantages.

Distrusted (Weakness)

A Distrusted character has an unshakeable aura of untrustworthiness. Long hours of probing arcane secrets have subtly warped his personality and demeanor. A reaction check (p. 26) on meeting an NPC can elicit a generous or friendly response. People may help the distrusted character, but they will never be at ease around him.

Endurance Loss (Weakness)

Study of the dark arts has sapped your character's physical and psychic vigor. Each Talent in the Endurance Talent Pool loses 2 points. Thereafter, it costs 3 points to increase an Endurance Talent by 1 point, and 10 points to purchase a new Endurance Talent.

Fame

Talent Pool: Perception

Fame measures a character's renown. For an explanation of fame is earned and can be used, see Improvement and Goals (p. 50).

Fear of Animals (Weakness)

Characters who suffer from Fear of Animals are so terrified that they will avoid any animal if at all possible. To handle or even closely approach an animal, they must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance. Failure means their fear prevents them from coming near the creature. This restriction does not, however, apply to monsters. Characters with this fear cannot learn Animal Handling or Natural Magic.

Fear of Heights (Weakness)

Your character's fear of heights is so strong that she must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance to continue to act when at a great height or forced to climb. Failure means she is frozen in fear and must rely on someone else to help her budge from the spot. Characters with Fear of Heights cannot learn Climbing.

Fear of Magic (Weakness)

Characters with Fear of Magic must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance to pick up any item they know to be magical. Whenever confronted by a sorcerer or magical monster, they must make a successful resolution check or flee/freeze in their tracks, as the player chooses. Those with Fear of Magic cannot learn any of the magical Talents.

Fear of Water (Weakness)

Your character so fears bodies of water that he must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance to enter the water or even board a vessel. He will never travel by water for longer than one day unless forced. It is impossible for him to learn Swimming or Sailing.

Foppish (Weakness)

Foppish characters are obsessed with fashion. They may spend their last coin on a hat, wedge themselves into ridiculous hose for the sake of style, or pass over boots in favor of more attractive pair of sandals that are utterly worthless for the twenty-mile march they're about to undertake. They will do their level best to keep their outfits pristine, avoiding such messy activities as battle whenever possible. They also tend to put on airs, which does make them the center of attention but unfortunately nets them a -1 column shift of all resolution checks for NPC reaction.

Forgery

Talent Pool: Perception

Your character may produce and detect forgeries (including writings and works of art). After the character attempts either to make or to detect a forgery, the referee

should make a secret Resolution check. A white result indicates failure that is immediately apparent to your character. A green result indicates failure but your character will think it a success. Any other color equals success. Your character should not be advised of the degree of his success unless the result is white or red.

Gambler (Weakness)

A gambler is always ready for a game of chance. Whenever she's presented with the opportunity to take part in a wager but has reason to prefer not to, she must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance to decline. (If she's willing to play, there's no need to check.) Once she has begun playing, she must make another successful resolution check to stop. The check may be modified according to the situation. After all, it's **so** hard to walk away from a hot streak...

There are limits to her susceptibility; she won't drop her sword and start dicing in the middle of a fight, for instance, although she might lay odds on the outcome even as she's hacking away. A gambler will bet on just about any situation whose outcome can be in doubt. Needless to say, this makes it hard for her to save a store of money.

Glutton (Weakness)

A glutton eats at every opportunity. He always has a little something to snack on with him, and must make a successful resolution check against Will or General Endurance to pass up an offer of food. His resultant girth means he can only wear custom-made clothing and armor, and he is of course much heavier than most other people.

Goldsmith

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Your character is trained in working gold and crafting jewelry. She can identify and evaluate gems and pieces of jewelry, and can craft new items given the proper equipment and sufficient time. The quality of the resulting piece is determined by the

degree of success obtained on a resolution check against this Talent.

Herbalism

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Those who have studied herbalism can identify and know the uses of various plants. This Talent can be used to identify poisonous and edible plants, prepare poultices that increase a character's rate of healing by 1 point per day, derive mild plant-based poisons, and brew teas to relieve pain, restore energy, and so on. Herbal brews can provide only minor relief and require some time to take effect.

Herbalists who also have the Medicine or Survival Talents receive a +2 column shift on resolution checks using those Talents.

Herbalism is a prerequisite for Alchemy and Natural Magic.

Hypnotism

Talent Pool: Insight

Hypnotism allows your character to make compelling suggestions. The user and subject must have 10 uninterrupted minutes in comfortable, quiet and dim surroundings, at the end of which the hypnotist makes a resolution check against his Hypnotism rating minus the subject's Will or General Endurance rating. Success means the hypnotist can implant a suggestion. The suggestion must be short and simple; it cannot be complex, self-destructive or obviously counter to the subject's interests ("OK soldier - go flip off Captain Barselius!" is right out).

The hypnotist may attempt to make any number of suggestions, but must make a successful resolution for each one. Failure means the subject refuses the suggestion. All suggestions wear off 24 hours after being implanted. The subject is fully aware of having been hypnotised unless a suggestion was made that he forget.

Hypnotism is a prerequisite for Mind Control.

Information

Talent Pool: Insight

Prerequisites: Arcane Languages, Lore

The Information Talent is the province of soothsayers and seers. It gives knowledge of distant or future events. It takes only one month of study to learn the Information Talent, but the student must take a magical weakness and become a priest of a setting-appropriate deity.

Information magic include such spells as:

- Minor
 - Clairvoyance
 - Clairaudience
- Moderate
 - Prediction
 - Spiritual Advice
- Ultimate
 - Prophecy

Clairvoyance: seeing distant events.
Clairaudience: hearing distant events.
Prediction: foreknowledge of near-future events.

Prophecy: foreknowledge of weighty events in the near or distant future.
Spiritual Advice: petitioning a deity for knowledge or advice.

The knowledge gained through Information spells is always cryptic or fragmentary. Events foreseen are not inevitable; they are the outcome of the current situation. Human agency is required to cause the event, and is capable of preventing it.

Language

Talent Pool: Knowledge

A rating of 1-10 in a foreign language represents basic knowledge of that language. A rating of 11-20 indicates competence, and a rating of 21 or greater represents fluency in the language. The referee may ask for a resolution check against your rating in a language to see whether you misunderstand a speaker or convey a meaning other than the one you intended. Your rating in a language can only be increased when your character has had a chance to practice speaking it.

Lockpicking

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Given the proper tools, your character can open any lock with a successful resolution check against this Talent. It may also be possible to improvise tools.

Lore

Talent Pool: Knowledge

Your character is versed in the ancient history of the world. She can make a resolution check against her Lore rating to glean a bit of information about a historical item, place, person or event.



Madness (Weakness)

The terrible secrets your character has unearthed in his quest for forbidden knowledge have begun to loosen his grip on reality. Every day there is a cumulative 1% chance that he will be struck by a fit of madness (so he will without fail go temporarily mad at least every 100 days). When it comes, the fit lasts for 1-10 hours, during which time he will run wild, liable to

do or say anything. At the end of the fit, the chance of another fit begins at 1% and slowly climbs as before.

Magic Endurance

Talent Pool: Endurance

This is a measure of your character's ability to resist the influence of spells or magical effects. See Magic (p. 37) for an explanation of its use.

Magic Sense

Talent Pool: Insight

On a successful resolution check against this Talent, your character becomes instinctively aware of magical items, people or creatures in her surroundings. She gains no specific information about the magic; she only feels its presence.

Medicine

Talent Pool: Perception

A character trained in Medicine can heal humans and animals alike. He can bandage injuries, concoct medicines, treat infections and cure diseases. A successful resolution check against Medicine doubles the patient's healing rate. However, only one check may be made per patient for each batch of wounds or conditions.

Minstrel

Talent Pool: Perception

Those with the Minstrel talent can provide a range of entertainments: song, epic poetry, instrumental music, dance, juggling, and so on. They can earn 1-2 silver coins a day by performing. Since nearly all doors are open to minstrels, they are also frequently hired as spies. A character who has the Minstrel Talent gains a +2 column shift when using Lore or Mind Control.

Mind Control

Talent Pool: Insight

Prerequisites: Arcane Languages, Hypnotism

Mind Control is used to cast spells that create illusions or dominate the thoughts of others. Learning Mind Control requires six months of study and imposes a magical

weakness on the student. The caster of a Mind Control spell must be able to make eye contact with its target. Some typical Mind Control spells are:

- Minor
 - Paralyzing glare
 - Momentary indecision
 - Sound
- Moderate
 - Fear
 - Illusion
 - Long term suggestion
- Ultimate
 - Instant hypnotism
 - Complete hallucinations
 - Mental slaves

Use of Mind Control spells is explained more fully in the Magic section (p. 37).

Miserly (Weakness)

Your character is a skinflint who spends as little as possible. She buys the cheapest equipment, eats the most meager meals, and stays in the cruffiest dives available. She hoards every coin she acquires and will certainly never lend money to anyone else. Unfortunately, her habit of squirreling away large amounts of lucre makes her a prime target for enterprising thieves...

Movement

Talent Pool: Prowess

Movement rating is a measure of both foot speed and agility in combat. The Talent's uses are explained under Combat (p. 25) and Movement (p. 42).

Natural Magic

Talent Pool: Insight

Prerequisites: Animal Handling, Animal Senses, Herbalism

Natural Magic is the most ancient of the magical arts, dealing with animals and the wilderness. Its teachings are never written,

but rather passed orally from instructor to student. What few symbols it uses are carven in the rock of secret caves and grottoes.

Those who would learn Natural Magic must study for one year in the wilderness, communing directly with the fauna and flora. A teacher is not necessary; it is possible to learn the basics of this art through observation and meditation. However, spells of moderate or difficult level can only be learned by those who are clergy of a nature god. Students must select a magical weakness other than Animal Aversion.

Typical Natural Magic spells include :

- Minor
 - Protection from animals
 - Animal location
 - Animal friendship
- Moderate
 - Animal speech
 - Animal commanding



- Ultimate
 - Monster commanding
 - Sight through animals

Most NPCs who practice Natural Magic will live in remote forests, tending members of the tribe and wild animals.

Navigation

Talent Pool: Knowledge

The Navigation Talent allows characters to chart their course by the stars. On any mostly cloudless night they may make a resolution check against their Navigation rating. Any degree of success means they have found their bearing; failure means they only think they have. In this case, the referee will randomly determine the direction in which the characters are actually travelling.

Necromancy

Talent Pool: Perception

Prerequisites: Arcane Languages, Lore, Medicine

Necromancy is the blackest of the magical arts. It is akin to Summoning, for its purpose is to reach out and draw upon the invisible. However, it is fundamentally different. While Summoning attempts to reach beyond the confines of this world and bring alien creatures into it, Necromancy attempts to rebind the dispersed energies of this world for the purposes of preservation, knowledge, and animation. Its practice is a heinous crime in all lands but those which routinely practice sorcery. Restraint is needed, for Necromancy is second in danger only to Summoning. The simpler spells of preservation and knowledge do not carry as much inherent risk, but the restructuring and animation of the dead is fraught with peril. The purpose of such spells is to bring back from the dead animals, monsters, or people. Unless the Necromancer exercises care, his animations may turn on him and the world. One year of study is required before a character can attempt any spells, and a character must choose a magical weakness. Necromancy is a draining art. Each time a character attempts to cast a spell he loses 1 point from his Damage

Talent even if the spell is not successful. The loss is permanent. The following spells are typical of the type that may be learned:

- Minor
 - Preserve Organic Material (50 years)
 - History of Deceased*
 - Animate Small Animal Body**
- Moderate
 - Preserve Organic Material (1,000 years)
 - Question Deceased*
 - Animate Large Animal Body**
- Ultimate
 - Preserve Organic Material (5,000 years)
 - Force True Answers from Deceased*
 - Animate Monster Body**
 - Animate Human Body
 - Prolong Life***

*A small part of the original creature or object must be obtained (feather, hair, dust) or an accurate likeness of the creature.

**A large part of the original creature must be obtained.

***May be cast on self or other, but may only be attempted once per year. Success adds 10 years to the subject's life, but cuts all Endurance Talents in half immediately and permanently (although lost points may be slowly renewed through the gaining of new talent points).

Each time an animation of an animal or monster is successful, the Necromancer can control that creature for one service of limited duration. After the service is performed, the creature returns to its previous form. Animated humans also perform one service the first time they are animated, but if the same human is reanimated, he is hostile toward the Necromancer unless some form of coercion (such as mind control) is employed. A reanimated human attempts to destroy the Necromancer and escape into the world to live a new life. Animations have talent

ratings equal in all respects (including spells) to those they possessed before death except that their Stamina rating is halved and they are invulnerable to poisons. Animated creatures may be dematerialized at the Necromancer's will. Human animations attempt to resist dematerialization, however, opposing the Necromancer's Will with their own. Any time a white result indicates failure for a spell of Difficult complexity, a magical fire (rating 25) engulfs the room. The Necromancer should be allowed to escape or quench the fire. His spell components may, however, be damaged. Necromancy's need for components from the original creature forces the character on quests for various tombs, should he wish to animate or question someone of ancient repute.

Night Blind (Weakness)

Characters with this weakness have very poor low-light vision. They are blind by starlight and cannot learn Navigation. They also suffer a -2 column shift when doing at night anything that requires vision.

Nocturnal (Weakness)

Your character has delved so long into secrets that may only be spoken of by night that he has himself become a creature of the night. When the sun is down, he is full of energy and will not sleep. By day, he is lethargic and groggy if not actually asleep. He is dazzled by sunlight, so much so that he suffers a -2 column shift on task that involves vision when in broad daylight.

Observation

Talent Pool: Perception

Your character is both extremely perceptive and quick at putting facts together. She has a keen eye for detail and is skilled at following others undetected. Observation may be used in three main ways:

1. to spot a minute or hidden detail, or to recall a crucial bit of information;
2. to notice someone following you; or
3. to follow someone without being noticed.

To find something hidden or recall a point of information, make a resolution check against your Observation rating.

To detect the presence of someone following you, the referee makes a resolution check against the pursuer's Observation or General Perception rating minus your Observation rating. To shadow someone, make a resolution check against your Observation rating minus the target's Observation or General Perception.

Obsession (Weakness)

The effects of this weakness are explained in the Magic section (p. 37).

Personal Magnetism **Talent Pool: Insight**

A character with Personal Magnetism is a born commander. He possesses a charm, dynamic personality, or ferocious energy that draws people to him automatically. All NPC reaction checks receive a +2 column shift bonus.

The forceful presence of a character with Personal Magnetism means no one is every neutral toward him; he is either worshipped in the ranks or despised. Any neutral reaction on an NPC reaction check is shifted toward the nearest strong reaction. An NPC who was simply accommodating will become actively helpful; one who was unfriendly will become hostile.

The character's force of personality may be such that NPCs are too intimidated to show their reaction openly. They may admire him from afar or secretly nurture a festering hate. Thus a character with Personal Magnetism is prone to suddenly discovering previously unknown allies and enemies.

Phobia (Weakness)

A phobia is a fear so debilitating that the phobic character must roll a heroic success on a resolution check against her Will or General Endurance rating to resist the urge to flee from the object of the phobia. A character can have a phobia of just about anything - cats, beards, blood (particularly inconvenient for a barbarian mercenary),

night, foreigners, bridges, and so on - that you and your referee agree on.

Physical Laws **Talent Pool: Perception**

As magical arts go, Physical Laws is among the least dreaded because it can be used for the good of the people. Those who study Physical Laws gain the ability to bring about changes in the forces of nature. Some representative uses of this Talent include:

- Minor
 - Create fog
 - Influence weather 1 month out
 - Stimulate plant growth
 - Summon favorable winds
- Moderate
 - Cause rapid plant or animal growth
 - Summon weather
 - Blight an area
- Ultimate
 - Eclipse the sun
 - Create freezing cold instantly
 - Cause earthquakes
 - Cause tornadoes
 - Summon comets or meteors
 - Instantly age an object or being

Picking Pockets **Talent Pool: Perception**

Your character is a trained cutpurse. On any degree of success on a resolution check against his Picking Pockets rating, he can pinch small items without being noticed. Ordinary failure simply means he has failed to grasp his object. On a roll of 95-100, however, his attempt at theft was detected.

Poison Endurance
Talent Pool: Endurance

This is a measure of your character's ability to resist the effects of poison. See the Hazards section (p. 40) for an explanation of this talent.

Rash (Weakness)

A rash character is prone to leap into action without forethought. She is hot-tempered and cares little for analysis. Further, she can never choose to Wait in combat.

Reading/Writing
Talent Pool: Knowledge

Your character is literate in a given language. Make a resolution check against this rating to read a text in that language.

Sailing
Talent Pool: Knowledge

Your character is a trained sailor and steersman. He can control vessels in rough water or high seas with a successful resolution check against his Sailing rating.

Siegecraft/Engineering
Talent Pool: Knowledge

Your character is trained in the design, construction and deployment of engines of war. She can direct troops in the use of siege engines and supervise tunneling under walls. On a successful resolution check against this Talent, sappers under her guidance can collapse fortifications.

Sleight of Hand
Talent Pool: Prowess

Your character is adept at concealing and manipulating objects with his hands. He is able to make small objects seemingly disappear, to juggle, and to cheat at games of chance. Your character's chance of successfully cheating is determined by subtracting his opponent's Observation (or General Perception) rating from his Sleight of Hand (or General Prowess) rating.

Stamina
Talent Pool: Endurance

Stamina is a measure of raw ability to keep at a physically or mentally strenuous task. See Movement (p. 42) for an explanation of its use.

Strength
Talent Pool: Prowess

A character can lift 100 pounds plus 10 pounds for every point of Strength he possesses. Strength rating also has some applications in Combat (p. 24).

Summoning
Talent Pool: Perception
Prerequisites: Arcane Languages, Lore

Summoning is the most dread and dangerous of magical arts. Those who dare probe its secrets learn to rend the veil that separates this world from other, uncanny realities and call forth the dwellers in those mad, horrifying realms. These unwholesome creatures, often referred to as demons by mortal men, possess strange physical and mental powers because of their alien origin. Once the summoner has brought the creature into our world, he may then attempt to impose his will upon it. Should he fail, the consequences are dire indeed.

Summoning is the hardest to learn of any magical Talent. A wizard must study for two years before he may even attempt a summoning. The wizard must also take a magical weakness. Furthermore, every time the wizard learns to summon a new creature, he must take an additional magical weakness. This may be a new one, or the same as the one previously taken (in which case its effect becomes more severe - disfigurement becomes more terrible, animal aversion grows more extreme, and so on).

Each summoning spell summons a single type of creature and no other. The creature's abilities are determined by its form. For example, a winged demon could fight, carry messages, or stand guard, but not swim, burrow, or assume the form of a

human. When your character learns a new summoning spell, you describe what you would like the summoned creature to be able to do. The referee then sets the difficulty level of summoning the creature. Some sample difficulties follow:

- **Minor**
A creature that can perform a single non-combat action, e.g. transporting the summoner, delivering a message, tracking a quarry, or locating an item.
- **Moderate**
A creature that fights with claws, fangs or weapons, can follow simple instructions, can operate semi-independently, can relate lost knowledge, strikes fear in the summoner's enemies, or will stand guard for a short time.
- **Ultimate**
A creature that fights using supernatural powers, will stand guard for a long time, can track and kill a target without fail, can teach its summoner a new spell, can assume the likeness of a specific individual, can serve as the summoner's advisor, or can imprison a person in perpetuity.

Summoning is time consuming and costly. A summoner must track down rare and hard-to-obtain material components - magic powders, directions for drawing blasphemous symbols, noisome incenses to be burnt in jewel-encrusted braziers. It is also incredibly physically taxing. Every time your character attempts to cast a summoning spell he takes one point of damage. This wound is permanent, cannot be healed (although you may still spend Talent points (p. 7, 50) to increase your Damage Endurance rating), and is inflicted whether the summoning is successful or not.

Summoning is only half the job; the summoner must still convince the creature to do his will. Simple-level creatures will do a

service in return for freedom to return to their own world. Moderate- and difficult-level creatures, however, give themselves more credit. Unless the summoner can threaten them with instant destruction (no mean feat itself), he must have something to offer the creature that it wants. It may accept a rare or magical item, but more likely it will demand a very personal price from the summoner - anything from an eye, to a service in exchange, to title to the summoner's soul. Whatever the price, it will mark the summoner as set apart - and increasingly different in nature - from ordinary humans.

Ordinary failure means that no creature appears. On a roll of 95-00, however, the summoner has made a critical error in casting and the creature enters the world out of control. It will immediately attack the summoner, either to kill him or carry him screaming back to the horrible netherworld from which it came. It never tires, it never gives up, and it will not stop until the summoner - or it - is dead.

Survival **Talent Pool: Knowledge**

This talent lets your character live off the land in one of four types of terrain: desert, jungle, arctic, and forest/plains. Survival in each type of terrain must be taken separately. Once a day, a successful resolution check against this Talent provides one day's food and water (even in the desert) plus shelter from the elements².

Swimming **Talent Pool: Prowess**

The Swimming Talent is used to determine how quickly your character can swim, as well as her ability to avoid drowning in rough water. See Movement (p. 42) for a full explanation.

² The original rules don't specify whether this means sustenance and shelter just for the character with the Talent, or for the character and all her companions. Stingier refs may want require survivalists to make a roll for each person for whom they need to find food and water.

Taciturn (Weakness)

Your character is ridiculously tight-lipped. It's a rare day on which he uses a sentence of more than three words, and it's virtually unheard-of for him to initiate conversation. His extreme reluctance to speak unfortunately means he never volunteers information without being asked.

Telepathy **Talent Pool: Insight**

Telepathy allows direct mental communication. Those who have mastered this Talent may both send and receive thoughts, but **only** to characters/creatures that also have telepathy. Use of telepathy requires five minutes of stillness and concentration. On a successful resolution check, telepathy users can send or receive a message. On a heroic success, the telepath may filch information from an unwilling mind, although the thoughts so collected are usually jumbled and unclear.

Characters who possess both Telepathy and Mind Control Talents receive a +1 column shift on all Mind Control resolution checks.

Throwing **Talent Pool: Prowess**

This talent is used when throwing an object or weapon for accuracy or to cause damage.

Tone Deaf (Weakness)

A character who is tone deaf cannot tell musical tones apart and perceives very little difference in vocal pitches. This leaves him with a flat, monotonous speaking voice and an utter inability to sing. He cannot learn the Minstrel Talent and suffers a -2 column shift when making an NPC reaction check or attempting to use a Mind Control spell.

Tracking **Talent Pool: Perception**

This Talent is used to follow a quarry through the wilds. A successful resolution check means that the tracker has found some trace of the person or creature sought and may follow it. The check suffers a -1 column shift for every hour the trail is old. The referee

may apply additional negative or positive modifiers for inclement weather, a large number of beings travelling together, bloodstains, unyielding ground, and so on.

Transmutation **Talent Pool: Insight**

Transmutation magic is used to alter shape or substance. It can be used to change a person's appearance, animate statues, turn stones to chunks of ice, and so on. One year of study is required to learn transmutation. The student must also select a magical weakness. Typical transmutation spells include:

- Minor
 - Change object to similar item
 - Temporary change of non-living form
- Moderate
 - Change your own form
 - Change form of an animal
 - Permanent change of non-living item
- Ultimate
 - Change form of another person
 - Animate item
 - Permanent change of non-living item to precious item

Transformation spells are very draining. Every time a magician tries to cast one he suffers a point of damage. This loss is permanent and cannot be healed.

Trapping **Talent Pool: Knowledge**

Your character is skilled in building, siting, setting and baiting traps for small- to mid-size game. She also knows how to set up and manage a trapline. She can prepare traps and snares that will capture creatures up to the size of a human. With help, she can ready pit traps for large creatures.

Each time your character readies a trap, the referee makes a resolution check

against your trapping rating. On any degree of success, the trap functions as intended and catches the prey.

This Talent may also be used to find hidden traps and snares with a successful resolution check. This applies only to wilderness traps, however, not indoor traps (such as rigged flagstones that trigger a volley of crossbow bolts).

Two-Weapon Fighting **Talent Pool: Fighting**

Your character is trained to fight effectively with a weapon in each hand. Although the most common combination is a dagger and small sword, any two one-handed weapons can be used. See Combat (p. 25) for an explanation of how two-weapon fighting is used.



Weakness to Drink (Weakness)

Characters who suffer a weakness to drink must make a resolution check against their Will or General Endurance rating to pass up a chance to drink alcohol. Once they have begun to drink, they must make a resolution check to stop. They get a chance to check after finishing each drink.

For each drink downed, a drinker must make a resolution check against his Stamina or General Endurance rating. If the check succeeds, he suffers no effects. If the check fails, however, all the drinker's ratings are temporarily reduced by 1. When the drinker's Stamina or General Endurance reaches 0, he passes out. Characters who began with no Stamina rating and a General Endurance of 0 are out cold after their first failed check. Once the drinker stops drinking, either by force of will or due to unconsciousness, his ratings return to normal at the rate of 1 point for each full hour he does not drink.

Weakness to Women/Men **(Weakness)**

Characters with this weakness are particularly susceptible to the charms of their preferred gender. (Which that is is up to the player.)³ When presented with a possible romantic liaison, they must make a successful resolution check against their Will or General Endurance to decline. They must also make a successful check to turn down requests or pleas for assistance, not just from NPCs but from other PCs of the appropriate gender!

Weapon **Talent Pool: Fighting**

Your character is trained in the use of a particular weapon. See Combat (p. 25) for an explanation of the use of this skill.

Weather Sense **Talent Pool: Insight**

Once per day, your character can make a resolution check to foretell weather conditions for the next 24 hours. This includes type and general amount of precipitation ("heavy rain comin'", not "I'm sensing scattered snow showers, 1 to 2 inches of accumulation..."), and wind speed and direction. Usually she can only use this Talent

³ Looking back 22 years later it's amazing to see just how far ahead of its time the **Conan** game was in some respects. The possibility that a character could prefer either gender is simply noted without judgment or further commentary.

once per day, but if a sudden change is brewing she may make another.

Will

Talent Pool: Endurance

A character's Will Talent is used to resist external influences or pressures and internal compulsions or weaknesses. Will is used to resist various weaknesses, as well as the effects of certain magic.

Wrestling

Talent Pool: Fighting

Your character is trained in grappling, throwing, locking and pinning opponents. See Combat (p. 25) for an explanation of how to use this skill.



Chapter Three: The Resolution Chart

At the heart of the ZeFRS system is the resolution chart used to determine success or failure of actions. In brief, any time you need to make a check to see if a Talent is successful, roll percentile dice and compare the result to the appropriate column along the bottom of the Resolution Chart.

Table Organization

There are four degrees of success, plus failure. Each is denoted by a color, such that a result will often be referred to as "red" or "green". The color scheme of the original table, which is used in the tables provided here, is white for failure and green, yellow, orange and red for success.

When making a resolution check, low rolls are best. In every other case, a high roll is best. For those who would like a uniformly roll-over system, a chart with the values flipped such that 01-02 are now the values of certain failure and 99-00 are certain success will be provided at a later date.

Column Shifts

There are two schools of thought on what exactly constitutes a column, since the original game rules weren't clear on this point.

One group holds that "column" means one of the columns that corresponds to individual Talent ratings (or groups of ratings for values above 11). For example, if a character with a Sailing Talent rating of 4 were to receive a +2 modifier thanks to some favourable condition or other, she would shift 2 individual columns to the right and roll on the 6 column of the table to resolve the attempt.

The other looks to the design of the original resolution chart and, seeing that there were actual lines only at the 1, 6, 11 to 15, -1, -6 and -11 to -15 points, concludes that these are the columns to which shifts should be applied. Thus, if the sailor with a rating of 4 were to receive a 2-column shift modifier, this method would have her make her

resolution check on the 11 to 15 column. This raises the further question of where in the column her exact value should fall. There are at least three options:

- the first value in the 5-member column may be used (e.g. in the column that includes the values 6 through 10, 6 would be used),
- the middle value of the column may be used (e.g. in the column that includes the values 6 through 10, 8 would be used), or
- the corresponding position in the column may be used (e.g. the sailor with a value of 4 who gets a +2 column shift would be rolling on 21-25).

Players are invited to consider and experiment with both to see which better accords with their own style and judgment. The standard resolution chart can be used either way; slender black lines delimit the column for each individual rating, and thicker black lines indicate the columns shown on the original chart.

The Colors of Success

As mentioned above, the original color scheme of the resolution chart was white for failure, green for marginal success, yellow for acceptable success, orange for total success and red for heroic success. These colors are the same as those referenced in this document, and on the chart at the end of the work. Many pixels were spilt on RPG.net discussing alternate choices of color for each level. The most popular alternate color scheme was the one proposed by Max:

Let's begin with White failure. White is for the blank canvas of failed artists, the bleached bones of failed heroes, white is the fatal flash of the sun or the moon on the blade falling on you, the slaver's fangs, the ripping talons, the wide-eyed terror, the empty panic-stricken mind of the soon-to-be-dead.

Then Black for the ultimate success. Black is the death-dealing iron, black is the mind-blasting sorcery, and the deepest and the highest knowledge and understanding, black is the eternal night, the primal night in which everything began and in which everything will end, and the barbarism that much always ultimately triumph; black is the dark undercurrent that runs through all the best S&S stories and lends them that particularly poignant contrast that makes them so deliciously, vibrantly life-like.

This leaves us with three intermediate levels of success. What more is there to S&S? Red blood, surely, and yellow gold, too. And let's throw in a verdant green, just for contrast.

Of the three, the lowest is Green. Green is for living things, and for the Earth that brought them forth, the grass, the trees, the rolling oceans, the steaming jungles and the primordial ooze that spawned all life. Green is also for the mold on the corpse, the searing venom in the fangs of a serpent, and the natural law of Tooth and Claw, the ever-turning wheel of life. Green is for those who live - for now.

Yellow is for the precious gold. It's for the rewards men seek in life, and sometimes achieve, for the warmth of the sun, the amber mead, the weight of the gold that lines your pockets, the hard-earned wealth and the ill-gotten gains. Yellow is for those who find the treasures they seek.

Red is the crimson of blood. Red is the blood of your enemies on your hands, red is the water of life in your own veins. Red is the stinging wine that sets minds a-light, the tender meat on your palate, the blazing dawn sun, the beckoning lips, the burning blood - red is lust and life. Red blood is more precious than yellow gold, for blood is life

and without life gold is nothing. Red is for those who live to the full, who strive and slay and burn with life, and are content.

So now we have:

- White, for failure
- Green, for minor success
- Yellow, for moderate success
- Red, for major success
- Black, for ultimate success

For those of you would like to apply an alternative color scheme, we offer a Microsoft Word version of the resolution chart that you can recolor as you like. This version can be found at:

http://www.midcoast.com/~ricekrwc/zefrs/resolution_chart.doc

Not Using the Chart

Those who prefer not to use a chart in play will want to note four values beside the rating for each talent. These are the numbers a player must roll to achieve marginal, acceptable, total or heroic success. There are two ways (roll-over and roll-under) to figure that as well:

Success Formulae		
Success Level	Roll Over	Roll Under
marginal	46 - 2R	54 + 2R
acceptable	67 - 2R	33 + 2R
total	83 - R	17 + R
heroic	93 - .5R	7 + .5R

R here stands for the character's adjusted Talent rating. Modifiers can result in a negative adjusted rating. If you have a Sword Talent of 3 but your opponent has a Movement of 5, you're rolling on the -2 column. So the formula would make green 50, yellow 29, orange 15 & red 6.

Chapter Four: Combat

It is a time for steel and heroic deeds. For your character to survive, he must know how to fight and fight well. His survival in these cruel and mysterious lands depends on it. Who knows when an assassin might strike from the night, bandits spring from trees, or an evil wizard test your character's steel!

Enemies and Foes

Your character will face two types of NPCs in combat - **Enemies** and **Foes**⁴.

Enemies are the most common opponents your characters will meet. Enemies are soldiers, hired assassins, guardsmen, sailors, and the like - men who are fighters, but who do not live by the sword the way your character does. Your character is superior to Enemies and has certain advantages over them in combat.

Foes are your peers - characters as powerful, and as daring, as your own. Beyond your own talents, you do not have any special advantages over these NPCs.

Types of Combat

There are three types of combat in ZeFRS - **melee**, **missile**, and **magic**. **Melee** and **missile** combat are explained in this section; see the **magic** section (p. 37) for details on that type of combat.

Melee occurs whenever a character fights with either his bare hands or a non-projectile weapon. Only those opponents within his reach, or within the reach of his weapon, may be attacked in melee.

Missile combat occurs whenever a character uses a weapon that leaves his hands. He may fire an arrow, throw an axe or a dagger, or push a rock down onto his enemies. The result of missile combat depends on his aim and how quick his

opponents are. A character cannot use a missile weapon if an enemy is attacking him via melee.

Using Talent Pools

Whenever your character tries to strike someone, you must know his Fighting Talent rating for that weapon. If he has a rating for that weapon, use that rating or his General Fighting rating, whichever is higher. If your character does not have a rating with the weapon, the rating is the General Fighting rating.

Esmis has a General Fighting rating of 2 and a Dirk Fighting rating of 7. If Esmis attacks his enemy with a dirk, he uses the 7 (Dirk Fighting). If he tries to wrestle his enemy to the ground, he uses the 2, since he has no talent rating for Wrestling.

How to Hit

Though every battle is different, the process of determining whether a character hits his target is the same for all melee and missile combat.

To see if your character hits, you need the dice and the Resolution Table. Find your character's talent rating with his weapon. The referee will tell you the Movement or General Prowess Talent rating of your opponent (this represents his ability to avoid your blow). Subtract this number from your Fighting Talent rating. The result is the **combat differential**. Find the combat differential on the Differential row of the Resolution Table. Above this number is the column you check when you roll the dice.

Now roll the dice to get a number from 1 to 100. Find the result on the proper column of the Resolution Table. The combination of the number and the column indicates whether your character succeeds at his action and how well he does.

If your character gets a white result on the Resolution Table, he fails at whatever action

⁴ This is the first instance of which I'm aware of what have come to be generally known as "mook rules", which let the stars of the story lay out large numbers of extras without slowing down the narration overmuch.

he tried. If the result is green, your character succeeded, but just barely. If the result is yellow, he succeeds and does average. An orange result means he is successful and does well. A red result means that he succeeds and does extremely well.

This procedure is reversed when an opponent is trying to strike at your character. Your character's Movement or General Prowess Talent rating is subtracted from his opponent's weapon talent rating. The referee then rolls the dice and checks the result against the Resolution Table.

The Combat Turn

Now that you know how to hit an enemy, it is important to know the order in which events happen. If your character and his opponent are slashing away at each other, who gets to slash first?

Combat in ZeFRS is divided into 5-second **Combat Turns**. A character requires one combat turn to accomplish one action and ready himself for the next. These 5-second combat turns are the basic units of **Game Time** - the measure of the passage of time in the adventuring world. **Game time** differs from real time (the time it takes you to do something in our world).

For Example, Suppose Galya Eyepiercer tips over a table, grabs up her sword, smashes a lamp, and strikes at an enemy in the darkness. This takes Galya four Combat Turns (20 seconds) of game time. In the real world, however, it takes you much longer⁵ to determine how well Galya performs these actions. You must roll dice, check tables, and wait for the referee to decide what Galya's opponents do.

Steps in the Combat Turn

A combat turn may have up to five steps. Not all of them need occur in every turn.

1. Check for surprise

⁵ "[M]uch longer" is a bit of an overstatement. Once you've got the hang of it, task resolution actually goes quite quickly.

2. Declare action
3. Determine initiative
4. Resolve actions in initiative order
5. Repeat until hostilities are over

Being Taken Off Guard

At the start of each combat, check to see whether any of the combatants are surprised. Those who are not will gain extra actions against those who are.

Check for surprise at the beginning of each combat, plus whenever a new fighter enters the fray.

Each fighter makes a check against her/his Animal Reflexes or General Prowess rating. Each level of success grants one advantage; thus, white gives no advantage, green gives one, and so on up to four. Opponents compare total advantage; if one has more than the other, that fighter gets a number of free actions

Jackal the Reaver and Dural Besh have both set out to rob the mansion of a rich merchant. They stumble across one another in the hall to the servants' quarters. Jackal gets an orange result (three advantages); Besh gets a yellow result (two advantages). Jackal gets one free action to flee, try to silently shiv Besh, start a hushed parlay, or attempt anything else he could do in one combat turn.

equal to the difference.

In a fight with only a small number of participants, each checks for advantage separately against their personal opponent.

Jackal and Besh have joined forces to carry away a very heavy chest of gold. They meet two of the merchant's house guard. Jackal, Besh, and the two guards each determine advantage. This time Jackal gets a green result (one) and his opponent gets one. Besh scores two again, but his opponent flubs the roll and gets none. Besh can take two unanswered actions against his opponent.

Whenever there are a large number of participants in a fight, each side checks for advantage as a group, using whoever's Animal Reflexes or General Prowess rating is highest.

When a new combatant enters the fight, only the individual that new combatant attacks checks for advantage.

Not surprisingly, Besh and Jackal are now fighting the guards. The noise has roused another guard, who comes hurtling around the corner. He decides to go after Jackal. The new guard and Jackal check for advantage against one another.

Declaring Action

At the beginning of each combat turn, all participants state their intended actions. Possible actions fall under one of five broad categories:

1. **Fight:** Take some action intended to injure your opponent, from armed attack to dropping a rock on him. If you choose to attack, you must state who you will attack and what part of the body you're aiming for.
2. **Defend:** Take action to avoid injury; this could mean parrying, dodging, blocking with a shield, and so on. You can only defend actively against one attack per combat turn, and must state how you are defending.
3. **Move:** Run, crawl, jump, swing, swim - whatever is physically possible under the circumstances. You must declare where and how you are moving.
4. **Use Magic:** The caster of a spell must declare which spell is being cast and its intended target.
5. **Wait:** You may declare that you're holding your action until a certain condition arises. When and if it does, you can try to act first.

Galya is talking with two rogues in a market square. She isn't sure whether they know there's a price on her head, so she's watching them closely. If one of them makes a move to grab her, she'll try to whip out her dagger and skewer him first.

Initiative

After actions are declared, all attacking participants in a combat roll d10 and add their Animal Reflexes, Movement, or General Prowess rating, whichever is highest, plus the Initiative Bonus of their weapon. (Some weapons have a positive or negative Initiative Bonus, reflecting how quickly they can be brought to bear.) Characters who are defending or waiting do not roll.

If the number of combatants is small, each rolls initiative individually. If you think the number of fighters is too large, roll collectively using the highest Animal Reflexes, Movement or General Prowess rating on each side. In the latter case, do not add weapon Initiative Bonus unless everyone on a given side is using the same weapon.

Fighters act in order of highest total to lowest.

If you have been waiting, when the condition you were waiting for arises, make a Resolution Table check against your Animal Reflexes or General Prowess rating. If the result is white, you weren't fast enough; the opponent acts first. On any colored result, you may act first.

One of the rogues suddenly tries to lasso Galya with some cloth he snatches up from a nearby stall. Galya rolls against her General Prowess of 2 and gets a 52. That's green; good enough. She grabs the fabric with one hand and pulls her assailant onto the point of her dagger.

Every time you wait, you must check to see whether you beat your opponent to the punch. If you fail, not only does the opponent go first, but if you want to engage someone else, you must again check

against your Animal Reflexes or General Prowess rating, this time against the new opponent. If you fail again and try to go after a third opponent, you must repeat the process again, and so on. An unbroken series of bad breaks will leave you going last in that combat turn!



Multiple Actions

You may attempt to carry out more than one action in a combat turn, but must state that you're doing so during action declarations, before initiative is rolled. You must also specify the order in which you intend to perform the actions.

Your first action is carried out normally. For the second and subsequent ones, make a check on the resolution chart check against your Animal Reflexes or General Prowess rating. If you score a red result, you may proceed with the additional action. On any other result, you cannot take the action and suffer a -3 penalty on all resolution checks for the rest of this combat turn and all of the next.

Foes can choose to take multiple actions. **Enemies** cannot.

Armed Melee

Melee can only take place between opponents who are within reach of each

other's weapons. Usually this will mean that the combatants must be adjacent.

When you make an attack, you must specify your **aiming point**⁶. There are seven aiming points: head, chest, right and left arm, gut, and right and left leg. Needless to say, in certain situations some points may be unreachable. A fighter on foot can strike only at the legs, gut and chest of a mounted opponent, unless the unmounted fighter is wielding a weapon that has a positive Initiative Bonus. Conversely, the mounted fighter cannot strike at the unmounted opponent's legs unless using a weapon that has a positive Initiative Bonus.

Unarmed Melee and Special Actions

Brawling

Brawling is a catchall term for combat involving kicking, punching, headbutting - anything other than grappling a foe. Brawling damage is reduced by 2 points. Brawling also has a different set of specific wounds from armed combat.

Wrestling

Anyone can attempt to grapple, although obviously trained wrestlers are much better at it. If you intend to grapple, during action declaration you must describe what your character is trying to do. Then, when your character's turn to act comes around, make a resolution check against your Wrestling or General Fighting rating minus your opponent's Movement rating. On any result but white, your grapple succeeds. Only a red result causes actual damage, though, and even then only 1 point plus the attacker's Strength Bonus.

Esmis is hiding behind some wine barrels in a cellar. The warriors searching for him pass a little too close for comfort; he decides to sweep one's feet and make a run for it. Esmis has a Wrestling rating of 5. His target has a Movement of 2. Esmis rolls against a modified rating of 3 and gets a 27. Success! The warrior finds himself first horizontal, then plummeting to the floor as Esmis dashes past. Because Esmis scored only an orange result, though, the fall inflicts no actual damage.

Rushing and Bashing

A rush lets your character charge through a group of hostile individuals to the other side. A rush is always a straight line, and anyone who wanders into the path of a rush in progress is automatically rushed as well.

To rush, make a resolution check against your character's Movement or General Prowess rating minus the target's Movement or General Prowess rating⁷. On a white result, the rush fails and your character is knocked down. On a green, yellow, or orange result, your character has made it through to the other side. The rushed character, however, can still take an action and may choose to attack you as you pass. On a red result, you have bowled over your opponent and he can take no action for the rest of the turn other than climbing to his feet. A rush never does damage.

A shield bash is a rush performed by a character who is carrying a shield. There are two varieties of shield bash. The first is a rush that uses the character's shield to knock down the opponent. This is resolved in exactly the same manner as a regular rush. The other type of shield bash is a strike on an adjacent opponent made with a shield. In this case, make a resolution check against your character's General Fighting rating minus the target's Movement or General Prowess rating. The target of the bash is knocked down only on a red result. Again, no damage is done.

Weapons of Desperation

Lacking a better weapon, your character may sometimes be forced to fight with whatever comes to hand - chair legs, fireplace pokers, pointed sticks, or the nearest big rock. The weapon description chart includes some suggested equivalents that you and the referee can use to approximate stats for an improvised weapon.

⁷ This seems to imply that even if you're facing a crowd of enemies, you target one individual to rush past.

Fighting With Two Weapons

Characters with the two-weapon fighting talent are trained to do just that. Only one-handed weapons can be used (no halberds or battleaxes, for example). Some common combinations are sword and dagger, sword and sword, or dagger and handaxe.

Anyone fighting with two weapons must designate an action - attack or defend - for each. If attacking with both, the first attack (which weapon is up to the player) occurs on the character's initiative, and the second occurs at the end of the combat turn. If attacking with one and defending with the other, the attack automatically falls at the end of the combat turn.

Fighting with two weapons is not considered multiple actions, so the multiple actions rules don't apply. There is, however, a penalty applied to the second attack (see Combat Modifiers).



Knock-Outs

Every so often, your character may want to quickly knock an opponent unconscious rather than dealing lethal damage. To do so, you must announce your intention to attempt a knock-out during declaration of intention. Then make a normal attack. If the result is red, you have knocked the target out. On any other color, the blow was not strong enough or missed the vital spot. A character thus knocked out remains unconscious for 1-10 minutes (12-120 combat turns).

Defending

When you choose to defend, you are focusing all your efforts on avoiding injury and foregoing any attempt to injure your opponent.

Your opponent, if attacking rather than defending himself, makes an attack in the normal manner. If he misses, nothing more need be done in this combat turn. If he hits, however, you then make a resolution check against your weapon or General Fighting talent (**N.B.** in this case, nothing is subtracted from your rating). On a white result, your defense wasn't good enough and the attack hits with full force. A green result reduces the damage done by 1 point; a yellow result reduces it by 2, orange by 3, and red by 4.

Characters who have a Strength Bonus or are using a weapon that gives a Combat Bonus cannot be completely defended against. Their might is so great or their weapon so massive that some force will always penetrate a defense.

Missile Combat

Missile combat is only possible between opponents who are not adjacent and are armed with some manner of projectile.

Each missile weapon has a short, medium and long range. A missile weapon is ineffective beyond its long range; it may be able to travel farther, but will have lost too much energy to do damage. Range is given as the number of feet the weapon can travel. On the weapons list, missile weapon ranges are given as follows:

Short bow	50/110/200
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The first number is short range, the second is medium range, and the last is long range.

Aiming

Combatants making a missile attack are not required to choose an aiming point. Typically an assailant will simply select a target, launch an attack toward that target, then roll on the random hit location table if the shot hits its mark.

Random Hit Location Table

% Die Roll	Location Hit
01-10	Left Leg
11-20	Right Leg
21-45	Gut
46-70	Chest
71-80	Left Arm
81-90	Right Arm
91-100	Head

To aim for a specific location, you must call your shot during declaration of intention. The attack is resolved normally (resolution check against missile weapon or General Fighting talent minus the target's Movement). However, the shot is only successful on a red result. Any other result means the shot missed the target entirely.

Combat Modifiers

Combat modifiers are applied when one fighter or the other is in an advantageous or disadvantageous position compared to the other. All modifiers are applied to the column against which the dice roll is compared. A favorable modifier causes a shift to the right; an unfavorable one shifts to the left. A single attack may be subject to any number of modifiers.

Combat Modifiers Chart

Situation	Modifier
Attacker is:	
Attacking character from behind	+1
Bound or held	-4
Fallen or lower position	-2
Fighting with two weapons	-3
For every attacker over 2	+1
In darkness or blind	-6
Per point of Strength over 10	+1
Defender is:	
Bound or held	+6
Fallen or in a lower position	+1
Larger than a man	+2
Moving	-1
Smaller than a man	-2
At medium range	-3
At long range	-6
Blinded	+6
Obscured by fog/smoke	-2
Hidden by bush/drapes	-4

Fallen/lower position: Applies to characters who have been knocked to the ground, or are attacked by an opponent who is

mounted, atop a wall, or otherwise at a higher elevation.

Obscured: Anything hidden from vision but not actually behind hard cover is considered obscured.

Range modifiers: Applied to missile weapons fired at targets within the given range.

Damage

Damage is inflicted on characters in two distinct ways. The first, more common way, is by loss of points from the Damage Talent rating. The second is by infliction of a Specific Wound.

When a character scores a hit in combat and the result of the resolution check is green, yellow, or orange, the attack does 1, 2, or 3 points of damage, respectively. The amount of damage done may be modified by a Strength Bonus, Weapon Bonus, armor, or Defense check success.

When a character scores a hit with a red result, 4 points of damage are inflicted and there is a chance the victim has suffered a Specific Wound. The 4 points of damage may be modified by any of the factors mentioned above, but the chance of a Specific Wound remains.

The Specific Wound inflicted depends on the aiming point and type (armed or unarmed) of the attack. Effects range from outright death to temporary loss of use of a limb.

Weapon Bonuses

Certain weapons have a Weapon Bonus (which can in fact be positive or negative) that modifies damage done with them. It is possible for damage to be reduced to zero if the degree of success on the attack resolution check is low enough. Each weapon's Damage Bonus, if any, is listed on the weapon chart.

Strength Bonuses

Characters with great strength deal additional damage in melee. For every 10 points of Strength Talent, add 1 point to damage done in armed or unarmed melee.

Armor and Shields

Armor reduces the amount of damage done to a character by an attack. Unfortunately, its added weight slows the wearer and makes him easier to hit.

Armor is worn in pieces. Each piece protects one or more areas of the body. Which part(s) of the body a piece of armor covers is given on the equipment chart. The chart also gives the number of points by which a piece of armor reduces damage done to the area(s).

Normally each body area can be protected by only one piece of armor. However, some pieces of armor only cover part of an area. These can be used in combination with other pieces that protect different parts of the same area. When pieces can be used in combination, add the damage reduction for each piece to find the total protection given to the area.

Esmis is girding his loins - and everything else he can - for battle. First he puts on a studded leather kilt, protecting his gut and thighs. He also straps on brazen greaves (covering his shins) and a breastplate (covering his chest). Finally he dons an iron helmet to protect his head. All told, his armor will stop 2 points of damage to the legs (1 from the kilt plus 1 from the greaves), 1 to the gut, 2 to the chest, and 2 to his head.

Shields stop damage in the same way pieces of armor do, but can only protect one side of the body. A shield carried on the left arm can be used to protect the head, left arm, chest, gut, and left leg, but not the right arm or leg. A shield can only be brought to bear against one combat attack (melee or missile) per combat turn. When used to block an attack, the shield's rating is added to the ratings of any and all other pieces of armor protecting the same location.

Most pieces of armor make their wearer less mobile. The equipment chart lists the

movement penalty, if any, imposed by wearing a given piece of armor. Add the move penalty for all pieces of armor a character is wearing, then subtract the total from the character's Movement or General Prowess rating for the combat in which the armor is worn. This may very well result in a negative rating.

Damage Points

Whenever a character suffers damage from an attack, subtract the number of points of damage from the character's Damage Talent rating. As long as the rating remains a positive number, there is no effect unless the character is called upon to make a resolution check against her Damage rating.

It's when a character's Damage rating reaches zero that the trouble starts. Reaching a Damage of 0 does not mean that the character instantly drops dead. However, every time a character whose current Damage

rating is 0 or less takes additional damage, he must make a resolution check against that Damage rating. If the result is red, the character can continue as normal. If the result is green, yellow, or orange, the character drops unconscious. He will regain consciousness in 1-10 hours. If the result is white, alas, the character dies on the spot.

Enemies reduced to a 0 Damage rating do not get to make a resolution check; they fall instantly. **Foes** make resolution checks against their current damage rating to continue in action, just like PCs.

Specific Wounds

Whenever a character scores a red result on an attack resolution check, there is a chance she has inflicted a Specific Wound



Specific Wound Chart		
Aiming Point/Area Hit	Brawling	Other
Head	Unconscious; Orange or Red to resist	Death; any color to avoid
Chest	Stunned 1 combat turn; Yellow, Orange or Red to resist	Unconscious; Orange or Red to resist
Gut	Stunned 2 combat turns; Yellow, Orange or Red to resist	Unconscious; Red to resist
Arm	Drop any object held	Unusable; any color to resist
Leg	Knocked down; any color to resist	Unusable; Yellow, Orange or Red to resist

on her opponent. The chance of dealing a Specific Wound is not affected by defending, armor, shield use, strength bonus, or weapon bonus. The Specific Wound chart details what wounds are caused by a hit to each location. The character struck has the chance to make a Damage or General Endurance⁸ resolution check to avoid the effects of a Specific Wound; the table gives the result needed to avoid each.

If your character suffers a Specific Wound, make note in the Character Folio of the type of wound and the circumstances in which he received it. He will suffer the

⁸ At least, I'm assuming it's a Damage check. The original text says "The Specific Wound Chart lists ... the talent checked against ...". The chart of course does no such thing.

effects of that Specific Wound until it is healed. Some Specific Wounds may have effects that last long after the physical damage has healed.

Like PCs, **foes** make resolution checks to avoid the effects of Specific Wounds. **Enemies**, on the other hand, automatically suffer them.

Healing

Healing can be either natural or magical (but in a sword-and-sorcery world, don't count on the latter). A character on complete rest will regain a number of Damage points equal to her General Endurance rating plus 1 (thus, never fewer than 1). A character who engages in strenuous activity heals only 1 point per day. A character may still travel slowly, putter around the house, or do light chores while resting.

Damage points are restored at the end of each day. Needless to say, you can never heal more Damage points than you had originally.

Mass Combat

For fights involving large numbers of combatants, the procedure is somewhat different.

The players are put in charge of one side of the battle, and the referee of the other. Each side secretly divides their forces into three units - left, center, and right. Each may also keep up to three units in reserve. A unit composed of troops who bear a variety of weapons or are equipped with different armor is given a weapon and armor rating that is the average of the total value of all unit members.

Each unit is given a leader, who can be a PC or an NPC. If the leader is incapacitated, someone else must step into the breach. Each side in the conflict must also have an overall commander. This commander must also be replaced if incapacitated.

Each side now reveals the composition and placement of their units to the other; battle is joined! Side A's Left Unit is considered to

be facing Side B's Right Unit, A's Right faces B's Left, and their Center Units face one another. Each reserve unit may be positioned behind any other unit.

As a visual aid, mark out a 5- by 7-square grid and note the square in which each unit is placed. Each square represents 100 feet. The referee will determine how far the opposing forces are when battle commences. It's very rare for an engagement to start with the antagonists already in contact, unless environmental factors (e.g. thick forest or dense fog) have let them get nose to nose without sighting one another.

Units not in contact with an enemy may move 1 square on the X or Y axis, but not diagonally, per combat round. The unit may be facing any direction after moving. A unit in contact with an enemy unit must Flee or Withdraw (see below) to move. Any unit can change its facing at any time.

The force commander can move one square in any direction, including diagonally, per turn. The commander may seize control of any friendly unit into whose square s/he moves. The commander then performs all the functions of that unit's leader for the turn, including engaging in leader-to-leader combat (see below).

Units may only attack adjacent enemies; they may not attack on the diagonal. Only one unit can be in each square. Units on several sides of a single enemy unit may gang up on it. The number of fighters in each coordinating unit is added together for purposes of determining whether and by what ratio the defenders are outnumbered (which imposes a negative modifier on the defenders).

Mass Combat Rounds

A mass combat round is divided into four segments. Before the start of each round, the commander of each side decides what action each unit will take for that round. The unit will perform that action for the entire round. The choices are:

- attack
- defend
- shoot
- withdraw

A unit may **attack** the adjacent enemy unit it is facing. If more than one enemy unit is adjacent, it can't attack both at once.

A unit that **defends** is concentrating on avoiding damage rather than inflicting it.

If the unit's members carry missile weapons, they may **shoot** at any enemy unit to which the shooters are **not** adjacent.

A unit that **withdraws** is moving away from its enemy while actively defending.

Segment 1: Leader Combat

During the first round, the leaders of opposing units duel one-on-one. This is resolved using the regular combat rules. If two or more units are attacking a single enemy unit, both the attackers' leaders may attack the defenders' leader. A unit whose leader suffers an injury or specific wound, or is killed outright, is subject to a negative modifier when fighting the rest of the round.

Segments 2-4: Unit Combat

Now the struggle between the units' members is resolved. The attacking unit makes a check on the resolution chart against the average of the members' Talent with their weapons. The results of the resolution check do not indicate points of damage done in this case; rather, they indicate the number of fighters lost from the defending unit. Results are determined for both sides at the same time. Each unit makes a check every segment to determine the damage it inflicts on its target unit.

Result	Defenders Lost As % of Attackers' Numbers
Failure	0
Marginal	10
Acceptable	15
Total	20
Heroic	25

For example, One hundred pikemen face off against 50 cavalry. The pikemen score a

marginal success. The arrogant horsemen have neglected to wear any armor, so their number incapacitated is 10% of the number of pikemen - in this case, 10 riders.

The number of casualties inflicted is always rounded up.

Armor reduces the number of fighters lost as follows:

Unit Average Armor Rating	Reduction in Losses
1	5 points
2	10 points
3	15 points
4	20 points

Since mass combat doesn't use hit locations, armor protection for all parts of the body is figured into a composite armor value. To figure a unit's overall armor rating, take the protection rating for each body part, multiply that rating by the values in the chart below, total them, and divide by 100. In this case round down.

For example, After their unfortunate encounter with the pikemen, our cavalry decide they had better armor up before the next fight. They don leather jacks, leather arm protectors and steel helmets, and take along a small shield for good measure. The unit gets 1 chest (1 x 25) plus 1 gut (1 x 25) plus 2 arm (2 x 10) plus 2 head (2 x 10) plus a shield bonus, or 25+25+10+10+20+80=170. The total of 170 is divided by 100; the result of 1.7 is further rounded down to 1. The cavalry's kit will now reduce their losses by 5 points. This means that the next time they face off against 100 pikemen, rather than losing 10 riders to a marginal success (100 x 10%), they will lose only 5 (100 x (10-5%)).

If a unit's members are not all wearing the same armor, figure the value for each portion of the group that is, then average that out. This value (mercifully) does not change no matter who in the unit should happen to be felled.

Body Part	Multiplier
Head	10
Arm (each)	10
Chest	25
Gut	25
Legs (both)	20
Shield	Bonus
small	80

Morale

At the end of each round, if:

- the unit leader is slain,
- the number of unit fighters down reaches 1/3 their original number,
- the number down reaches 2/3 the original number, or
- the force commander is slain

a morale check must be made. If the force commander dies, all units must check morale. Otherwise, only the afflicted unit checks morale.

To test morale, the unit leader (or force commander, if s/he is with that unit) makes a resolution check against the average of her/his Will and the troops' average Will. A leaderless unit uses only the troops' average Will. Failure on the check means the unit flees. (In extreme circumstances, such as being outnumbered five to one or facing a horde of rampaging monsters, the referee may decide that the unit will flee on a marginal success as well.)

When a unit flees or its numbers are reduced to zero, it is removed from the battle grid. If the unit leader is alive, s/he may join any adjacent allied unit. Otherwise s/he is captured by the enemy. The space occupied by a unit that flees or is dispersed may immediately be occupied by a reserve unit if the reserve was adjacent at the time the destroyed unit was broken. Otherwise the enemy unit may immediately take the defeated unit's space.

A unit that withdraws moves back one space. Its enemy may advance one space for free.

Modifiers

A unit's combat effectiveness is subject to a large number of influences. The table below shows the modifier, in column shifts, applied to a unit under certain circumstances.

Mass Combat Modifiers	
Unit Modifiers	
attacking from flank or rear	+2
attackers outnumber defenders 2:1	+1
attackers outnumber defenders 3:1	+2
attackers outnumber defenders 5:1	+3
defenders outnumber attackers 2:1	-1
defenders outnumber attackers 3:1	-2
defenders outnumber attackers 5:1	-3
attacker has high ground	+1
defender has high ground	-2
at least 25% of attackers are on horses	+2
at least 25% of attackers are on warhorses	+4
at least 25% of defenders are on horses	-2
at least 25% of attackers are on warhorses	-4
defenders are withdrawing	+2
Missile Modifiers	
defending unit 2 spaces away	-1
defending unit 3 spaces away	-3
defending unit 4+ spaces away	no missile fire possible
Leader Influences	
leader hit enemy leader in segment 1	+1
leader scored heroic success against enemy leader	+2
leader inflicted specific wound on enemy leader	+3
enemy leader's Damage Resistance half gone	+4
leader killed enemy leader	+6
unit's leader is killed in segment 1	-6
Force Commander Influences	
commander's General Fighting	+1/point
commander is present with unit	+1
commander killed this round	-8

The condition or achievements of a unit leader affect only that unit. The commander influences all units, except for the presence bonus which is only applied to a single unit.

Chapter Five: Magic

In true sword-and-sorcery style, magic in ZeFRS is a shadowy and unnatural force - one into which only the most daring, obsessed, or mad inquire...

Who Can Use Magic

Anyone can learn magical skills, but not everyone wants to. The quest for magical knowledge involves spending long hours in musty libraries, poring over crumbling scrolls searching for scraps of information humanity was never meant to have. The wizard's growing intimacy with unnatural forces exacts other, grimmer tolls on mind and body. Once the forbidden knowledge has been gained, anything less than perfect application has the potential to destroy the user. And crucial bits of information have usually been lost to the ages...

On top of all that, the citizenry of the typical sword-and-sorcery world consider magicians suspect at best, demonic at worst. A career in magic is not going to win you any friends.



Learning Magic

Magic cannot be learned like regular talents. Many magical talents have prerequisites that must be met, and each exacts a price from those who learn it. Furthermore, simply learning a magical talent is only the beginning; each spell to be cast must subsequently be learned individually.

Prerequisites

Some magical talents require other, mundane talents as prerequisites. Without prior knowledge of them, the teachings of that branch of magic would be incomprehensible. Magical talents' prerequisites, if any, are listed along with the talent itself in Talents and Weaknesses (p. 9).

Tolgan has undertaken the study of Mind Control. He must study for six months before he can even attempt to use this talent. After three months of study, he discovers that he needs to make a monthlong journey to a far city to consult rare books in a reclusive sage's library. On arrival, he still needs to study for three more months before he can begin to use Mind Control.

Study

Each magical talent demands a long period of study, numbering at least in months, before it can be used. The description of each magical talent in Talents and Weaknesses (p. 9) gives the length of study necessary to begin learning effective spells with that talent. To learn the talent, the prospective magician must spend the specified length of time doing nothing but studying. She may travel and participate in adventures, but the time spent on those activities does not count toward time spent learning the talent.

Obsession

Upon learning his first magical talent, a character acquires a rating of 1 in Obsession "talent", which falls under the Insight Talent Pool. Every time the character learns a new magical talent or a new spell, his Obsession increases by 1 point. Obsession may also increase as a result of using certain magical items.

Obsession is a measure of how fixated the character is upon gaining new magical knowledge. Every time the character has the opportunity to acquire more magical power, he must make a resolution check against his Obsession rating. On a Heroic (red) result, the character gives in and will do whatever he must to gain the power.

Obsession can be worked around, but never ignored; if it possible to sate the character's lust for magic without harming his friends, he will do so. But if injuring or betraying them can't be avoided ... well, sometimes a magician just has to do what he has to do...

Magical Weaknesses

In almost every case, learning a new magical talent inflicts a new magical weakness upon the student. Prolonged intimacy with unnatural forces gradually warps mind and spirit into something no longer entirely human. If a magical talent specifies that its students acquire a magical weakness, choose one from this list:

- animal aversion
- disfigurement
- distrusted
- endurance loss
- madness
- nocturnal

The weakness takes effect immediately on completion of the course of study in the new magical talent. For a complete description of each weakness, see Talents and Weaknesses (p.9).

Spells

Mere knowledge of a magical talent is not enough to produce magical effects. It simply prepares the student to learn spells that fall under that talent's rubric. Researching a spell is no easy matter. The spell will require obscure, costly, and probably immoral components that must be gathered from remote and inhospitable locations.

There is no standardized spell list in ZeFRS. Each magical talent describes the sorts of effects it encompasses. When a magic-using character wants to learn a new spell, the character's player will describe to the referee what the spell should do. The player and ref will then settle on what must be learned or acquired for the character to use that spell. Then it's up to the character to track down each item.

Tolgan, not satisfied with controlling men's minds, has taken up Alchemy. The ref tells his player that Tolgan read of a deadly blood-reversing poison in fragments of an ancient Hshsian book. Reversing blood sounds good to Tolgan (whose Obsession rating is apparently already well up there), so he sets off on a six month trek across the Dromedian Desert to find the complete tome. On arrival, he finds the formula for concocting the poison. Now he needs to gather the ingredients - deadly black orchid from the fetid Janghari Swamps. If he survives the quest to find the orchids, he can then prepare the lethal poison.

Types of Magic

There are many different types of magic, each conferring different powers, demanding different prerequisites and exacting a different cost. The types of magic are:

- alchemy
- information
- mind control

- natural magic
- physical laws
- summoning
- transformation

Each type is detailed in Talents and Weaknesses (p. 9).

Magical Talent Ratings

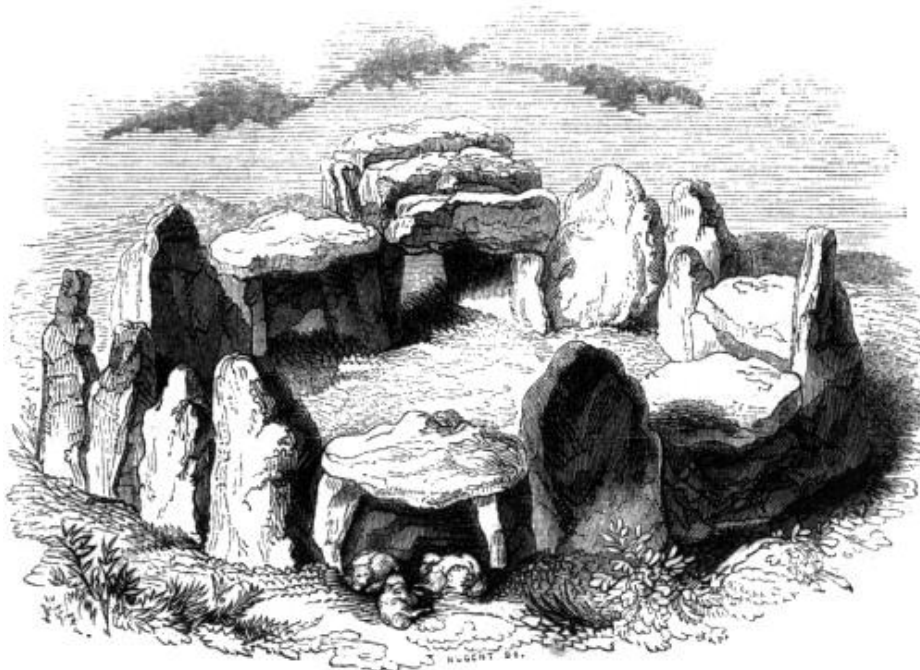
Upon learning a magical talent, you may assign it as many points as you can pay for, just as with any other new talent. The magical talent rating can also be improved like other talents'. The magical talent's rating is used to make resolution checks whenever a magician attempts to cast a spell.

Magic Resistance

Tolgan has completed his course of study in Mind Control, and has enough points saved up to immediately buy it at a rating of 5. After long hours of further study he has also learned his first spell, one that lets him erase himself from a person's sight. When he casts it, the spell will have a rating of 5.

Living beings who have spells cast upon them have a chance to resist. A magician casting a spell on another being subtracts the being's Magic Endurance or General Endurance rating from his magical talent rating of the caster when making the resolution check to see whether the spell takes effect. On a Failure (white) result, the spell or item does not affect the target. On any other result, the effect takes hold.

Tolgan wants to sneak past an armed guard into a private laboratory. He casts his erasure spell on the guard, who has a General Endurance of 2. His adjusted rating when making the resolution check is 3 (base rating of 5 - guard's rating of 2).



Chapter Six: Hazards

Falling

A fall of 10 or more feet may injure a character. The chance of injury increases with the distance fallen. When your character drops from a height, subtract 10 from the distance fallen in feet and find the corresponding value on the resolution chart. Make a resolution check against that value. On a white result, the character has miraculously avoided injury. Any other result causes commensurate injury (1 point for a marginal "success", 2 for acceptable, and so on).

As with a hit from a weapon, a heroic result on a fall resolution check may cause a specific wound. Roll on the random hit location table (p. 30) to determine which body area is threatened with a specific wound. PCs and foes may make a resolution check to avoid the specific wound.

Armor provides no protection against damage from a fall.

Characters who are injured in a fall are stunned for a number of combat turns equal to the distance fallen in feet divided by 10. Stunned characters can take no action at all.

Characters who fall more than 100 feet onto a hard surface are killed outright. Those who fall more than 100 feet onto a yielding surface such as sand, or into (sufficiently deep!) water may survive. It is left to the referee to determine how much damage is mitigated is by the circumstances of a fall.

Fire

Fires are rated based on their intensity. A fire's rating determines how likely it is to injure characters who come into contact with it. The rating is used to "attack" a burnt character in the same manner as a fighters use their weapon Talent ratings. Characters who are at liberty to move away from a fire may subtract their Movement rating from the fire's rating.

Fire Ratings	
candle, small lamp	-5
torch, lantern	0
small fire, burning tapestry	5 to 8
large fire, burning beam	10 to 14
bonfire, burning building	15 to 20
lava, magical fire	25 to 30

Fire may cause a specific wound on a heroic result. Armor, regardless of type, provides 1 point of protection against fire damage.

Drowning

Characters must make a Swimming resolution check to stay above water whenever an unusual challenge is presented. Such challenges may include:

- falling or being tossed into water with no forewarning
- diving from a height of more than 20 feet
- swimming in armor
- beginning a swim in water with a rating of 10 or greater
- every turn spent swimming in water with a rating of 25 or greater

Bodies of water, like fires, have a rating. Water does not "attack", however; rather, its rating is subtracted from the swimming character's adjusted Swimming rating. When a character makes a resolution check to stay afloat, double his Swimming rating and subtract any Movement penalty imposed by armor. (This may very well result in a negative rating.) Any degree of success means the swimmer has kept his head above water. Failure means he has taken 1 point of damage from choking on water.

Water Ratings	
still, flat calm	0
slow stream, sewer, calm ocean	5
strong current, icy water	10
rapids, ocean swells	15
whitewater, windblown ocean	25
waterfall, river whirlpool, stormy seas	35
ocean whirlpool	40
hurricane on the open ocean	50

Characters may hold their breath for a number of combat turns equal to 6 plus their Stamina or General Endurance ratings. On every subsequent turn they do not breathe, they suffer 1 point of damage.

After some struggling, Esmis pries a melon-sized ruby free from the grasp of a statue. The statue responds by seizing Esmis by the throat and throttling him. Esmis has a Stamina rating of 7; therefore he has 13 combat turns to free himself from the statue's grasp before he begins to suffer strangulation damage.

Poison

Poisons have three ratings: a venom rating, a wound rating, and a duration rating. The venom rating shows the poison's virulence, the wound rating determines the damage done by the poison, and the duration rating shows the poison's onset time.

When a character is poisoned, the referee makes a resolution check against the poisoned character's Poison Endurance or General Endurance rating minus the poison's venom rating. Failure means the poison takes full effect. Marginal success

reduces damage by 1 point. Acceptable success reduces damage by 3 points. Total success reduces damage to a single point, and heroic success means the character shrugs off the effects of the poison completely.

Example Poison Ratings

spider	6/5/6 hrs.
rattlesnake	10/8/2 hrs.
viper	13/15/1 hr.
curare	15/20/5 min.



Following her escape from the bazaar, Galya has lit out across the desert. As she beds down in the shadow of a dune to sleep through the heat of the day, she feels a sharp pain in her ankle; a scorpion, Perun blast it! Scorpion poison has a venom rating of 6. Galya has a Poison Endurance of 8. She makes a resolution check with a modified rating of 2 and gets an acceptable success. The scorpion's poison has a wound rating of 5, but because of her resolution check Galya will suffer only 3 points of damage. The poison's duration rating is 6 hours. Galya has 6 hours to find an antidote. If she succeeds in time, the poison will do her no damage at all.

Chapter Seven: Movement

Types of Movement

There are two basic types of movement in ZeFRS. Covering short distances in a brief time is referred to as **movement**. Movement is measured in combat turns or minutes. Prolonged trekking across large distances is referred to as **travel**. Travel is measured in hours, days, or even weeks.

Movement

Crawling, Walking, Jogging and Sprinting: Under normal circumstances, any character can crawl, walk, jog or sprint. Jogging and sprinting are tiring, however, and will eventually require a resolution check to continue. They may also require a resolution check in difficult circumstances (say, if your character is knee-deep in a bog). Crawling and walking do not require a resolution check.

Climbing: Everyone can at least attempt to climb, although training makes it much easier. A character's Climbing Talent rating is used for resolution checks when scaling a surface.

Swimming: Not everyone can swim. Those who have no training at all, and particularly those who grew up away from large bodies of water, are liable simply to drown. A character's Swimming Talent rating is used for resolution checks to stay afloat.

Acrobatics: Those who have the Acrobatics Talent have practiced jumping, tumbling, swinging and so forth. The Acrobatics Talent is used for stunts such as swinging from a chandelier, vaulting a wall, or leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

Travel

Walking: Sword-and-sorcery characters spend half their lives too broke to afford a mount. When reduced to traveling on foot, the number of miles per day a character can walk depends on her Movement or General Prowess Talent.

Animals: In a day's travel, a mount can cover an amount of ground that corresponds to their Movement rating, determined as for a character. The rider's Animal Handling ability does not affect the distance the animal can travel in a day. It does affect the rider or driver's ability to keep control of or motivate the animal in unusual circumstances.

Boats and Sailing: For most of human history, riverboats and coasters were far and away the fastest and safest means of long-distance travel. The Sailing Talent determines how well a character can handle a boat; the Navigation Talent determines whether or not he can find his way.

Water Travel	
Transport	Miles per Day
canoe, raft, rowboat	10
riverboat	30/10*
merchant galley	50
pirate or war galley	65

* miles sailed/miles rowed

Movement Rate

The following table shows the speed a character can attain at a crawl, walk, jog, and sprint.

Character Movement Table				
Talent Rating	Crawl	Walk	Jog	Sprint
-10 or less	1 [10]	P	P	P
-9 to -5	2 [25]	5 [50]	P	P
-4 to -3	2 [25]	5 [50]	10 [100]	P
-2 to 0	3 [35]	5 [50]	10 [100]	15 [150]
1 to 3	3 [35]	5 [50]	15 [150]	20 [250]
4 to 6	3 [35]	10 [100]	15 [150]	25 [300]
7 to 10	3 [35]	10 [100]	20 [250]	30 [350]
11 to 13	4 [50]	10 [100]	20 [250]	35 [400]
14 to 17	4 [50]	10 [100]	20 [250]	40 [500]
18 to 21	4 [50]	10 [100]	25 [300]	45 [550]
22 to 25	5 [50]	10 [100]	25 [300]	50 [600]
26 to 29	4 [50]	15 [150]	25 [300]	55 [650]
30 or above	4 [50]	15 [150]	30 [350]	60 [700]

- The distance in feet a character can move per combat turn

[#] - The distance in feet a character can move in one minute

P - this type of movement is prohibited

Fatigue

Crawling and Walking: For game purposes, crawling and walking cause no fatigue.

Your character can crawl or walk at the rates given in the movement table as long as he likes, so long as he stops to sleep for 8 hours out of every 24.

Jogging: Characters may jog for a number of hours equal to their Stamina or General Endurance ratings⁹. Characters who have a rating of 0 in both can jog for 1 hour. After jogging for the maximum time, a character must rest for one hour. She may then continue her journey at a walk for the rest of the day. Characters can only jog once per day.

Sprinting: Characters may sprint flat out for a number of minutes equal to their Stamina or General Endurance rating. Those who have a rating of 0 in both can sprint for one minute. After sprinting, a character must rest for 30 minutes.

Animal Movement

Animals follow the same fatigue rules as do humans. Getting an animal to move in the first place is a whole other matter. To get an animal to do something unusual, such as getting a horse to rear and stike a foe with his forehooves, the rider or driver must make a resolution check against his Animal Handling or General Perception rating. On a failure, the character has lost control of the animal. (What that means will depend on whether the character is aboard the animal, driving it, or otherwise attempting to command it.) On a marginal success, the character retains control - the animal does not bolt - but cannot make the animal obey. On a higher result, the animal obeys the character's direction.

Climbing

Anyone can attempt to climb, and the referee can declare success automatic for easy ascents. Climbs that the referee decides are challenging can only be attempted unassisted by characters with the Climbing Talent. All others must be

assisted by ropes, trained climbers going on ahead to hack footholds, and so on.

Characters climb at a rate of 5 plus their Climbing rating per combat turn. Under no circumstances can a character climb faster than 20 feet per turn.

For every 100 feet a character climbs, she must make a resolution check against her Climbing or General Prowess rating. A check is made for every 100 feet climbed. For a climb of less than 100 feet, a check is made at the halfway point and on reaching the summit. Thus every climb involves at least two resolution checks. On a failure, the character falls from the point at which the check was made. Any degree of success means she may continue to climb.

Climbing checks are modified as follows:

Surface Conditions	
sloping	+2 columns
rough	+1 column
glacier or ice	-1 column
smooth stone	-1 column
overhang	-3 columns

Characters who fall do not necessarily fall all the way to the bottom. There is a slim chance they can catch themselves before they hit.

If your character is climbing a rough or uneven surface, one that offers projections that might help slow or break his fall, the number of feet he falls before catching himself is equal to $d10 \times 10$. If the result is greater than the distance climbed, he has hit bottom.

To determine damage inflicted by a fall, see Hazards (p. 40). A fall of 100 or more feet usually results in death.

Swimming

Only characters with the Swimming Talent can cover any significant distance by swimming. All others are limited to treading water and maybe dog paddling to the nearest bit of flotsam.

Those who have the Swimming Talent can swim at a rate equal to their walking speed on land as determined on the character movement table. Swimmers can swim at

⁹ One of the images burnt into my mind from **Conan the Barbarian** is him & Subotai jogging endlessly across the trackless waste. Another bit of genre emulation here?

their walking speed for the same number of hours they can walk. They can swim at their jogging speed for a number of minutes equal to the number of hours they can jog.

Trained swimmers are also much less likely to drown. Drowning is explained in Hazards (p. 40).

Acrobatics

Any acrobatic movement - vaulting, swinging, tumbling, and so on - has some chance of failure. When attempting such a movement, make a resolution check against your character's Acrobatics or General Prowess rating, whichever is higher. A failure means the character has bobbed the movement and suffers the

consequences (e.g. lost his grip while swinging from a chandelier, smacked his chin trying to do a franchissement under a railing, crashed and skidded trying to vault an altar). The movement succeeds on any other result.

Long-Distance Travel

A character's Movement rating influences the number of miles the character can cover per day on foot. A character has a number of movement points equal to her Movement rating. The cost to cover one mile of various types of terrain is given in the table below.

Travel Table							
Traveler	Movement Points	Clear	Mountain	Desert	Forest	River	Animal Walk / Sprint
Human	Movement rating	1/3	3	2	1	+2	--
Horse	20	1/4	4	1	3	+1	10/30
Ox	10	1	3	4	2	+4	5/10
Mule/Pony	20	1/2	2	2	2	+2	10/20
Camel	20	1/2	5	1	3	+8	10/30
Elephant	15	2	4	8	2	+1	10/20

Clear: plains, steppes, meadows, farmlands, etc.

Desert: includes tundra

Forest: includes jungle

River: applied only when fording rivers is necessary

If an animal is carrying a rider, it has only 2/3 its usual points available for travel. If pulling a chariot or wagon, it has only 1/2 the usual points available.



Chapter Eight: Life in a Sword-and-Sorcery World

Money

Three basic coin types are used in ZeFRS: gold, silver and bronze. Each nation will doubtless produce its own currency, and a nation's coins may have more than their face value in one foreign land while being practically worthless in another. For the sake of convenience, it is assumed that there is an economically dominant nation whose currency has a nearly universal value. A

gold is worth 10 silvers, and one silver is worth 100 bronze.

Jewels, another mainstay of decent treasure hoards everywhere, range in value from semi-precious to priceless. Some representative gems and their values are given in the table below:

Jewel	Value	Jewel	Value
agate	5 b	turquoise	1 g
garnet	1 s	aquamarine	2 g
mother-of-pearl	1 s	Pearl	10 g
Quartz	2 s	Opal	15 g
amber	3 s	sapphrie	30 g
chalcedony	4 s	Topaz	30 g
Coral	5 s	amethyst	50 g
Jet	5 s	Jade	75 g
lapis lazuli	7 s	Ruby	100 g
malachite	7 s	emerald	200 g
Onyx	8 s	diamond	300 g

g = gold; s = silver; b = bronze

A jewel's value may vary considerably depending on size, cut and quality.

Equipment

Although most merchants are willing - indeed, expect to - haggle, you can generally count on common items commanding prices such as those given in the table below:

Clothing	
boots	1-10 g
cloak, heavy	1-5 s
cloak, ornamental	1-5 g
robe or dress, fancy	10-100 g
robe or dress, plain	1-5 s
sandals	1-2 s
shirt or trousers, coarse cloth	50-100 b
cotton	1-2 s
linen	5-10 s
leather	1-5 g
silk	5-10 g
winter fur robe	10-20 g

Drink (one flagon)	
moonshine/homebrewed beer	1-5 b
flat, funky beer	2-10 b
vinegary plonk	5-10 b
common wine	10-50 b
mead	50-100 b
good wine	1-3 s
fine vintage wine	5-20 s
Food (one meal)	
greasy slop	1-5 b
bland but filling	10-20 b
hearty and tasty	50-100 b
fine dining	10-20 s
elegant feast	10-50 g
Lodging (one day)	
a bench in the common room	1-5 b
shared room	10-15 b
private room	50-100 b
comfortable room and board	4-10 s
suite	20-50 s
apartment	1-5 g
Miscellaneous	
one day's rations (dried meat, bread, cheese, fruit)	1-3 s
saddle and bridle	1-10 g
stable (per night)	1-10 b
wool blanket	1-5 s

Prices for weapons and armor, as well as their combat statistics, are given in **Arms and Armor**, below.

Employment

Adventuring characters will often try to make ends meet by serving as bodyguards or mercenaries. The sort of hired position a character can obtain depends on his Fame

rating. Characters with greater Fame will be able to command higher rank and better pay.

Fame	Position
little known (rating 0-10)	bodyguard caravan guard soldier, sergeant brigand, highwayman
moderately famous (rating 11-25)	army captain bandit chieftain caravan master tribal warlord or hetman elite guard special envoy of a king
legendary (rating 26+)	general high priest ambassador prime minister

Aside from salaried work, there is always someone looking to hire skilled adventurers to carry out a dangerous, secretive, or dodgy mission.

Characters with a rating of 20 or more in a Talent may hire themselves out as instructors for whatever wage they can negotiate.

Dealing With NPCs

Referees will usually have decided ahead of time or be able to form a pretty good idea what an NPC's reaction to the

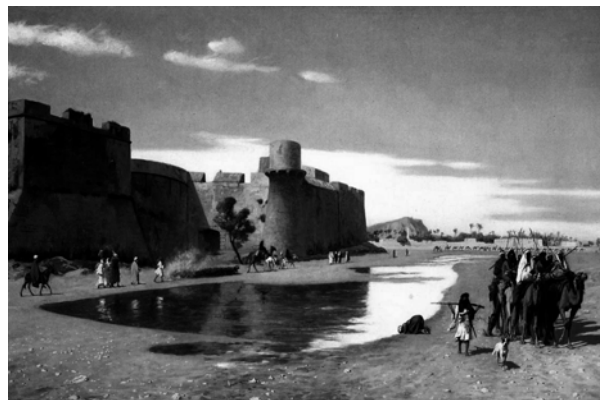
characters will be. When reaction has to be determined on the spur of the moment, however, the character makes a resolution check against her Fame or General Perception rating, whichever is higher.

A friendly situation is one in which the PC is dealing with an NPC who is already well disposed toward the PC. In a neutral situation, the NPC has no opinion on the PC one way or the other. NPCs in a hostile situation have reason to dislike or distrust the PC. A dangerous situation is one in which the PC is trying to get the NPC to do something that puts the NPC at risk.

NPC Reaction Table

Result	Situation			
	Friendly	Neutral	Hostile	Dangerous
failure	abrupt	ignores	fight	flees
marginal success	neutral	abrupt	refuses/brushes off PC	refuses
acceptable success	neutral	answers	unfriendly	refuses
total success	helpful	answers	unfriendly	will agree if bribed/rewarded
heroic success	generous	helpful	suspicious	helpful

Esmis has finished a relaxing steam at a Sulean bath house. As he dresses, he discovers that his fine leather gloves are gone! Looking around, he sees a weasly little thief clutching his gloves and headed for the door. "Hoi!" he bellows, at which the thief brandishes a knife. "Stop that thief!" Esmis yells. He'll need to get a heroic result on his resolution check for anyone to risk going near the thief. If he had yelled, "A gold for the man who stops that thief!", he would only need a total success (will agree if rewarded).



Arms and Armor

Weapons

Weapon	Weapon Bonus	Initiative Bonus	Range	Cost
arbalest*	+1	0	50/120/200	special
bastard sword	0 (+1)**	-1	-	2 s
bill	+1	+2/-2***	-	9 s
broadsword	0	0	-	1 s
cinequesda	+1	-1	-	1 s
club	0	0	-	-
dirk	0	-1	0	5 b
falchion	+2	-2	-	2 s
fighting axe	+1	-1	-	3 s
flail	+1	-2	-	3 s
fork/trident	+1(+2)#	+2/-3***#	-	8 s
francisca	0	0	5/10/20	1 s
great axe	+2	-2	-	5 s
halbard	+1	+2/-3***	-	1 g
holy water sprinkler	+1	0	-	3 s
javelin	-1	0	30/50/80	4 b
katar	-1	+1	-	1 g
knife, throwing	0	+1	5/10/15	4 b
lance, jousting	+3	+4/-4***	-	2 g
lance, light	0	+3/-3***	-	8 g
longbow	0	0	70/150/250	4 g
mace	0	0	-	5 b
man-catcher	****	+2	-	3 g
maul	+2	-3	-	2 s
pike	0	+2/-3	-	1 g
rapier	0	+1	-	4 g
saber	0	0	-	5 s
short bow	0	0	50/110/200	2 g
sling	-1	0	50/100/150	3 b
spear	0	0	10/25/40	2 s
throwing dirk	0	0	10/20/30	1 s
tiger claw	-2	-2	-	3 g
two-handed sword	+2	-3	-	2 g
warhammer	0	0	-	6 s

* requires 3 combat turns to load

** use second number when using weapon with two hands

*** use first number on first round of combat only

**** does no damage, but traps target in weapon's jaws

Especially effective against mounted attackers; each hit has a 10% chance of unseating a mounted victim.

g = gold; s = silver; b = bronze

Armor

Protection and cost given are for steel or iron armor. For bronze armor, reduce protection by 1 point and cost by 50%.

Human Armor				
Armor	Protection	Move Penalty	Cost	Area(s) Covered
arm guard, splint	2	1	4 s	RA, LA
armored sleeve	3	1	5 s	RA or LA
arm armor, leather	1	0	3 s	RA or LA
armet	3	1	3 g	H
barbutte	2	1	1 s	H
basinet	2	0	7 s	H
bishop's mantle	2	4	5 g	C, G, RA, LA, RL, LL
breastplate	3	2	3 g	C
brigandine	2	1	8 s	C, G
coif	1	0	2 s	H
jack	1	0	3 s	C, G
leg armor, metal	2	2	5 s	RL, LL
leg armor, leather	1	0	5 s	RL, LL
hauberk	2	2	1 g	C, G, RA, LA
mail suit	2	4	10 g	all but H
shield, buckler	2	0	8 s	see Combat*
shield, great	3	4	5 g	see Combat*
shield, spiked	2	2	2 g	+
shield, standard	2	2	1 g	see Combat*
shield, target	1	0	5 b	see Combat*
shirt, ring or scale	2	1	6 s	C, G
skirt, studded	1	1	3 s	G, RL, LL
tassets	3	1	6 s	G
three-quarter suit	4	5	12 g	H, C, G, RA, LA, RL, LL

+ A spiked shield used to Bash (see Combat*) knocks down the opponent on an acceptable through heroic result. The Bash also inflicts damage equal to the basher's strength bonus, if any. A failure on a bash means that the opponent has entangled the shield and torn it from the user's grasp.

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Horse Armor				
chanfron	3	1	10 g	H
crupper, leather	1	0	5 g	hindquarters
crupper, plate	3	4	20 g	hindquarters
peytral, leather	1	0	10 g	chest
peytral, plate	3	3	25 g	chest

Improvement and Ultimate Goals

What is best in life? That's up to each character to decide individually. There are, however, certain things that most characters will strive for at one time or another.

Money

Sword-and-sorcery heroes are typically eager to line their pockets with treasure, but mere money isn't their only motivation. Riches are there to be won by main force or cunning, then squandered just as quickly on high living.

Fame

A hero's fame will long outlast her money, and indeed will survive her. Her legend will be based on her deeds, earning her a reputation for cunning, might, ferocity, mercy - whatever attributes she displays in accomplishing her feats.

Each character has a Fame rating. Unlike other talents, Fame cannot be bought and cannot be improved with talent points. Fame must be earned by doing deeds of renown. Certain conditions must be met for Fame to be earned:

1. The deed must be extraordinary or heroic.
2. The deed must be performed before witnesses or leave indisputable proof of its author. You can't earn Fame for something you can't prove you did.
3. The deed must be dangerous.

Characters earn 1 Fame point for:

- particularly wild or dangerous stunts
- defeating an opponent with higher General ratings
- leading the victors in a major battle

- deeds of notable savagery
- each Talent rated between 20 and 29
- each Talent rated 30 or higher
- notable displays of mercy
- outwitting a major NPC

This is not an exhaustive list; the referee may award a Fame point for any sufficiently noteworthy accomplishment.

Monsters and items may have a Fame rating. A character who participates in defeating the monster or gains possession of the item gains Fame points equal to that rating.

Characters may also lose Fame due to public failure or misbehavior. For example, a character will lose 1 Fame point for:

- acts of notable cowardice
- acts of notable stupidity
- being made a fool of
- betraying friends or followers
- leading the losers in a major battle
- being defeated by an opponent with lower General ratings

Of course, since there must be proof or witnesses for a character to lose Fame, the truly amoral frequently have more than they deserve...

Expertise

At the end of each adventure, characters may gain talent points. These may be spent to improve existing Talents or acquire new ones.

Characters earn 1 talent point just for showing up. Using Talents earns additional points:

Talent Point Awards

Action	Talent Points
minor use of a talent	1
moderate use of a talent	2
major use of a talent	5
succeeding at an action for which the character does not have the Talent	2

Minor use of a Talent means using it only once or twice in the course of an adventure. Major use means making heavy use of it - making a two-thousand foot climb up a mountain then scaling the walls of the necromancer's tower perched atop it, for instance.

Characters may earn a hard maximum of 10 talent points at a time.

Talent points may be spent to improve existing Talents on a one-for-one basis. A new Talent may be added at a cost of 5 points. The new Talent begins with a rating of 1.

Circumstances may dictate which new Talents your character can add at any given moment. Don't expect to learn Sailing while you're still atop necromancer mountain.

Thrills

Each character has a certain number of luck points that he can use to deal with the sudden changes of fortune that are wont to spring up in a sword-and-sorcery world. At character creation, the referee secretly rolls d10 for the character. This is the number of luck points he starts with. The character (and player!) do not know how many points the character has; there is quite literally no knowing when his luck will run out.

Characters can spend 1 luck point to:

- reroll a resolution check

- reduce damage by one level (e.g. from heroic to total)

They can also spend any number of luck points on an attempt at an action that could only possibly succeed by luck. Make a resolution check against the number of luck points spent; on any result other than a failure, the stunt succeeds.

Jackal and Dural Besh have escaped the merchant's mansion and are fleeing the city with the guard hot on their tails. Cornered atop the city walls, Jackal glances over the edge and spots a number of horses in a departing merchant caravan. He and Besh spend 3 luck points apiece and jump. Fortunately both roll a success and land squarely atop a mount. Wincing but still alive, they gallop away.

Characters earn additional luck points by deeds of derring-do. Referees may choose to award 1 luck point for a highly original or outrageous stunt. They may also award 1 point for good role-playing or generally contributing to everyone having a good time.

Honor

What separates the heroes from the villains in a sword-and-sorcery world is the heroes' sense of honor. They stay true to their friends, defend the weak from the strong, and will even fight to smash evil if there's a little something in it for them. Many a hero hopes for nothing more than to leave an honorable name graven in legend.

Appendix: A Rogue's Gallery

The great majority of the opponents a ZeFRS character faces will be other human beings. In this section we present some examples of typical people your character is likely to encounter.

Foes

Brigand

Bands of armed robbers can be found haunting forest and highway alike. These roaming thugs are somewhat less fearsome than bands of actual military men, whether mercenary or soldier.

Pro 1	Fight 1	End 0	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
movement 5 acrobatics 3 climbing 5	sword 4 dagger 3 brawling 3	damage 5 poison 2	lockpicking 2	picking pockets 3 observation 4	direction sense 3

Commoner

The common folk of the world are skilled in whatever profession they follow, but have next to no knowledge of the talents adventurers use every day.

Pro 0	Fight 0	End 0	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
movement 3 strength 2	brawling 2	damage 3 willpower 2 poison endurance 2	any profession/trade 10		

A commoner will have little on his person beyond the tools of his trade and perhaps a few coppers.

Cultist

The religions of a sword-and-sorcery world are many and varied, but a large number have this in common: they inspire their adherents to become gibbering killers.

Pro 1	Fight 0	End 0	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
movement 4 strength 5 throwing 1	weapon 4 wrestling 4	damage 4 magic endurance 3	any profession/trade 2	animal handling 3 observation 3	animal senses 2

Cultists will be most often be armed with ritual weapons such as daggers, sickles or garottes.

Freebooter

A step up from the common mercenary, freebooters are professional military units that work for the highest bidder. Elite freebooter companies will even include cavalry.

Pro 1	Fight 1	End 2	Kno 0	Per 1	In 0
movement 5 strength 5	sword 5 shortbow 5 brawling 5	damage 8 magic endurance 3 poison endurance 3 will 6	at least two foreign languages 3	animal handling 5 observation 3 tracking 2	direction sense 3

Freebooter "knights" will also have heavy and light lance Talents at a rating of 5-8.

Sailor/Pirate

Merchant sailors and pirate crewman share much the same Talents (no surprise given that each may have been the other only a few weeks ago).

Pro 1	Fight 0	End 1	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
climbing 3 swimming 5 movement 3	dagger 2 cutlass 5	damage 10	sailing 6 navigation 2	medicine 2	weather sense 2

Sample Characters

Dural Besh

Dural Besh, son of Dural Hab the praise singer and Dural Ima the weaver, was born in the land of Marumasai. Dural grew to a moderate stature, with a wiry frame and long, nimble fingers. His skill at the loom was passable, but he excelled at vividly recounting folktales and even scenes of everyday life in the city where he and his parents lived. On days he was sent to the bazaar for materials, he spent far more time swapping stories with traders from far-flung lands than he did hunting for good deals on cotton and silk. One day he could refuse the call of the open road no longer; he spent his meager savings on two blades and a leather coat and signed on as a guard for a caravan headed for a city he had never heard of. Ever since Besh has wandered the far corners of the earth, always sure that a new great tale of adventure is just over the horizon.

Pro 1	Fight 1	End 0	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
movement 5 animal reflexes 3 climbing 3	saber 5 dirk 3 two-weapon fighting 3	damage 5 poison 3	lore 3	minstrel 3 artisan: weaver 2 observation 3	personal magnetism 4

Weaknesses: Phobia (cats)

Equipment: sabre, dirk, leather jack, cotton trousers, ox-hide sandals

Jackal the Reaver

Of all the children of the grim and hard Rhagadash people, Jackal the Reaver is among the most dour and pitiless. The nameless country of the Rhagadash was a mighty nation until a wizards' war blasted its very earth; now the once-cultured citizenry have reverted to barbarism in their struggle to survive against creatures warped by sorcery and a landscape that is itself in constant upheaval. The Rhagadash believe that each day of life must be won in a struggle against Emradeth, a god who pays the world no mind other than to send curses and doom. Jackal took this lesson to heart and has made it his goal to wrest as many days as he can from this divine tormentor by deeds of ferocity and might. Every day he lives is another chance to spit in the Cruel Lord's eye.

Pro 0	Fight 1	End 1	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
climbing 3 movement 5	brawling 4 broadsword 7 axe 5	damage 7 willpower 4	survival (desert) 3	observation 5 tracking 3	animal senses 4 directional sense 2

Weaknesses: Taciturn, Phobia (magic)

Equipment: broadsword, iron and sinew headband, linen tunic, leather breeches and boots

Galya Eyepiercer

Galya, daughter of Rina the Swift, daughter of Yevna Stonehand, lived her early years among the wild riders who roam the Sarthian steppes. Her eponym she earned while little more than a girl, downing six Mitrugolnik warriors at the Battle of Evernight Forest. She soon became the captain of her own troop of mounted archers who made their living in the traditional Sarthian manner, as elite mercenaries in the service of the strange kingdoms across the mountains. With every campaign the fame of Galya's band grew - as did the envy of rival freebooter captains. At last, during a battle on the borders of the Amarian moors they left open a crucial avenue of attack on her company. Wild Uskibayan barbarians swept down and slew the lot before the other mercenaries closed in and destroyed them in turn. They were finally rid of their hated rival. Or so they thought.

Galya alone survived the fighting, though so badly beaten she was unrecognizable for many months. She dragged herself by her one good arm to a farm, where the old couple who kept it took her in and nursed her back to health. Upon recovering she set out to learn what had gone so terribly wrong that day. It didn't take long for her to learn of her troop's betrayal, and less time for her to begin to take her revenge. Seven captains of the civilized world's most famous freebooters have met their deaths on the end of her knife or the tip of her arrow. Only one remains, and Galya will never rest until she has watched him die at her hand.

Pro 0	Fight 1	End 1	Kno 0	Per 0	In 0
movement 5	shortbow 10 dagger 4 wrestling 2	damage 7 poison 8	brewing 2 fletching 2 herbalism 2	animal handling 8	direction sense 4

Weaknesses: Weakness to drink

Equipment: shortbow, 50 arrows, chain shirt, silk undertunic, leather pants, felt boots

CHARACTER

ZeFRS



Character Folio

THE STORY BEGINS

PROWESS

ENDURANCE

FIGHTING

KNOWLEDGE

PERCEPTION

INSIGHT

WEAKNESSES

REPUTATION

TALENT PTS.

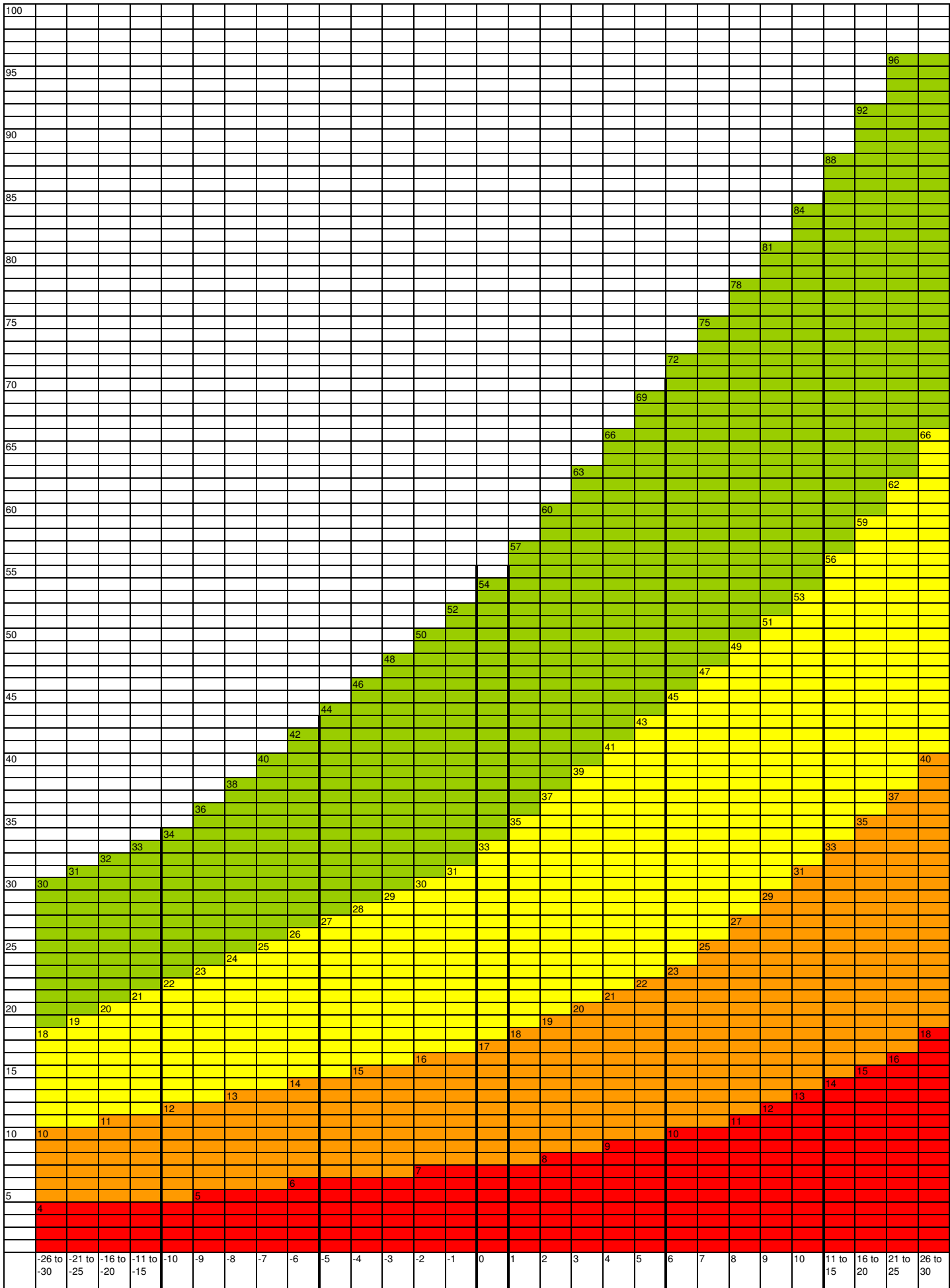
THE STORY CONTINUES

SPELLS

EQUIPMENT

VALUABLES

WOUNDS



For purposes of column shifts, use columns as defined by dark lines