

Grimdark

Ghost of War

December 29, 2020

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CHAPTER 1: BASE SYSTEM

ATTRIBUTES

Characters in Grimdark have 9 Attributes which define their relevant physical and psychical abilities. All rolls in Grimdark make use of two associated Attributes - thus the attributes of your character are very important!

- **Ballistic Skill:** Shoot stuff dead with bow, pistol and rocket launchers!
- **Weapon Skill:** Stab stuff dead with knives, swords and power hammers!
- **Strength:** Lift heavy stuff, carry your team on your broad shoulders and hit hard!
- **Agility:** Dodge dangerous stuff, jump high and far, move without sound and run fast!
- **Toughness:** Take some serious beating, drink and eat stuff like an ork and recover just as fast!
- **Perception:** Notice stuff. Lies, traps, secrets, shadows, bugs, ambushes.
- **Intelligence:** Know stuff. Patch machines. Patch people. Talk like a true human rather than a monkey.
- **Fellowship:** People. People-people. Charm them, seduce them. Preach, shout, command, lie. Did we mention people?
- **Willpower:** Resist manipulating stuff. Witch-stuff. Keep going when your body would rather not.

APTITUDES

Where Attributes define the *current* abilities of your character, Aptitudes represent your character's *potential*. Aptitudes define how easy your character can learn new skills, professions and talents associated with the Aptitudes. While every character in Grimdark can learn any skill or talent, a character with the respective Aptitudes will have a much easier time doing so. In game terms, the number of matching Aptitudes determines the XP cost to learn something new.

When learning a new skill or talent, check its referenced Aptitudes. If your character has both Aptitudes he will have a very easy time learning it. Do you only have one of them, you will do okay. But if you have neither, your character will find it pretty hard (but not impossible!) to learn this new ability.

Grimdark uses a total of 18 Aptitudes, grouped by Attribute and Non-Attribute Aptitudes. The former group consists of Aptitudes which are named after one of the nine Attributes and

represent those Attributes that a character feels a natural connection with: Strength might come naturally to an Athlete while a good connection with Fellowship makes for a good Spokesman. The latter group does represent more specific yet broad concepts a character might feel particularly attuned to:

- **Offense:** Offensive behavior is second nature for you. Why knock at a door if you can kick it in? Why aim a single round when a full clip is ready? Why debate with someone you can cow into submission?
- **Defense:** Defensive behavior is of great concern to the character. Making yourself a hard target during a gunfight or parry the blow of an attacker is a good first step to survive after all. Resisting manipulations and temptation is just as well.
- **Finesse:** You prefer the delicate approach over brute force. A single well placed round might take down an opponent which could withstand a full salvo of ill-aimed shots. Graceful maneuvers are their own reward - you don't want to be mistaken for an Ork after all, right?
- **Fieldcraft:** You are a crafty person. Whether this is expressed by your great skill with an scalpel in a field surgery, a multi-tool in the repair bay, with tripwire and explosives, in the taming den of a wild beast or by setting up a primitive shelter in the woods: you are up to the task!
- **Knowledge:** You know stuff. And you love to learn new stuff. Potentially dangerous and heretical as it may be, it may also prove very helpful.
- **Leadership:** You are a born leader. Whether by powerful speech, religious fervor, exemplary behavior, trickery or intimidation: you can lead your fellows and make them act at your command.
- **Social:** The thoughts, fears and desires of your fellows are an open book for you. Whether you seek to understand them, see through their lies, manipulate them or make them believe your every word is up to you...
- **Tech:** You have a deep connection to technology and all of its mysteries. You can easily handle machinery, understand and solve operational problems and may even attempt the great task of creating new devices from scratch or understand archeotech!
- **Psyker:** You have an (un-)fortunate connection to the warp, with all the powers and dangers that come with it. You may be a

full fledged psyker and able to call on its powers or you may only be slightly more susceptible for its influence and thus able to feel nearby warp phenomena or entities.

THE CORE SYSTEM

Grimdark uses a universal roll system. Every check in the game uses the same base system. The following chapter will describe it in detail.

THE BASE ROLL

Whenever a character uses a skill (in a non-trivial way), the player will roll a skill check. The check uses two d100 dice rolls, one for each attribute linked to the skill in question. If the roll result is equal to or lower than the target number (attribute value plus potential modifiers), it is considered a pass.

TRINARY OUTCOME

A Base Roll can have three possible outcomes:

- **0 Pass - Failure:** Both rolls are above their target numbers and the check fails and causes a complication.
- **1 Pass - Partial Success (PS):** One of the rolls is above the target number, the other a pass. The check achieved a Partial Success, that is the goal is reached but at a cost. The cost is decided by the GM according to the situation but the group is encouraged to provide input if there is no obvious cost. See the example below for two possible costs.
- **2 Pass - Full Success (FS):** Both rolls are passes. The check achieved a Full Success. The goal is achieved without problem.

FATE, LUCK & DOOM

Sometimes characters just get lucky, a blindly fired shot into a smoke screen hitting an enemy in the head or unknowingly addressing the weak spot during a discussion. And at other times, the entire universe just seem to have met in a murky back room of a shady bar to plot against them.

Grimdark uses the term Fate for this. Fate comes into play when a character rolls a skill (or profession) check and one (or both) dice come up with double-digit results (11, 22, ..., 99). Whether Fate is good or bad, is determined by the overall outcome of the roll - think of it as an catalyst. Good things get better. Bad things get worse. Getting Fate on a Full Success will result in something truly spectacular, while getting Fate on a Fail mean you are in big trouble this time for sure...

EXAMPLE SKILL CHECK

Sister Aryanna of the Ordo Dialogis attempts to calm down Inquisitors Zu-Lin Yu and Otto Brecht who have come close to open hostility over a debate of how to handle the survivors of an Imperial Guard regiment fighting off a daemonic incursion...

- **Skill:** Pretty Words
- **Skill Modifier:** +5
- **Attributes:** Fellowship 47, Intelligence 34
- **Target Numbers:** 52 (47+5), 39 (34+5)
- **Rolls:** 64 (no pass), 23 (pass)
- **Result:** Partial Success

The player rolls two d100. The first comes up with a 64 and the second with a 23. This means that the check resulted in a Partial Success, since only one roll was below the target number (the second one). The goal will be achieved (stopping the Inquisitors from starting a internecine war) - but at a cost. For most social skills, a Partial Success will leave the a bad aftertaste with the target of the skill, making it potentially more difficult to interact with in the future. Another common complication of social skills would be the target challenging the character to a debate over the matter, resulting in a second opposed test.

Sister Aryanna speaks up and argues that executing the soldiers, who are by now very well trained to detect and fight the neverborn, would be massive waste of Imperial assets and simply cannot be tolerated at the current stage of the war. While her temper rose quickly and flamed up brightly over yet another debate between Yu and Brecht, her arguments are sound and not easily squashed even by a hardline puritan like Brecht.

Inquisitor Brecht will surely remember her interdiction - but the argument has been settled without bloodshed.

Some skills or talents will provide special rules or guidelines for how to treat Fate when it comes up as part of its use. Generally, GM and players should work together to make fateful rolls remarkable and memorial - especially in the case of double Fate (both rolls are double-digits) as those are very, very rare indeed.

THE OPPOSED ROLL

Many situations in Grimdark are resolved by making an opposed roll between two parties. This is especially true for inherently competitive situations like combat, social manipulation or contests.

An opposed roll works as follows:

1. The active party chooses the skill first.
2. The passive party chooses a fitting skill in response.
3. Both sides roll their respective checks as normal and get their trinary outcome.
4. The outcomes of both parties is compared to get the result of the opposed test.
5. Apply Fate of the winning party as normal.

The results of an opposed roll is determined by the following table:

| Active | Passive | Outcome |
|--------|---------|---------|
| FS | Fail | CS |
| FS | PS | FS |
| FS | FS | Draw |
| PS | Fail | PS |
| PS | PS | Draw |
| PS | FS | Fail |
| Fail | Fail | Draw |
| Fail | PS | Fail |
| Fail | FS | CF |

While this might appear complicated at first, there are three easy to remember rules that determine the outcome:

1. When the active party gets more passes than the passive party, the outcome of the active party is the end result.
2. When both parties get the same outcome, there is a draw. If one party has Fate on her roll, the result of that party determines the end result. If Fate does not play a role (or both parties get an equal amount of Fate dice), the outcomes of a draw is determined by the used skill of the active party (see section 2).
3. If one party gets a FS and the other a Fail, a critical effect happens.
 - Critical Success (CS): Happens when the active party gets a FS and the passive party a Fail. Counts as a FS but with enhanced effects determined by the GM.
 - Critical Failure (CF): Happens when the active party gets a Fail and the passive party a FS. Counts as a Fail but with additional or worsened complication(s) determined by the GM.

CHAPTER 2: PROFESSIONS & SKILLS

Grimdark's skill system is divided into so-called Professions, which group associated skills together. Raising a certain skill will also raise the profession bonus, which can be used in place of any profession skill. This represents the fact that specialists are also (somewhat) proficient in the general field. A renown surgeon for cybernetic replacements is certainly also quite capable at first aid treatments after all, and a famous climber is quite likely a dangerous wrestler as well...

Generalist or Specialist Path?

The number of skills featured in Grimdark is quite large (and might even grow in your game!), so it is easy to feel overwhelmed. It is totally acceptable to completely set aside skills for your first (or any) character and only use the more general Professions instead! Grimdark calls this the **Generalist** path. Whenever the GameMaster calls for a skill check, he should also announce the respective Profession. If you choose to follow the Generalist path, you will just make the respective Profession check and you're good.

Should you prefer the delve deeper into Grimdark's skill system and manage each individual skill, you are set to follow the **Specialist** path. The Specialist path provides the option to fiddle with every last bit of your character, and can be seen as a tool for advanced players (or those who like a complex system) to tweak and customize their characters even further and make them truly unique.

PROFESSIONS

A Profession represent the generalist ability of a character in a certain broad area of expertise. Each Profession covers a range of skills which are somewhat related. In addition, they provide a fast and loose overview of the character. Is he a brutal underhive ganger with high scores in the Betrayer, Athlete and Warrior professions? Or an ancient tech priest with a more accumulated knowledge in his left (augmented) toe, than a handful of highborn nobles put together, reflected by his Tinkerer, Technologist and Logic professions?

One central decision of Grimdark, contrary to many other game systems, is the fact that it does not assume that player characters or even a group of player characters, cover all or even most professions. There are many different ways to tackle any given situation scattered over the different professions that may appear redundant on a purely mechanical take. But each

PROFESSION EXAMPLE

Sister Aryanna of the Ordo Dialogis and her death-cult comrade Krill'Ta are attempting to infiltrate a gathering of noblewomen of the Hive World Olrabus, suspecting the machinations of a genestealer cult in its midst. As a distrustful guard is denying them entrance, a hasty debate between the two members of the Inquisitors retinue using Ordo hand signs erupts. Should Aryanna attempt to tell a convoluted (and utterly crafted) story to convince the guard - or should Krill'Ta attempt to seduce the guard with her death world charm?

Both would be valid approaches, but seducing the guard may take Krill'Ta out of the next scene and leave the sister alone in the midst of the noblewomen. On the other hand, sister Aryanna isn't particular known for her abilities to lie - an ability which is far from well-perceived by her Ordo after all...

profession has its very own take and spin on "their" solution to a problem, along with certain role-play implications, limitations and situational modifiers. Thus a certain given situation may be much easier to solve by one profession than by another - yet they all have their uses, without forcing someone to break out of character to tackle a certain solution.

On a mechanical level, Professions work (mostly) like skills. You can use them instead of any related skill. The main difference between skills and Professions, is the fact that you cannot raise Professions directly. The roll modifier is instead determined by the current Profession rating (see below).

Design Decision: Professions

- **Facilitate Player Creativity:** If a player has an idea, which is not covered by the existing skills, it is usually easy to discern the Profession to which the described action relates. Having the option to roll a Profession check in such a case, allows for great player creativity. GM and Players are encouraged to develop new skills for commonly used actions of players that are not foreseen by Grimdark.
- **Make Everyone a Generalist:** In many skill-based game systems, players may end up with specialist characters which are very proficient in skill A but absolutely untrained in skill B, although the two skills are actually quite closely related. This does not make a whole lot of sense, as every specialist is also necessarily a generalist in his field of purview - at least to some degree.

THE PROFESSION RATING

Each profession has a certain Profession rating, representing the total ability of the character in

that Profession. This rating **increases by 2 for each new skill level learned** in an associated skill of the profession.

THE PROFESSION CHECK

A Profession check works just like a normal skill check with a single difference. Instead of using the respective skill modifier, it uses the Profession Rating. Everything else works the same, including the used attributes and situational modifiers of the respective skill.

PROFESSION CHECK EXAMPLE

Inquisitor Otto Brecht has been trapped into a hive corridor with all doors locked. The straight forward Inquisitor decides to try and force open one of the doors with his own strength, hoping to still remain his covert approach that way. If that fails, he can still blast open the doors with a grenade after all ...

Brecht is not particularly skilled at breaking things- he relies on the brute Nic'Or for such things - but he is keeping himself in top physical condition and is tough as nail. He should have a good enough chance to break open the doors...

That is, Brecht does not have the Break skill of the Athlete Profession, but he does have two ranks each in the Triathlete and Endure skills of that Profession. Thus, his Athlete Profession rating is: $2 * 4 = 8$.

- **Skill / Profession:** Break / Athlete
- **Skill Modifier:** 0 (untrained => use Profession)
- **Profession Rating:** 8
- **Attributes:** Strength 37, Toughness 44
- **Modifiers:** Locked Door (-10)
- **Target Numbers:** 35 (37+8-10), 42 (44+8-10)
- **Rolls:** 77 (no pass), 43 (no pass)
- **Result:** Failure

But the door won't budge. Going loud it is then. So be it. He never liked sneaking around anyway...

THE PROFESSIONS

Grimdark uses the following professions:

- **Acrobat:** covers skills that require a high level of body control, tension and swiftness.
- **Athlete:** covers skills that require a high level of physical strength and endurance.
- **Believer:** covers skills that require a deep conviction in a belief.
- **Betrayer:** covers skills that deceive others or break common law.
- **Commander:** covers skills that lead others by example, pressure or wit.
- **Enforcer:** covers skills that cow others into submission or fear.
- **Ghost:** covers skills that allow the character to stay hidden.
- **Gunner:** covers skills of ranged weapon fighting.
- **Medic:** covers skills needed to keep others alive.
- **Navigator:** covers skills that prevent you from

getting lost.

- **Observer:** covers skills that require a high level of alertness and perceptiveness.
- **Operator:** covers skills that allow the operation of vehicles and its functions.
- **Psyker:** covers the arcane skills only open to the witch.
- **Rationalist:** covers skills that require a high level of intelligence and clear thought.
- **Spokesman:** covers skills that rely on communicating with others.
- **Survivalist:** covers skills that allow characters to survive in any environment on their own.
- **Technologist:** covers skills that allow the proper use, understanding and even crafting of advanced tech.
- **Tinkerer:** covers skills that allow the proper use of common and low tech.
- **Trader:** covers skills related to money, property and value.
- **Warrior:** covers skills of close-quarter fighting.

ACROBAT

The character shows a high level of body control and tension. His movements are fluid, every step measured, every gesture a study in precision. He is likely to possess quite some strength without appearing swollen with muscle and may appear lean or even slim without being sunken or weak. The character is likely to be considered handsome or even beautiful depending on the local beauty ideals and other people might react accordingly.

- **Aptitudes:** Agility, Finesse
- **Common Attributes:** Agility, Strength, Toughness, Willpower
- **Skills:** Balancing, Contortionist, Dancing, Hard Target, Leap, Maneuvering
- **Sample Consequences:**
 - Twisted Ankle: Cannot run or charge for the remainder of the scene.
 - Snapped Tendon: -5 on any agility based check until healed.
 - Bruise: 2d5 points of Resilience damage.
 - Trip: Fall prone.
 - Wide Open: Enemies gain +10 to attack the character until his next turn.
- **Common Modifiers:**
 - High Gravity: -15
 - Zero Gravity: -10
 - No Armor worn: +15
 - Bulky Weapon: -5
 - Slippery Ground (Water, Ice, Oil): -5 (or worse)

ATHLETE

The character is visibly strong and tough. He likely has great muscle mass and little to no fat

deposits. Most people will expect the character to be a good warrior - which may influence the way they perceive the character and react to him. He may be physically intimidating to less strong characters even without meaning to.

- **Aptitudes:** Strength OR Toughness, Offense
- **Common Attributes:** Strength, Toughness, Willpower, Weapon Skill, Agility
- **Skills:** Block, Brawl, Break, Endure, Heave, Throw, Triathlete
- **Sample Consequences:**
 - Torn Muscle: Cannot perform any Athlete skill checks until healed.
 - Bruise: 2d5 Resilience damage
 - Fractured Bone: Increases resilience damage taken by 2 until healed. Cumulative.
 - Push-Back: The character is pushed back by 1d5 meters.
 - Contusion: -5 on any strength based check.
- **Common Modifiers:**
 - Solid Ground: +5
 - Unsteady Ground (Pebble, moving Car): -5 (or worse)
 - High Gravity: -15

BELIEVER

The character has strong beliefs, usually religious ones, that he is displaying openly. He may openly wear insignia or iconography associated with his beliefs or actively preach about his beliefs to other persons. Swaying the character to a new point of view or convince them to change a set course of action is generally a difficult prospect.

- **Aptitudes:** Willpower, Social
- **Common Attributes:** Willpower, Fellowship, intelligence
- **Skills:** Deny, Preach, Sanctify
- **Sample Consequences:**
 - Doubt: A sliver of doubt is enough to crack the firm belief. -5 on Believer checks for the remainder the scene.
 - Shattered: The belief got shattered and makes it all but impossible to call on it for the remainder of the scene.
 - Fanaticism: The Believer loses any sense of reality over the overpowering belief and cannot see reason. He is unable to use Rationalist skills for the remainder of the scene and his actions may overstep many boundaries he normally would not bend.
- **Common Modifiers:**
 - Corruption Points: -1 per CP the character or target has
 - Betrayer Profession Rating: -3 per Betrayer Rating of the target

BETRAYER

The character is focused on his own personal benefit in any given situation and values other people only for the benefit he can gain from using them. The word of a Betrayer is worth as much as one might suspect and you better watch your goods when one is around. Of course it is far from easy to see a Betrayer for who he really is through the maze of twisted lies, half-truth and even physical disguises a Betrayer might wear. More often than not, a Betrayer has a likable face, his speech a honey-tinged sweet and his gestures inviting and calming - everything intended to lower suspicions and alertness.

- **Aptitudes:** Fellowship, Social
- **Common Attributes:** Fellowship, Agility, Intelligence, WS
- **Skills:** Deceive, Disguise, Feint, Forgery, Selfishness, Sleight of Hand, Smuggle
- **Sample Consequences:**
 - Suspicious: Target becomes suspicious of the character. -5 for all future Betrayer checks. Stackable.
 - Caught Red Handed: target knows the target to be a Betrayer. All Betrayer checks fail for the remainder of the scene. May restrict future interactions.
- **Common Modifiers:**
 - Target Believer Rating: +3 per Believer rating of the target
 - Distracted Target: +15

SKILLS

Skills represent narrow, specialist activities and are the central resolution mechanic used in Grimdark. Every skill is associated with a Profession. Thus, skills are usually written like this: Pretty Words (Spokesman). That is the name of a skill is followed by the respective Profession in parenthesis.

SUBTLE AND BLATANT SKILLS

Grimdark uses two different type of skills: Subtle and Blatant.

- **Subtle Skills** are (somewhat) covert or low-profile in manner and draw considerable less attention than Blatant skills. Subtle skills produce less severe effects on a failure or partial success but in turn are slightly less likely to succeed and lose a Draw during an opposed test. Examples: Pretty Words (Spokesman), Disguise (Betrayer), Balancing (Acrobat), Snap-Shot (Gunner), Fencing (Warrior)
- **Blatant Skills** are flashy, loud, extreme or all

of them (and more) at once. Using a blatant skill is nearly guaranteed to draw (potentially unwanted) attention. A Blatant skill will cause considerable effects on failure or partial success but has a higher chance to succeed and always win a Draw during an opposed test.

Examples: Quarrel (Spokesman), Rally (Commander), Break (Athlete), Walking Fire (Gunner), Hammerblow (Warrior)

Some skills may be used in both Subtle or Blatant way, e.g. the Demolition (Tinkerer) skill. Discretely placing a bomb can be done in a subtle way, but using a charge to blow open a door and shake those within certainly can only be considered blatant. The GM is the final arbiter when it comes to deciding whether a skill is used in a Blatant or Subtle way.