

ZD12 Core Rulebook v2.8

Table of Contents

- The ZD12 Design Philosophy
- Setting Agnostic, Tone Specific
- Part I: The Player's Guide
- Chapter 1: Character Creation
- Chapter 2: The Core Mechanic
- Chapter 3: Combat & Grit
- Chapter 4: Damage, Defeat, & Progression
- Chapter 5: Magic & Resources
- Chapter 6: Examples of Play
- Part II: The Game Master's Guide
- Chapter 7: Running the Game
- Chapter 8: Social Interaction
- Chapter 9: Threats & Opposition
- Chapter 10: Setting Primer
- Chapter 11: The Bottom Line
- Part III: Appendices & Indices
- Appendix A: Signature Moves Library
- Appendix B: Gambit Library
- Appendix C: Relics Library
- Appendix D: Glossary
- Appendix Z: Design Lineage

Foreward

The Invitation to Tinker, A Creators Thanks

A Note from the Fringes

For the longest time, I've been a happy resident of the hobby's fringes. I suspect some of you live there, too. It's a great place. The view is wonderful. From the edge, you're not just playing the game in front of you; you're looking at its architecture, its bones. You're less concerned with the "correct" way to play and far more fascinated by its narrative potential, by the beautiful, intricate machinery humming just beneath the surface. And a special thanks^[1] to the readers who understand intuitively how systems can be both rigorous and mythological, why emergent complexity doesn't require complicated rules, and why a good footnote is worth the page space.

My notebooks are a Graveyard

of beautiful, dead-end ideas born from this perspective. I've always been more interested in the potential of mechanics than their strict application.

My design process has always been a restless, meandering conversation with other systems, a constant internal monologue of playful deconstruction. "What would happen if we just... opened up these options?" "This one rule would be really cool as its own contained subsystem, because then you could link it to this other system over here, and they'd resonate in a really interesting way..." And on, and on. It's a process of constant, joyful tinkering.

ZD12 is the logical—perhaps inevitable—

manifestation of that approach. It isn't an attempt to be the definitive game. It's the opposite. It's an attempt to build the most inviting, adaptable, and philosophically open starting point I could imagine.

The Philosophy of the d12

This game is built on a few core assumptions:

- The goal is the story. Rules are the scaffolding, not the building. They should be strong enough to hold things up, but light enough to disappear when you don't need them.
- Overhead is the enemy of momentum. We want a game that anyone can pick up and play quickly, a system where the time from "I have an idea" to "we are playing" is as short as humanly possible.
- Attachment is everything. We want you to become attached to the world and your characters, to feel the weight of their choices and the thrill of their successes. This happens when the rules get out of the way and let the fiction breathe.
- Hacking is not a bug; it's the primary feature. This is the most important part.

This is my contribution to a conversation.

Now, it's your opportunity to respond.

My wish is that ZD12 one day enriches the hobby as much as the hobby has enriched me.

Welcome to the workshop.

Zethican

Lead Designer, ZD12 RPG SYSTEM

The ZD12 Design Philosophy

Our design is governed by a few core directives:

- **Meaningful Choices:** From the gear you carry to the Stance you take in a fight, every decision has a mechanical impact. The game is built on a series of risk/reward trade-offs that empower players to think tactically.
- **The d12 is King:** The twelve-sided die is the heart of the system. Its range of results provides satisfying outcomes, and its use in every core mechanic creates a powerful, unified game feel. By keeping static bonuses low, we ensure the result of the d12 roll is always the most exciting and significant part of any check. The roll itself is the moment of drama.
- **Forward Momentum:** The core resolution mechanic is designed to always push the narrative forward. There are no "whiff" turns where nothing happens; every roll has consequences, introducing success, failure, or a mix of both with new complications.
- **Structured Flexibility:** We provide clear, intuitive structures (like Gambits, Clocks, and the Net Fulcrum) that empower on-the-fly rulings and player creativity, rather than restricting them with complex rules. The goal is a game that is easy to learn but offers deep strategic potential.

Setting Agnostic, Tone Specific

ZD12 is designed to be setting-agnostic, capable of running adventures from gritty low-fantasy to arcane sci-fi. However, it is built with a specific tone in mind: ZD12 excels at telling stories about competent characters facing high-stakes situations where consequences matter. The world is dangerous, success is not guaranteed, and every choice can have a tangible impact on the narrative.

The Rhythm of Combat

Forget what you know about the steady, attritional grind of combat. A fight in ZD12 is not a straight line to victory; it's the cinematic rhythm of a great action scene—a pulse of desperate moments followed by heroic, tide-turning counters.

The engine for this is **Grit**, and it works differently here. Grit is a comeback currency, a resource you earn through adversity. It's generated when you fail, when you push your luck and suffer a complication, or when an enemy lands a staggering blow. Success, while advancing your goals, will drain your resources.

This is the core of the ebb and flow.

After a string of triumphant actions, you'll find yourself in the **ebb**—a tense, low-Grit moment where your flashiest abilities are out of reach. This is by design. This is where you must rely on cunning, teamwork, and the environment to survive. It's the moment the hero is disarmed and must fight with their wits and grit in the literal sense.

But this struggle is what fuels the **flow**. The Grit you earn from weathering the storm will power your heroic crescendo. You will unleash devastating Signature Moves, bend the laws of probability, and create the spectacular moments that everyone at the table will remember.

Don't fear the low points. They are the tension that makes the release of your power so satisfying. Welcome to cinematic combat.

Part I: The Player's Guide

Chapter 1: Character Creation

Creating a ZD12 character is a straightforward, seven-step process designed to establish a unique, competent adventurer quickly.

System Canon: The Hybrid System

ZD12 uses a hybrid system for character creation that combines the guided progression of Archetypes with the customization of Attribute Points. A player first selects their character's Archetype, which determines their available skills and special abilities. Separately, the player receives a pool of Attribute Points to customize their character's core Attribute scores. These two choices are distinct but complementary, allowing for both a strong thematic identity and granular personalization.

Step 1: Choose Your Archetype & Concept

Once you have a concept, choose an Archetype. This provides the core of your character's mechanical identity, establishing your starting skills, abilities, and thematic role in a party.

- **The Stalwart:** A resilient melee-oriented archetype focused on MGT. You are a bulwark against your foes, a master of arms and armor who protects your allies.
- **The Shadow:** A quick and cunning archetype focused on AGI. You thrive in the shadows, striking from unexpected angles and exploiting your enemies' weaknesses.
- **The Strategist:** A brilliant and tactical archetype focused on WIT. You overcome obstacles with your intellect, whether through ancient lore, cunning invention, or battlefield strategy.
- **The Savant:** A deeply empathic channeler archetype focused on SPI. Your strength comes from inner conviction, channeling potent energies through Relics and your own willpower.

Step 2: Choose Your Background

Next, select a Background. This choice adds narrative flavor and grants your character one free skill proficiency from a short, thematic list, representing their life experiences. This proficiency does not count against the total you select in Step 4.

- **Artifact Tender:** Gain proficiency in Academics or Insight.
- **City Guard:** Gain proficiency in Investigation or Intimidation.
- **Urchin:** Gain proficiency in Stealth or Thievery.
- **Scribe:** Gain proficiency in Academics or Perception.
- **Hunter:** Gain proficiency in Survival or Stealth.
- **Acolyte:** Gain proficiency in Persuasion or Insight.
- **Tinkerer:** Gain proficiency in Mechanics or Investigation.

Step 3: Assign Attribute Scores

You have 6 points to distribute among your four primary Attributes. At character creation, a score can range from 0 to a maximum of +3.

- **Might (MGT):** Raw physical power, endurance, and brute force.
- **Agility (AGI):** Finesse, speed, precision, and reflexes.
- **Wits (WIT):** Knowledge, perception, deduction, and technical skill.
- **Spirit (SPI):** Willpower, focus, charisma, and magical attunement.

Step 4: Choose Skill Proficiencies

You may now choose a number of skill proficiencies from the Skill List equal to **2 + your Wits (WIT) modifier**.

Step 5: Calculate Derived Statistics

Once your Attributes are set, calculate your derived stats.

- **Health Points (HP):** Your physical durability. Your starting HP is equal to **10 + MGT**
- **Grit:** Your heroic potential. All characters begin encounters with 0 Grit, and generate them during combat. Only player characters are eligible for the Grit system.
- **Defense:** Your passive ability to avoid attacks, equal to your base AGI score.

Step 6: Select Abilities

Your character's special abilities are what set them apart.

- **Signature Moves:** Choose two Signature Moves from the library in Appendix A. These are reliable techniques, often fueled by Grit, that reflect your Archetype's training.
- **The Path of the Specialist:** Alternatively, if your primary Attribute modifier is +2 or higher, you may forgo choosing two Signature Moves. Instead, you can spend 1 Mastery Point (MP) to begin walking the Path of the Specialist, gaining access to powerful but risky abilities.

The Path of the Specialist: High-Stakes Investment

While most characters define their power through broad skill and versatile Signature Moves, a Specialist learns to draw upon the raw, chaotic currents of their core Attribute. This path is one of great power and greater risk, allowing access to abilities that transcend the normal rules of the game.

Becoming a Specialist

To walk a Path of the Specialist, a character must meet the following criteria:

- **Attribute Requirement:** The character must have an Attribute modifier of +2 or higher in the chosen path's Attribute.
- **Investment:** A character can choose to spend 1 Mastery Point (MP) to learn their first Thesis or Path ability.

The Specialist Die

A Specialist's power is channeled through their Specialist Die. The size of this die is determined solely by the character's Attribute modifier and remains constant between rests.

Attribute Modifier	Specialist Die Size
+1	(Cannot become a Specialist)
+2	1d10
+3	1d12

Backlash

If the Specialist Die result is a 1, the character suffers a Backlash. The specific effect is determined by the Specialist's unique Backlash table, listed below for your reference.

The Specialist Resolution

When a Specialist attempts an ability from their Path, they roll their Specialist Die, with the following outcomes:

- **Result of 5 or higher:** Success. The ability manifests perfectly as intended.
- **Result of 2 to 4:** Mixed Success. The ability works, but with a complication.
- **Result of 1:** Backlash! The raw power turns against the Specialist.

Specialist Backlash Tables

These tables are used when a Specialist rolls a 1 on their Specialist Die.

Physical Backlash Table (MGT, Path of the Titan)

d12 Roll	Result	Effect
1	Spinal Shock	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Wounded condition."
2-5	Crippling Strain	You gain the Wounded condition AND the Crippled condition.
6-8	Blunt Trauma	"You suffer 1d4 damage that ignores armor (DR), and you gain the Staggered condition."
9-11	Exhausting Effort	"You are immediately Exposed, and you lose 2 Grit (to a minimum of 0)."
12	The Titan's Shrug	"You may immediately gain +1 Grit, OR you may suffer 1 point of damage (ignores DR) to negate the failed roll and re-attempt the initial action with a Favorable Net Fulcrum."

Exposure Backlash Table (AGI, Path of the Ghost)

<u>d12 Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Effect</u>
1	The Cornered Ghost	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Crippled condition."
2-5	Crippling Loss of Position	"You are immediately knocked Prone, and the enemy you targeted (or the closest enemy) immediately makes a free, un-modified attack against you."
6-8	Disarmed and Exposed	"You are immediately Exposed, and you drop a weapon or critical piece of gear you are currently wielding/wearing into the Close distance band."
9-11	Lost Momentum	"You suffer 1d4 damage, and you gain the Staggered condition."
12	The Perfect Pivot	"You may immediately take a free Move Minor Action, AND you gain +1 Grit."

Miscalculation Backlash Table (WIT, Path of the Oracle)

<u>d12 Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Effect</u>
1	Synaptic Failure	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Dissonance condition."
2-5	Blinding Panic	"You suffer 1 point of temporary SPI Attribute Damage (to a minimum of 1), AND you gain the Dissonance condition. You cannot take a Major Action on your next turn."
6-8	Information Overload	You immediately lose 3 Grit (to a minimum of 0) and the GM advances all active Threat Clocks by one segment.
9-11	Conflicting Logic	"You gain the Doubt condition, and you must use your next Major Action to target a randomly chosen character (including allies) with a basic Attack or Assist/Hinder action."
12	The Clear Path	You gain +1 Grit. You may immediately ask the GM one specific question about enemy intent.

Magical Backlash Table (SPI, Path of the Adept)

<u>d12</u> <u>Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Effect</u>
1	Resonance Fracture	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and the character gains the Dissonance condition."
2-5	Wild Surge	"You immediately suffer 1d6 damage that ignores armor (DR), and you immediately cast the last spell you used again, targeting yourself or an ally (GM's choice)."
6-9	Planar Leak	"You immediately lose up to 3 Grit (to a minimum of 0), and a nearby enemy gains a Favorable Net Fulcrum on their next attack against you."
10-11	Resource Drain	"You gain the Exposed condition, and you lose access to any Resource Die for this scene."
12	Divine Refocus	"You may immediately clear any one active Condition you currently suffer from, AND you gain +1 Grit."

Step 7: Gear Up

Finally, equip your character for adventure. Your inventory is managed through a simple slot system.

- **Worn & Wielded Slots (5):** For your armor, shield, and any weapons you want to draw quickly.
- **Inventory Slots (8):** For stowed items in your pack, like rope, rations, and supplies.

ARMOR

Tier 0 (Light Armor & Clothing | +0 Bonus)

These items offer no direct defensive bonus but provide utility or define a character's role. They are the baseline from which all other armor is judged.

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Traveler's Garb	0	+0	A sturdy set of clothes with extra pockets. (Starts with one extra Inventory Slot).	Common
Nomad's Wraps	0	+0	Layered textiles ideal for harsh climates. (Grants a Favorable Net Fulcrum on checks to resist environmental effects from heat or cold).	Common
Guild Artisan's Leathers	0	+0	A practical apron and reinforced clothing. (Grants a Positive Tag on one craft- or trade-related check per scene).	Common
Ceremonial Robes	0	+0	Finely tailored and impressive garments. (Grants a Positive Tag on the first social check in a formal or official setting).	Common

Tier 1 (Medium Armor | +1 Bonus)

The first true tier of tactical gear. The choice between avoiding a hit (AV) and soaking its damage (DR) begins here.

AV Variant (+1 to the TN to be hit)

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Oiled Leather Hauberk	1	+1 AV	"A long coat of supple, hardened leather, allowing for fluid movement."	Common
Hegemony Infantry Mesh	1	+1 AV	A modern combat vest of ballistic mesh over a fatigue uniform. Light and flexible.	Common
Ringmail Tunic	1	+1 AV	Thousands of small metal rings sewn onto a leather backing. Deflects glancing blows.	Common
Acrobat's Harness	1	+1 AV	A minimalist set of straps and reinforced pads designed for maximum agility.	Uncommon

DR Variant (+1 Damage Reduction)

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Hardened Hide Brigandine	1	+1 DR	Thick plates of beast-hide riveted to a heavy cloth backing. Absorbs impact well.	Common
Iron-Scale Vest	1	+1 DR	"Overlapping iron scales that clatter and shift to dissipate the force of a blow. [Noisy]"	Common
Scrap-Plate Armor	1	+1 DR	A rugged assembly of scavenged metal plates bolted onto a leather frame.	Common
Cinderwood Cuirass	1	+1 DR	"A breastplate carved from the petrified, iron-like wood of the Cinderwood."	Uncommon

Tier 2 (Heavy Armor | +2 Bonus)

The pinnacle of mundane protection, representing a significant investment in a character's survival and combat style.

AV Variant (+2 to the TN to be hit)

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Duelist's Articulated Plate	2	+2 AV	"Masterfully crafted, interlocking plates designed to guide attacks away from the body."	Uncommon
Laminar Ceramic Armor	2	+2 AV	"Modern, lightweight plates of advanced ceramic composite. Excellent deflection."	Uncommon
Silent Watcher's Mail	2	+2 AV	"A full suit of chainmail with muffled links, favored by elite guardians."	Uncommon
Spider-Silk Weave	2	+2 AV	An impossibly light and resilient suit woven from monstrous silk.	Rare

DR Variant (+2 Damage Reduction)

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Knight's Full Plate	2	+2 DR	"The iconic suit of heavy steel plate. [Noisy]"	Uncommon
Forge-Lord's Siege Armor	2	+2 DR	"Overlapping, thick plates of raw iron. Imposes an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum on AGI checks."	Uncommon
Adytum Bastion Plating	2	+2 DR	"Strange, resonant metal plates salvaged from the Silent City."	Uncommon
Stone Guardian's Mantle	2	+2 DR	Heavy plates of magically reinforced granite. A character must have MGT +2 or higher to wear this armor effectively.	Rare

Tier 2 (Heavy Armor | Hybrid Style)

These master-crafted armors blend different defensive principles, offering both solid damage mitigation and the means to deftly turn a blow aside.

<u>A</u> rmor	<u>T</u> ier	<u>B</u> onus	<u>T</u> ags / <u>N</u> otes	<u>R</u> arity
Vanguard Commander's Plate	2	+1 AV / +1 DR	"A suit of polished steel plate over hardened leather, adorned with a flowing, distracting cloak or command insignia. [Impressive] (Grants a Positive Tag on one check to command or intimidate per scene)."	Uncommon
Wyvern-Scale Brigandine	2	+1 AV / +1 DR	"Tough wyvern hide forms the core DR, while the overlapping, iridescent scales create an unpredictable surface that deflects attacks. Grants a Favorable Net Fulcrum on checks to resist the attacks of beast-type enemies."	Uncommon
Weathered Sentinel's Suit	2	+1 AV / +1 DR	"Once a flawless suit of ancient make, its solid plates (DR) are now marred by gaps and dents that make the wearer's movements erratic and hard to track (TN). A quest item that could be restored."	Rare
Aetheric Field Harness	2	+1 AV / +1 DR	"A sleek harness of conductive plates over a padded suit. The plates provide DR, while a low-power, shimmering energy field provides the TN bonus. [Powered] (Ceases to function if its power source is drained or disabled)."	Rare

Head Protection (Helms)

Helms are a crucial, separate piece of gear. A character can wear one helm in addition to their body armor.

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Tier</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Tags / Notes</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
Leather Cap / Coif	0	+0	Basic protection. Better than nothing.	Common
Open-Faced Helm	1	+1 AV	Provides a +1 bonus to the TN to be hit by attacks specifically targeting the head.	Common
Great Helm	2	+1 DR	Provides +1 DR against damage from a Critical Hit.	Uncommon

WEAPONS

Close Quarters Weapons (Standard Damage: 1d4)

These are weapons for tight spaces and desperate moments, favoring speed and agility.

Weapon	Damage	Tags	Rarity	Notes
Dagger	1d4	"[Agile], [Thrown(Near)]"	Common	"A simple, versatile blade. The [Agile] tag allows it to be used with specific AGI-based Gambits."
Stiletto	1d4	"[Agile], [Precise]"	Common	"A thin, piercing blade. The [Precise] tag allows it to ignore 1 point of DR on a Full or Critical Success."
Main Gauche	1d4	"[Agile], [Guard]"	Uncommon	"A parrying dagger with a large handguard. [Guard] grants a +1 bonus to your TN to be hit when in the Defensive Stance."
Hand Axe	1d4	"[Sunder], [Thrown(Near)]"	Common	"A brutal, utilitarian tool. The [Sunder] tag allows it to deal double damage to inanimate objects."
Short Sword	1d4	"[Agile], [Guard]"	Common	"A soldier's sidearm, balanced for attack and defense."
Mace	1d4	"[Brutal]"	Common	"A simple, bludgeoning weapon. The [Brutal] tag inflicts the [Unsteady] condition on a Critical Hit."
Morning Star	1d4	"[Vicious]"	Common	"A spiked club designed to tear through flesh and light armor. [Vicious] deals +1 damage to targets with 0 DR."

Standard Reach Weapons (Standard Damage: 1d6)

The balanced, workhorse weapons of the battlefield, offering a mix of offense, defense, and reach.

<u>Weapon</u>	<u>Damage</u>	<u>Tags</u>	<u>Rarity</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Arming Sword	1d6	"[Guard]"	Common	"The classic one-handed sword, perfectly balanced for versatility."
Battle Axe	1d6	"[Sunder], [Vicious]"	Common	A weapon designed to cleave shields and armor.
Warhammer	1d6	"[Brutal], [Sunder]"	Common	A powerful impact weapon that can crush armor and bone.
Spear	1d6	"[Reach], [Thrown(Near)]"	Common	Allows the wielder to make attacks from the Reach distance band. Can be braced with the Set for Charge Gambit.
Trident	1d6	"[Reach], [Snare]"	Uncommon	"The prongs make it adept at trapping limbs. The [Snare] tag can be used with a Gambit to apply the [Exposed] condition."

Extended Reach & Two-Handed Weapons (Standard Damage: 1d8)

These weapons require two hands and trade defense for overwhelming power and control of the battlefield.

<u>Weapon</u>	<u>Damage</u>	<u>Tags</u>	<u>Rarity</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Greatsword	1d8	"[Two-Handed], [Momentum]"	Uncommon	"The [Momentum] tag grants a Positive Tag on the attack if you moved at least one distance band this turn."
Greataxe	1d8	"[Two-Handed], [Sunder], [Vicious]"	Uncommon	An unsubtle weapon of pure destruction.
Halberd	1d8	"[Two-Handed], [Reach], [Versatile]"	Uncommon	"The [Versatile] tag allows the wielder to choose between Piercing or Slashing damage for each attack."
Quarterstaff	1d6	"[Two-Handed], [Guard]"	Common	"Though it deals less damage, its defensive capability is unmatched for a two-handed weapon."

Projectile Weapons

Weapons that project force across a distance, each with a unique rhythm of use.

Weapon	Damage	Tags	Rarity	Notes
Sling	1d4	"[Subtle]"	Common	A simple weapon that is easy to conceal. Can use found stones as ammunition.
Shortbow	1d6	"[Two-Handed]"	Common	A flexible bow that can be fired from the Near or Far distance bands.
Longbow	1d8	"[Two-Handed], [Long Range]"	Uncommon	"A powerful war bow. The [Long Range] tag means it does not suffer a penalty for attacking targets at the Far distance band."
Light Crossbow	1d6	"[Precise], [Reload(Minor)]"	Common	"An accurate, easy-to-use weapon. Requires a Minor Action to reload after firing."
Heavy Crossbow	1d8	"[Sunder], [Reload(Major)]"	Uncommon	A powerful siege weapon that can punch through heavy armor. Requires a Major Action to reload after firing.

Chapter 2: The Core Mechanic

All risky actions in ZD12—from swinging a sword to persuading a guard—are resolved using the same core mechanic. This loop keeps the game moving and ensures that every roll matters.

The Core Check

To make a check, you roll a single twelve-sided die (1d12), add the relevant Attribute, and compare the result to a Target Number (TN) set by the GM.

Formula: $1d12 + \text{Attribute}$ vs. Target Number (TN)

Whenever a character attempts an action where the outcome is uncertain and carries a meaningful risk, the GM will call for a check. If the action is trivial (like walking across an empty room) or guaranteed to succeed, no roll is needed. Checks are reserved for moments of drama, risk, and consequence.

- **Attribute Modifier:** A character's innate talent provides a consistent, small bonus. This represents the character's baseline competence.
- **Target Number (TN):** The TN is the number you must meet or beat for the action to succeed. The GM sets this based on the opposition or the inherent difficulty of the task.
- **TN 5 (Easy):** A task with minimal opposition.
- **TN 8 (Standard):** The default difficulty for most risky actions.
- **TN 11 (Hard):** A task requiring exceptional effort or facing significant opposition.

Net Fulcrum

Sometimes, circumstances grant a character multiple short-term advantages or disadvantages. The Net Fulcrum system replaces the older binary Fulcrum Roll and evaluates the balance of those factors to determine whether a roll is made under Favorable, Unfavorable, or Neutral conditions.

How it works:

- Count all applicable positive Tags that would grant an advantage for this check (for example: [Focused], [Inside Knowledge], a beneficial piece of gear, or a narratively justified Tag granted by the GM).
- Count all applicable negative Tags that would impose a disadvantage for this check (for example: [Noisy Footing], [Shaken], environmental hazards, or a narratively justified negative Tag).
- If the number of positive Tags exceeds the number of negative Tags, the roll is a Favorable Net Fulcrum: roll 2d12 and use the higher result.
- If the number of negative Tags exceeds the number of positive Tags, the roll is an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum: roll 2d12 and use the lower result.
- If positives and negatives are equal, or if there are none, the roll is Neutral: roll a single d12.

Notes and interactions:

- Tags are the unit used by Net Fulcrum (see the Unified Tags section). Each Tag counts as one toward the Net calculation unless otherwise stated.
- Some effects may explicitly add +1 or -1 to the Net count; treat those as additional Tags for the purpose of determining Net Fulcrum.
- Net Fulcrum is additive and granular: multiple small advantages can overcome a single large disadvantage, encouraging teamwork and layered tactics.
- The GM may declare certain Tags to be situationally dominant (for example, a catastrophic environmental effect). In such cases, the GM should clearly announce that the Tag counts as 2 for Net calculations; use this sparingly.
- Optional Rule — Binary Fulcrum: For groups who prefer the older binary approach, the Binary Fulcrum remains a modular option (see the Flavor Strategem supplement). It can be used as an alternative rule set.

** The Rule of Stacking **

In ZD12, the same game effect from multiple sources does not stack. If a character would be affected by the same Tag, Stance, or other named ability more than once, they only benefit from it a single time. This encourages tactical diversity and ensures every choice is a meaningful one

The Degrees of Success

The outcome of every Core Check is determined by both the natural result of the d12 and your final total compared to the Target Number (TN).

- **Critical Failure (Natural 1):** If your die shows a 1, you fail in the worst possible way, creating a significant complication, regardless of your total. Gain +2 Grit.
- **Critical Success (Natural 12):** If your die shows a 12, you succeed brilliantly, gaining an additional benefit, regardless of your total. Gain 0 Grit.
- **Failure:** If your die roll is not a 1, and your final total is less than the TN, you fail the action. Gain +1 Grit.
- **Mixed Success:** If your die roll is not a 12, and your final total is between the TN and TN+2 (inclusive), you succeed, but with a minor cost or complication. Gain +1 Grit.
- **Full Success:** If your die roll is not a 12, and your final total is TN+3 or higher, you succeed at your intended action without any negative consequences. Gain 0 Grit.

When you achieve a Critical Success, you don't just succeed; you triumph in a way that reshapes the moment. In addition to the exceptional narrative outcome described by the GM, you may choose one of the following tactical benefits:

- **Create an Opportunity:** Choose an ally who is in a position to capitalize on your success. They gain a **Favorable Net Fulcrum** on their next check.
- **Impose a Detriment:** Choose an opponent affected by your action. They gain a relevant negative Tag (such as [Exposed], [Staggered], or [Demoralized]) until the end of their next turn.

Skills & Task Resolution

While the Core Check governs all risky actions, some tasks require specific training, honed talent, or specialized knowledge beyond raw ability. When the outcome of such a task is in doubt, you make a Skill Check.

In ZD12, a character's ability to perform specialized tasks is governed by two interconnected concepts: **Skills** and **Tags**.

- **Skills** represent formal training and provide a consistent, minor bonus.
- **Tags (Unified)** represent the ever-changing circumstances of the world and provide a powerful, situational advantage or disadvantage. Tags subsume the older 'Qualities' concept and provide a single, consistent system for temporary modifiers.

Skills

Skills are broad areas of expertise a character has honed through practice and study. The ZD12 system uses a fixed list of 12 skills, each tied to one of the four core Attributes.

Skill Proficiency

If a character is proficient in a skill, they gain a **+1 bonus** to any Core Check made using that skill. This reflects their training and muscle memory. If a character is not proficient, they may still attempt the check, but they do not add any bonus beyond their relevant Attribute modifier.

Example: Valeria, who is proficient in the Athletics skill, needs to leap across a chasm. She adds her MGT modifier (+2) and her proficiency bonus (+1) for a total bonus of +3 to her d12 roll.

The Skill List

- **Might (MGT):** Athletics, Intimidation, Might
- **Agility (AGI):** Acrobatics, Stealth, Thievery
- **Wits (WIT):** Awareness, Investigation, Tactics
- **Spirit (SPI):** Discourse, Performance, Resolve

Unified Tags

Where Skills represent a character's internal training, Unified Tags represent the temporary, narrative-driven conditions that affect a specific character, object, or situation. Tags cover everything that was previously handled by 'Qualities' as well as item- and ability-granted modifiers.

- Tags are named descriptors (for example: [Focused], [Inside Knowledge], [Noisy Footing], [Exposed], [Shaken]) that communicate a clear in-fiction reason for the modifier.
- Tags do not provide flat numeric bonuses. Instead, they affect the roll state via Net Fulcrum (see above) and may interact with specific abilities that reference them.

Rules for Tags:

- **Duration:** Unless otherwise specified, a Tag lasts until the end of the scene. Some Tags specify shorter durations (one check, one encounter, or one action).
- **Stacking:** Each instance of a Tag counts as one toward Net Fulcrum calculations even if several sources grant the same Tag name; exceptions must be explicit.
- **Granularity:** GMs and designers may define Tags that grant conditional benefits (for example, [Defensive Cover] might grant +1 to AV and also a Favorable Tag for checks to remain concealed). When a Tag does both narrative and mechanical work, document both effects clearly.
- **Application:** The GM is the final arbiter for when a Tag applies. Players should describe how their actions create or exploit Tags; good fiction can earn mechanical advantage.

Examples:

- A player describes using a small mirror to inspect a lock; the GM grants the [Inside Knowledge] Tag for that check. The Tag counts as +1 positive toward Net Fulcrum for the lockpick attempt.
- Moving across dry leaves during a stealth attempt creates the [Noisy Footing] Tag, a negative Tag that counts against the player's Net Fulcrum on Stealth checks.
- Wearing specialized goggles may grant the [Clear Sight] Tag when attempting perception checks in low-light situations; the Tag persists for the scene.

Cross-reference: Tags are the unit used by Net Fulcrum. See the Net Fulcrum section for how Tags determine Favorable, Neutral, or Unfavorable roll states.

Chapter 3: Combat & Grit

Combat in ZD12 is designed to be fast, lethal, and driven by meaningful choices. It is governed by the "active attacker" philosophy: the player making an attack is the one who rolls the dice.

The Combat Round

Combat is resolved in rounds. During a round, each participant takes a turn. On your turn, you have access to a set of actions known as the Action Economy.

The Action Economy

On your turn each round, you can take:

- **1 Major Action:** Your primary, significant action for the turn, such as making an attack or using a powerful ability.
- **1 Minor Action:** A quick, supplementary action, like moving one distance band, drawing a weapon, or adopting a Stance.
- **1 Reaction:** An action taken outside of your turn in response to a specific trigger. You have one Reaction per round.

Action Summary

Action Type	Cost	Common Examples
Major Action	1 per turn	Attacking an enemy, using a powerful ability, casting a spell.
Minor Action	1 per turn	Moving a short distance, drawing a weapon, opening a door.
Reaction	1 per round	Making an opportunity attack, using a defensive ability when targeted.

You may trade your Major Action for an additional Minor Action, but you cannot trade a Minor Action for a Major Action.

Distance & Movement

ZD12 uses abstract Distance Bands to manage positioning:

- **Close:** Within arm's reach, the range for most melee combat.
- **Reach:** Several meters away; requires a Minor Action to move to Close.
- **Near:** Within a standard room; requires a Major Action to move to Close.
- **Far:** The maximum range for most projectile weapons; requires a full turn of movement to reach Close.

The Anatomy of an Attack

All attacks follow a clear, step-by-step sequence based on the Core Check mechanic.

1. **Declare Action:** The attacker chooses their target, weapon, and any relevant abilities.
2. **Determine Target Number (TN):** The GM determines the TN for the attack. The default TN to hit any target is 8. This base TN is then modified by the target's specific defenses (e.g., armor with a +AV or +DR bonus).

Formula: $TN = 8 + \text{Target's AV Modifiers}$

1. **Attacker Makes a Core Check:** The attacker makes a Core Check ($1d12 + \text{Attribute vs. TN}$) to see if they hit. The Attribute used is typically Might (MGT) for melee or Agility (AGI) for ranged and finesse attacks.
2. **Determine Outcome:** The attacker's Degree of Success determines the result.
 - **Failure (Result < TN):** The attack misses.
 - **Mixed Success (Result TN to TN+2):** The attack hits, but potentially triggers the target's Throes effect (50-50 odds, flip a coin). The attacker then rolls for damage.
 - **Full Success (Result >= TN+3):** The attack hits cleanly. The attacker rolls for damage.
 - **Critical Success (Natural 12):** The attack is a Critical Hit, typically dealing damage twice. The attacker rolls damage.
1. **Calculate Damage:** If the attack hits, the attacker rolls their weapon's Damage Die. The target subtracts their Damage Reduction (DR) from the total rolled damage. A minimum of 1 damage is always dealt on a successful hit.

Combat Stances

At the start of your turn, you can declare a Stance as a Minor Action. Your stance dictates your tactical focus for the round.

- **Aggressive Stance:** You focus entirely on offense. You can perform aggressive Gambits and may spend your Minor Action to gain the **[Focused]** tag for your next attack this turn.
- **Defensive Stance:** You prioritize survival. You can perform defensive Gambits and may spend your Minor Action to gain the **[Guarded]** tag for any defense check before your next turn.
- **Balanced Stance:** You remain flexible, the pivot point of the battle. You can perform utility-focused Gambits. Your benefit is unparalleled tactical flexibility.

Grit: The Engine of Momentum

Grit is a resource representing momentum, luck, and determination.

Only Player Characters may generate, gain, and use Grit. NPCs and monsters must rely solely on the abilities and Throe mechanics as described.

Gaining Grit

- Gain **+1 Grit** on any result other than a Full Success or Critical Success
- Gain an additional **+1 Grit** when you roll a natural 1.
- **Grit Cap**: You can hold a maximum of 3 Grit. All Grit is reset to zero at the end of any scene or combat encounter.

Spending Grit

You may only perform ONE of the following Universal Spends per turn. Specific Signature Moves may have their own Grit costs.

- **1 Grit**:
- Take an additional Minor Action.
- **2 Grit**:
- Enhance any one roll by imparting a +1 bonus to the result.
- Give 1 Grit to an ally you can see and speak to.
- **3 Grit**:
- Take an additional Major Action.
- Perform a Reaction (act out-of-turn in response to a trigger).

The Devil's Bargain

Sometimes, you need a burst of momentum right now and can't wait for a setback to fuel you. For that, there is the Devil's Bargain.

Once per scene, you can choose to **personally advance any active Threat Clock by one segment** to immediately gain **1 Grit**.

This is a conscious trade of long-term safety for short-term power. You are willingly bringing the opposition one step closer to their goal, or a new disaster one tick nearer, in exchange for the resources to handle the immediate crisis. Choose wisely.

Chapter 4: Damage, Defeat, & Progression

Combat is dangerous, and its consequences can be lasting.

Health, Damage, and Armor

- **Health Points (HP):** Your HP represents your ability to withstand physical harm. When you reach 0 HP, you are taken out of the fight.
- **Damage Reduction (DR):** Armor and other protective effects may provide DR. When you take damage, subtract your DR from the incoming total. A minimum of 1 damage is always dealt on a successful hit, regardless of DR.
- **Avoidance Value (AV):** Armor and other protective effects may provide AV instead of DR. When suffering an attack, subtract the AV from your attackers' to-hit target number. This does not mitigate damage, but improves the chance of being missed entirely.

Reaching Zero HP

When your HP is reduced to 0, you are **Broken**. You are not dead, but you are incapacitated and out of the fight. You will fall prone and cannot take any actions. At the end of your next turn, if you are still at 0 HP, you must make a roll on the Death's Door Table.

A character's Health Points (HP) cannot be reduced below 0. When damage reduces a character to exactly 0 HP, they are immediately considered Broken and must make a roll on the Death's Door Table to determine their fate *at the end of their next turn. Any damage dealt by an attack beyond the amount required to reduce the character to 0 HP is ignored and has no further mechanical effect.

While Broken:

- You immediately fall prone.
- On your turn, you can only take a single Minor Action (e.g., Crawl one distance band, speak a few words, drink a potion).
- You cannot take Major Actions or Reactions.
- Any damage you take while Broken forces you to immediately roll on the Death's Door Table.
- An ally can use a Major Action and make a TN 8 Wits check to stabilize you, removing you from danger.

Death's Door Table (Roll 1d12)

d12 Roll	Outcome	Mechanical Effect & Narrative Hook
1	The Final Breath	You are truly dead. Your story ends here. Begin creating a new character.
2-4	Rattled	You are psychologically scarred by the experience. Choose with your GM one of the Wits or Spirit Scars below.
5-10	Battered	"You survive, but the physical toll is significant. You are unconscious for at least an hour and wake up with a story-appropriate injury. There is no further mechanical penalty."
11-12	Maimed	The injury is severe and life-altering. Choose with your GM one of the Might or Agility Scars below.

Mortal Wounds Library

A Mortal Wound is a defining moment, a brush with death that changes a character forever. It leaves a permanent narrative mark—a story etched into their body, mind, or soul. When the table directs you to choose a scar, select one from the relevant category below that best fits the narrative of how you were injured.

While the scar itself is a permanent part of your character's story, its most severe mechanical effects are acute and temporary. The mechanical penalty listed under "Effect" lasts only for the remainder of the current adventure. Once the adventure concludes, the character adapts to their new reality, and the specific mechanical hindrance fades. The narrative truth of the scar, however, remains.

For Game Masters running long-form campaigns, the "Path to Recovery" can be used as a personal story hook, representing a way for the character to overcome their limitations before the adventure's end.

Might Scars (Brute Force Trauma)

- **Shattered Limb:** One of your limbs is permanently damaged, perhaps crudely set or replaced with a simple prosthetic.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, you cannot wield two-handed items. When you attempt a feat of strength that requires two hands, you have an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest involving master-level surgery or esoteric means to remove the penalty early.
- **Internal Injuries:** Your core is weakened, leaving you with a constant, deep ache.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, your HP maximum is permanently reduced by 2.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest involving specialized alchemy or magical healing to restore your body's vigor early.

Agility Scars (Precise or Debilitating Damage)

- **Limping Gait:** A leg injury has permanently affected your mobility, forcing you to adjust your stride.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, your base movement is considered one distance band lower for the purposes of tactical movement (e.g., moving from Far to Reach would take two Minor Actions instead of one).
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest to acquire a masterwork prosthetic or receive miraculous healing to restore your mobility early.
- **Nerve Damage:** Your hands are unsteady, and your fine motor skills are compromised by a slight, persistent tremor.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, you have an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum on all checks requiring delicate manipulation, such as picking a lock or disarming a complex trap.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest involving a rare regenerative procedure to steady your hands early.

Wits Scars (Mental or Sensory Trauma)

- **Fuzzy Memory:** The trauma has left gaps in your memory, like a puzzle with missing pieces.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, work with your GM to identify a significant skill, contact, or piece of knowledge your character has forgotten. You can no longer add your Skill bonus for that specific knowledge.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest involving a powerful narrative trigger to restore the lost memory early.
- **Sensory Impairment:** Your sight or hearing has been permanently damaged, forever altering your perception of the world.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, you have an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum on all perception-based checks that rely on the affected sense.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest to acquire a technological or magical replacement for the damaged sense early.

Spirit Scars (Psychological or Existential Trauma)

- **Broken Confidence:** Your brush with death has left you hesitant and fearful, second-guessing your every move.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, the first time you take damage in any combat, you gain the **[Shaken]** Negative Tag.
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest that requires a significant personal test of will to restore your confidence early.
- **Haunting Visions:** You are plagued by flashbacks of your near-death experience, a constant echo of your mortality.
- **Effect:** For the remainder of this adventure, your maximum Grit cap is reduced by one (typically to 2 instead of 3).
- **Path to Recovery:** The mechanical penalty fades at the conclusion of the adventure. In a campaign, a GM may offer a quest to find spiritual guidance or profound peace to silence the visions early.

Character Progression

Progression is how your character grows in power and skill over time. Characters advance by earning Discovery Points (DP), which convert into Mastery Points (MP).

- **Gaining DP:** You gain 1 DP every time your character spends 1 Grit. The GM may also award DP for significant narrative milestones.
- **Spending MP:** When you accumulate 10 DP, they automatically convert into 1 Mastery Point (MP). You can spend MP between sessions to purchase permanent enhancements, such as new Signature Moves or increased Attributes.

Chapter 5: Magic & Resources

From a dwindling supply of arrows to the cosmic energies harnessed by Relics, this chapter covers limited resources.

The Resource Die

To track resources that are limited but not easily counted—like arrows in a quiver or oil in a lantern—ZD12 uses the Resource Die. When you use the resource, you roll its associated die. On a low result, the die is downgraded to a smaller size. When you roll a low result on the smallest die (a d4), the resource is fully depleted.

At the end of an encounter or scene in which you used the resource, roll its current die. On a result of 1 or 2, the die size degrades to the next step down (e.g., a d10 becomes a d8). When you roll a 1 or 2 on a d4, the resource is completely depleted.

How large any given available resource's die size is determined by the table and the tone of the game. Example: A Waterskin may have a default resource die size of d6 or even d4 in an arid desert-based campaign whereas in an urban setting where drinking water is plentiful, a Waterskin may have no resource die and can be assumed to be virtually unlimited (within reason). Work with your group to find out what resources make sense for the story your table wants to tell!

Certain items, such as a quiver of arrows or a waterskin, have a limited but uncertain number of uses. These are tracked with a Resource Die. When you use such an item, roll its Resource Die. On a result of 1 or 2, the die is downgraded to the next smallest size (d12 > d10 > d8 > d6 > d4). If you roll a 1 or 2 on a d4, the item is expended and cannot be used again until it is replenished.

Relics & Attunement

Relics are items of immense power that offer capabilities far beyond mundane equipment. To unlock the full potential of a Relic, a character must first Attune to it, a process that takes time and effort, bonding the item's power to their own spirit.

Sidebar: Relic Resonance

Relics are not merely tools; they are artifacts that absorb the stories they are a part of. Over time, a Relic that is used in significant, dramatic moments can awaken, resonating with its wielder's own history and growing into something more. This is Relic Resonance—a way for your gear to become a part of your legend.

Triggering Resonance

A Relic becomes eligible to resonate when the GM determines it has been used in at least three distinct, meaningful scenes. A "meaningful scene" is one with lasting consequences, such as:

- The scene in which the Relic was first acquired.
- A scene where its use filled the final segment of a Progress or Threat Clock.
- A scene where it was instrumental in defeating an Elite or Master threat.
- A scene where its wielder suffered a Mortal Wound while using it.

Once this narrative threshold is met, the player can spend 1 Mastery Point (MP) during downtime to bond with the item, unlocking its Resonant Path.

Resonant Paths

The Relic's evolution follows one of three paths, chosen by the player with GM collaboration to fit the narrative.

- **Path of Echo:** The Relic gains a new, permanent passive feature that reflects its history. This often manifests as a situational Tag or a Favorable Fulcrum under specific circumstances.
- Example: A shield used to block a wyvern's fire might gain the Echo: "Grants a Favorable Fulcrum on checks to resist elemental damage."
- **Path of Pulse:** The Relic gains a new active ability. Once per scene, the wielder may spend 1 Grit to activate this Pulse effect.
- Example: A dagger used for a silent assassination might gain the Pulse: "Spend 1 Grit to grant your next attack with this weapon the [Subtle] and [Precise] tags."
- **Path of Mutation:** The Relic undergoes a significant physical or functional transformation based on a key story event. This is the most dramatic evolution, creating a truly unique item.
- Example: After its wielder is brought back from the brink of death, a simple amulet (the Sentinel's Charm) might mutate into the "Last Stand Charm," absorbing the original's power and gaining the ability to be crushed to automatically stabilize its wielder without a roll.

Resonance and Progression

Using Resonant Relics is a direct way to push the story forward. When you use a Resonant Relic's Pulse or a feature from its Echo to directly advance a clock or defeat a foe, you gain 1 bonus Discovery Point (DP).

Chapter 6: Examples of Play

This chapter provides practical, step-by-step examples of the ZD12 rules in action.

Example: Making a Core Check

The Situation

Kaelen, a swift and cunning character with an Agility (AGI) of +3, is fleeing from Hegemony enforcers across rooftops. The GM describes a dangerous four-meter jump to the next rooftop.

The Check

- **Stating the Stakes (Predictive Failure Protocol):** The GM calls for a Core Check and clarifies the consequences. GM: "This will be a TN 8 Agility check to clear the gap. If you fail, you'll plummet into the alley below, taking damage and landing right in the path of their ground patrol."
- **The Roll:** Kaelen's player rolls a single d12 and gets a 7.
- **The Calculation:** The player adds Kaelen's relevant Attribute modifier to the die roll.

Formula: 1d12 + Attribute vs. Target Number (TN) Calculation: 7 (d12) + 3 (AGI) = 10

- **The Outcome (Degrees of Success):** The player compares their final result of 10 to the TN 8. Because the result of 10 is TN+2, this is a **Mixed Success**. The character succeeds their check, but just barely and with some minor thematic complication (e.g. a monster's Throes Effect in combat, or some complication like "You got a mixed success! You barely make the jump across the alley below to the rooftop across the way, but the extra noise created by your scrabbling may have drawn unwanted attention...")

The Resolution

The GM narrates the outcome based on the Mixed Success. GM: "You clear the gap and your feet land solidly on the opposite ledge, but you stumble on a loose brick, sending a clatter of debris into the alley below. The sound of the enforcers' shouts changes direction; they know exactly where you are."

Example: A Round of Combat

The Situation

Valeria, a Stalwart with a Might (MGT) of +2, is in combat. She is wielding a Battle Axe (1d6 Damage) and wearing Hardened Hide Brigandine (+1 DR). She is in the Close distance band with a Corrupted Watchman (HP 12, DR 0). It is Valeria's turn.

The Turn

- **Minor Action - Adopt a Stance:** Valeria's player uses their Minor Action to enter the **Aggressive Stance**.
- **Major Action - Attack Sequence:** Valeria uses her Major Action to attack the Watchman.
- **Step 1: Declare Action.** The player states: "I'm attacking the Corrupted Watchman with my Battle Axe."
- **Step 2: Determine Target Number (TN).** The default TN to hit is 8. The Watchman has no armor that modifies this TN. The final TN is 8.
 -- **Step 3: Attacker Makes a Core Check.** Because she is in an Aggressive Stance, she can choose to gain a **[Focused]** tag for her attack. The player decides to do this, granting a Favorable Net Fulcrum. The player rolls two d12s, getting a 3 and an 8. They use the higher result, 8. They add Valeria's MGT modifier: $8 (d12) + 2 (MGT) = 10$.
- **Step 4: Determine Outcome.** The result of 10 is compared to the TN of 8. Because 10 is TN+2, this is a **Mixed Success**. The attack hits, and because it was a Mixed Success instead of a clean success, the GM must flip a coin to determine if the Watchman's Throes effect is triggered.
- **Step 5: Calculate Damage.** Valeria's player rolls damage for her Battle Axe (1d6) and gets a 5. The Watchman has DR 0. Final Damage: $5 (\text{Damage Roll}) - 0 (\text{DR}) = 5 \text{ Damage}$.

The Resolution

The GM narrates the outcome. GM: "Your axe bites deep into the Watchman's corrupted form, but its unnatural resilience throws you off balance. It takes 5 damage, and its Physical Stress Throe triggers, imposing the **[Exposed]** condition on you until your next turn." The GM updates the Watchman's HP from 12 to 7. Valeria's turn is now over.

Part II: The Game Master's Guide

Chapter 7: Running the Game

- **Push the Narrative Forward:** A failed roll should introduce a new complication, not bring the story to a halt.
- **Principle of Narrative Causality:** Anchor every mechanical effect in a clear, in-fiction cause. Rules should flow from believable actions and consequences so players and GMs can narrate results that feel inevitable and dramatic.

Using Clocks

A Clock is a simple visual tool to track progress towards a goal or rising tension. Draw a circle and divide it into 4, 6, or 8 segments. Fill in a segment when the characters make progress or a threat escalates. When the clock is full, the event comes to pass.

- **Progress Clock:** Use this to track the party's success in a complex task.
- **Threat Clock:** Use this to represent escalating danger.

The Unified Tag System

In ZD12, a **Tag** is any temporary mechanical modifier applied to a character, object, or aspect of the environment. Tags are the primary source for the **Fulcrum Roll** and other situational effects. The **Binary Fulcrum State** rule remains in effect: multiple sources of Favorable or Unfavorable Fulcrum from Tags do not stack; they simply cancel each other out.

The Core Tag Library

This is a fundamental set of Tags that form the backbone of the system. GMs are always empowered to create new, bespoke Tags as the narrative demands.

Character & Combat Tags

These are typically applied to creatures as the result of actions or abilities.

- **[Blinded]:** The character cannot see. They automatically fail sight-based checks and all of their attacks have an **Unfavorable Fulcrum**. Attacks against them have a **Favorable Fulcrum**.
- **[Exposed]:** The character has a gap in their defense. The next attack roll made against them has a **Favorable Fulcrum**.
- **[Focused]:** The character is concentrating. Their next attack roll this turn has a **Favorable Fulcrum**.
- **[Guarded]:** The character is braced for impact. The next defense check they make before their next turn has a **Favorable Fulcrum**.
- **[Staggered]:** The character is off-balance. They cannot use their **Reaction** until the end of their next turn.

Environmental & Situational Tags

These are typically applied by the GM to the scene or objects within it.

- **[Blocked]:** A path is obstructed. It cannot be moved through without a specific action and a successful check to clear it.
- **[Cover]:** A character near this feature can use it for protection, adding to their AV or DR.
- **[Darkness]:** The area is unlit. All actions relying on sight are made with an **Unfavorable Fulcrum** unless a character has a light source.
- **[Obscured]:** The area is filled with smoke, fog, or heavy rain. Ranged attacks into, out of, or through the area have an **Unfavorable Fulcrum**.
- **[Unstable]:** The ground is treacherous (e.g., ice, a tilting rope bridge). All checks involving careful movement or balance have an **Unfavorable Fulcrum**.

The Lifecycle of a Tag

Tags are dynamic and change with the narrative. Here's how they are applied and removed.

Applying Tags

- **By Mechanics:** An ability, attack, or gambit explicitly states that a Tag is applied (e.g., the Skirmisher's [Exposed] Tag).
- **By the GM:** The GM can apply a Tag to any element of the scene when the narrative changes (e.g., "The oil lamp shatters; the floor now has the [Slick] Tag").
- **By Player Action:** A player can declare they are attempting to create a Tag. The GM calls for a Core Check to see if they succeed (e.g., kicking sand in an enemy's face to apply the [Blinded] Tag for a round).

Removing Tags

- **By Duration:** Many combat Tags have a built-in timer (e.g., "until the end of your next turn").
- **By the GM:** When the situation that created a Tag is resolved, the GM removes it (e.g., "The rain stops, and the [Slippery] Tag on the rooftops is gone").
- **By Player Action:** Players can use their actions to remove Tags (e.g., using a Major Action and a Wits check to stabilize a floor with the [Unstable] Tag).

Specialist Backlash Tables

These tables are used when a Specialist rolls a 1 on their Specialist Die.

*Bodyshock Backlash Table (MGT, Path of the Titan)

d12 Roll	Result	Effect
1	Spinal Shock	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Wounded condition."
2-5	Crippling Strain	You gain the Wounded condition AND the Crippled condition.
6-8	Blunt Trauma	"You suffer 1d4 damage that ignores armor (DR), and you gain the Staggered condition."
9-11	Exhausting Effort	"You are immediately Exposed, and you lose 2 Grit (to a minimum of 0)."
12	The Titan's Shrug	"You may immediately gain +1 Grit, OR you may suffer 1 point of damage (ignores DR) to negate the failed roll and re-attempt the initial action with a Favorable Net Fulcrum."

Overextended Backlash Table (AGI, Path of the Ghost)

d12 Roll	Result	Effect
1	The Cornered Ghost	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Crippled condition."
2-5	Crippling Loss of Position	"You are immediately knocked Prone, and the enemy you targeted (or the closest enemy) immediately makes a free, un-modified attack against you."
6-8	Disarmed and Exposed	"You are immediately Exposed, and you drop a weapon or critical piece of gear you are currently wielding/wearing into the Close distance band."
9-11	Lost Momentum	"You suffer 1d4 damage, and you gain the Staggered condition."
12	The Perfect Pivot	"You may immediately take a free Move Minor Action, AND you gain +1 Grit."

Miscalculation Backlash Table (WIT, Path of the Oracle)

d12 Roll	Result	Effect
1	Synaptic Failure	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and you gain the Dissonance condition."
2-5	Blinding Panic	"You suffer 1 point of temporary SPI Attribute Damage (to a minimum of 1), AND you gain the Dissonance condition. You cannot take a Major Action on your next turn."
6-8	Information Overload	You immediately lose 3 Grit (to a minimum of 0) and the GM advances all active Threat Clocks by one segment.
9-11	Conflicting Logic	"You gain the Doubt condition, and you must use your next Major Action to target a randomly chosen character (including allies) with a basic Attack or Assist/Hinder action."
12	The Clear Path	You gain +1 Grit. You may immediately ask the GM one specific question about enemy intent.

Eldritch Backlash Table (SPI, Path of the Adept)

d12 Roll	Result	Effect
1	Resonance Fracture	"You immediately drop to 0 Grit, and the character gains the Dissonance condition."
2-5	Wild Surge	"You immediately suffer 1d6 damage that ignores armor (DR), and you immediately cast the last spell you used again, targeting yourself or an ally (GM's choice)."
6-9	Planar Leak	"You immediately lose up to 3 Grit (to a minimum of 0), and a nearby enemy gains a Favorable Net Fulcrum on their next attack against you."
10-11	Resource Drain	"You gain the Exposed condition, and you lose access to any Resource Die for this scene."
12	Divine Refocus	"You may immediately clear any one active Condition you currently suffer from, AND you gain +1 Grit."

Chapter 8: Social Interaction

This is the baseline for most NPC interactions and is handled through freeform roleplaying. If a player attempts a simple risky social action, they make a single Resolution Roll against a TN set by the GM.

Tier 2: The Discourse Encounter (Optional System)

For high-stakes social conflicts, this framework treats the social conflict like a unique form of combat.

- **Composure & Resolve**
- **Composure**: Their mental "health points," representing their will to continue the debate. It is often calculated as 5 + SPI. When reduced to 0, they are Swayed.
- **Resolve**: Their mental "damage reduction," representing their stubbornness or conviction. It is often equal to their WIT modifier.

Chapter 9: Threats & Opposition

Threat Anatomy

- **Concept**: A short description of its nature and tactics.
- **HP (Health Points)**: Its physical durability.
- **DR (Damage Reduction)**: Its armor or natural toughness.
- **Damage/Effect**: The damage it deals and any conditions it applies on a hit.
- **Throes**: The consequence the player triggers on a Mixed Success attack against it.

The Throes System

When a player achieves a Mixed Success on an attack, they deal damage and have a 50% chance to trigger the monster's Throes. Full and Critical Successes do not trigger an enemy's Throe effect.

The Threat Builder

Step 1: Define Concept & Tier

- **Standard**: The rank-and-file.
- **Tough**: More dangerous, specialized threats.
- **Elite**: Bosses and truly formidable foes.
- **Master**: The campaign-defining antagonists.

Step 2: Set Core Stats (HP & DR)

<u>Tier</u>	<u>Recommended HP</u>	<u>Recommended DR</u>
Standard	8-10	0-1
Tough	12-15	1-2
Elite	16-20	2-3
Master	21+	3+

Step 3: Assign Damage & Effects

<u>Tier</u>	<u>Recommended Damage</u>	<u>Sample Effect (On Strong/Critical Hit)</u>
Standard	1d6	"Applies a minor condition (e.g., Exposed)."
Tough	1d8	"Applies a serious condition (e.g., Staggered, Bleeding)."
Elite	1d10 / 2x 1d6 attacks	Applies a debilitating condition or triggers a special ability.
Master	1d12 / Unique	Scene-altering effects.

Bestiary

Monster	Concept	HP	DR	Damage / Effect	Throes
Corrupted Watchman	Relentless Sentry	12	0	"1d6 Damage, Applies Staggered"	Physical Stress
Mire Ghoul	Ambush Predator	8	1	"1d4 Damage, Applies Bleeding"	Position Loss
Spire Bat Swarm	Area Denial / Harass	10	0	"1 Damage, Applies Exposed"	Position Loss
Ruin Crawler	Armored Scavenger	6	3	"1d4 Damage, Compromised on Strong Hit"	Physical Stress
Whispering Shade	Incorporeal Tormentor	10	N/A	"1d6 SPI Damage, Doubt"	Doubt/ Exhaustion
Stone Guardian	Golem / Obstacle	15	2	"1d8 Damage, Shove to Near band"	Physical Stress
Thieving Gremlin	Resource Thief	5	0	"Steals item, Exposed on hit"	Costly Delay (escapes)
Cult Fanatic	Reckless Attacker	9	1	"1d6 Damage, Gains Favorable Net Fulcrum"	Frenzied Retaliation

The Recursive Threat Generator

This section provides a framework for Game Masters to generate unique, compelling threats on the fly, reducing preparation time while increasing dynamism at the table. This is a tool for inspiration, not a rigid set of instructions.

The Prime Directive of Generation

All generator tables in ZD12 are presented as curated lists of inspiration. The GM is always encouraged to **choose** the result that best fits the narrative, or to **roll** for a spark of chaotic creativity.

The Royal Court of Design

The heart of ZD12's action is the **d12**, whose flat probability distribution makes every roll a dramatic event. For generation, however, we defer to the **2d6**, whose bell curve creates a world with texture and consistency, where common threats are common and rare threats are rare.

Step 1: Roll for Archetype (2d6)

This roll determines the threat's fundamental combat role and tactical identity.

2	Elite	A superior version of another archetype. The rare "boss" or "champion."
3	Defender	Protects other targets. High DR/HP, abilities like "Guard" or "Intercept."
4	Lurker	Ambusher. Focuses on stealth, surprise attacks, and applying negative conditions.
5	Controller	Battlefield manipulator. Creates hazards and applies debilitating conditions.
6	Artillery	Ranged damage dealer. Stays at a distance and lays down consistent damage.
7	Brute / Skirmisher	The core of any fighting force. The GM can choose: the Brute (a straightforward, high-HP, high-damage melee threat) or the Skirmisher (a mobile attacker who dashes in and out of combat).
8	Leader	Force multiplier. Buffs allies, gives them extra actions, or directs them tactically.
9	Controller	Battlefield manipulator. Creates hazards and applies debilitating conditions.
10	Lurker	Ambusher. Focuses on stealth, surprise attacks, and applying negative conditions.
11	Defender	Protects other targets. High DR/HP, abilities like "Guard" or "Intercept."
12	Wildcard	A strange, unpredictable threat that breaks the rules.

Step 2: Determine Core Action (1d6)

Based on the Archetype, choose or roll on the corresponding table to generate its primary action.

Brute Core Actions

1	Armor Break	A standard melee attack. The sheer force of the blow degrades the target's armor; their DR is reduced by 1 for the next attack that hits them.
2-3	Brutal Shove	A standard melee attack. On a hit, the target is also pushed one distance band away.
4-5	Reckless Swing	The Brute makes an attack with a Favorable Fulcrum, but also grants its target a Favorable Fulcrum on the next attack against it.
6	War Scream	All player characters in the close distance band must pass a TN 8 Spirit check or gain the [Staggered] Tag until the end of their next turn.

Skirmisher Core Actions

1	Harrying Strike	A standard melee attack. On a Mixed Success, no damage but [Distracted] Tag (Unfavorable Fulcrum on next Major action). On Full/Crit Success, deal damage.
2-3	Disengaging Strike	The Skirmisher makes a standard melee attack, then may immediately move one distance band away without provoking a reaction.
4	Exposing Feint	The Skirmisher makes a non-damaging maneuver. The target must pass a TN 8 Agility check or gain the [Exposed] Tag.
5	Dashing Strike	The Skirmisher moves one distance band and then makes a standard melee attack as a single action.
6	Puncturing Strike	A standard melee attack. If the target is suffering from any negative Tag, the Skirmisher exploits the opening, and the attack ignores all of the target's DR.

Artillery Core Actions

1	Suppressing Fire	The Artillery targets an area. Any character starting in or moving into that area gains the [Pinned] Tag.
2	Pinpoint Shot	A standard ranged attack. On a Full or Critical Success, the attack hits a vital spot, and the target also gains the [Staggered] Tag.
3-4	Arcing Shot	The Artillery makes a standard ranged attack that ignores the defensive benefits of cover.
5	Overwatch	The Artillery aims at a character or narrative feature. If the target moves, or any enemy moves past the feature, the Artillery may use its Reaction to make a ranged attack that also applies the [Staggered] Tag.
6	Targeting Weakness	A standard ranged attack. This attack ignores 2 points of the target's Damage Reduction (DR).

Leader Core Actions

1-2	Mark Target	The Leader targets a player character, who suffers a -1 penalty to their AV against attacks from the Leader's allies until the Leader's next turn.
3	Command: Reposition!	The Leader chooses one ally, who immediately moves one distance band as a free action.
4	Coordinated Tactics	The Leader grants an ally the [Focused] Tag for their next attack this round.
5	Rallying Cry	The Leader chooses one ally, who immediately removes one negative Tag they are currently suffering from.
6	Command: Strike!	The Leader chooses one ally, who may immediately use their Reaction to make a standard attack.

Defender Core Actions

1	Shield Bash	A standard melee attack that deals minimal damage. On a Full or Critical Success, the target is also knocked back one distance band.
2	Bodyguard	The Defender designates one ally in their Close band. The next time that ally is targeted by an attack, the Defender can choose to become the target of that attack instead.
3-4	Hold the Line	The Defender plants their feet. They gain +2 DR, cannot be unwillingly moved, and any character attempting to move past them must first succeed on a TN 8 MGT check.
5	Goading Challenge	The Defender makes a threatening display at a player character. That character must pass a TN 8 SPI check or suffer an Unfavorable Fulcrum on any attack that does not target the Defender on their next turn.
6	Intercept	The Defender chooses a player character. If that character moves to engage an ally, the Defender may use their Reaction to move one distance band and make a standard melee attack against that character.

Controller Core Actions

1	Debilitating Blast	A standard ranged attack that deals minimal damage. On a hit, the target also gains the [Staggered] Tag.
2-3	Tanglefoot Spore	Choose a point within the Near distance band; all characters in the Close band of that point gain the [Hindered] Tag (movement costs double) until the end of their next turn.
4	Forceful Push	One target within the Near band must pass a TN 8 MGT check or be pushed one distance band directly away.
5	Create Hazard	The Controller creates a zone with the [Hazardous] Tag; any character moving into or starting their turn in the zone takes 1 damage.
6	Chain Pain	The Controller targets a character who is already suffering from at least one negative Tag, then chooses a second character nearby; that second character gains one of the same Tags.

The Lurker

1	Ambush	If the Lurker is hidden from its target, it may use this action. It makes a standard attack that deals +2 damage . After the attack, the Lurker is revealed.
2	Venomous Strike	A standard melee attack. On a hit, the target must pass a TN 8 MGT check or gain the [Weakened] Tag (the target deals half damage with attacks) until the end of their next turn.
3-4	Fade into Shadow	The Lurker uses a distraction (a smoke pellet, kicking up dust, etc.). It may immediately make a Stealth check to attempt to become hidden, even if currently observed.
5	Prey on the Lone	A standard melee attack. If the target is not within the Close distance band of any of its allies, this attack is made with a Favorable Fulcrum .
6	Ensnaring Shot	A ranged attack that deals no damage. On a hit, the target gains the [Immobilized] Tag (cannot move from their current position) until they use a Major Action to pass a TN 8 MGT check to break free.

The Elite: A "Template" Archetype

The description for the Elite is "A superior version of another archetype." This suggests it shouldn't have its own list of Core Actions. Instead, "Elite" is a powerful template that we apply on top of another archetype.

I propose the following mechanic: When a GM gets an **Elite** result, they first choose or roll a base archetype (from Brute, Skirmisher, Artillery, Leader, Defender, or Controller). They then apply the Elite template, which grants the threat:

1. A significant boost to its core stats (e.g., +4 HP, +1 DR).
2. Access to a powerful **"Recursive Modifier"**—the final step of the generator proposed in the original brief. This might add an **[Area of Effect]** to a Brute's slam or a **[Drains Grit]** property to a Controller's blast.

This makes generating an Elite a simple two-step process that creates a truly formidable "boss" version of a standard threat.

The Wildcard: The "Weird Fiction" Table

The Wildcard, on the other hand, is where we can get truly strange. Its role is to break the established rules of combat and introduce bizarre, memorable mechanics. This is our "weird fiction" table.

Let's design a 1d6 table of abilities that are unpredictable and force the players to think outside the box.

The Wildcard: "Weird Fiction" Table		
1	Grit Leech	A ranged attack that deals no damage. On a hit, the target loses 1 Grit. If they had no Grit to lose, they gain the [Weakened] Tag instead.
2	Unstable Form	When this threat is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes in a shower of chaotic energy. All characters in the Close band take 1d8 damage.
3	Action Echo	Immediately after a player character uses a Signature Move, the Wildcard can use its Reaction to create a minor, corrupted echo of the effect (e.g., a weaker attack, a lesser teleport, a small defensive barrier).
4	Adaptive Armor	The first time the Wildcard takes damage from a source (e.g., a melee weapon, a ranged weapon, a spell), it adapts. It gains +2 DR against that specific source for the rest of the encounter.
5	Symbiotic Link	The Wildcard is psychically linked to another threat on the battlefield. Any damage dealt to the Wildcard is split evenly with the linked threat (rounded up). The link is broken if the other threat is defeated.
6	Reality Anchor	The Wildcard is a focal point of strange energies. While it is alive, no character (player or threat) in the Near band can benefit from a Favorable Fulcrum.

Universal Reactive Throe Table (1d12)

(When a player's attack results in a Mixed Success, the GM may flip a coin. On a success, roll on this table.)

1	Reposition	The threat immediately moves one distance band, ignoring difficult terrain.
2	Vicious Rebuke	The threat lashes out. The attacker who triggered the Throe gains the [Exposed] Tag.
3	Tactical Shift	The threat uses the opening to prepare its next move. It gains the [Focused] Tag for its next action.
4	Bolster Ally	The threat's cry of pain inspires an ally. One ally of the threat's choice within the Near band gains the [Focused] Tag.
5-6	Create Hazard	The threat's impact, blood, or spilled energy alters the battlefield. The Close band around the threat now has the [Hazardous] Tag.
7-8	Guard Up	The threat recovers its footing. It gains +1 DR until the end of its next turn.
9	Obscuring Cloud	The threat releases a cloud of dust, smoke, or spores. It is now in an [Obscured] area until its next turn.
10	Grapple	The threat grabs onto the attacker. The attacker gains the [Immobilized] Tag until they use a Major Action to pass a TN 8 MGT check.
11	Item Sundered	The blow is caught on the attacker's gear. The player must choose: either their weapon or their armor is damaged, losing one key property (e.g., a weapon's Tag, 1 point of DR/AV) until it can be repaired.
12	Frenzied State	The threat is enraged by the blow. For the next round, all of its attacks have a Favorable Fulcrum .

Chapter 10: Setting Primer

ZD12 is setting-agnostic, but these foundational hooks can be used to create a default world of high-stakes adventure.

- **The Shattered Reach:** A chaotic sea of unnatural, island-eating mist, dotted with chunks of solid ground.
- **The Iron Hegemony:** A mainland industrial empire that survived a past cataclysm through rigid order and powerful artifice.
- **The Cinderwood:** A colossal, petrified forest on the edge of the Hegemony's territory that is slowly turning to iron.
- **Adytum, the Silent City:** An impossibly old city discovered on a stable, mist-shrouded island in the Reach.

Chapter 11: The Bottom Line

This will be a short, but important chapter--I want to be unequivocally clear about this: This book is not a sacred text. It is a toolbox. It is a well-stocked workshop. I have tried to adopt a FOSS (Free and Open-Source Software) philosophy for ZD12. If you're not a programmer, don't worry about the term. It just means this: what you're holding is not a finished product designed for consumption, but a living engine designed for modification.

You have my full and enthusiastic permission to break, bend, rewrite, and reinvent everything you find in these pages. Rip out a subsystem you don't like. Bolt on a new one from a game you love. Change the core dice. My greatest design hope for this project is not that you will play ZD12, but that you will be inspired to create your own flavor of it—a version so specifically tailored to your table's desires that it practically runs itself.

Part III: Appendices & Indices

Appendix A: Signature Moves Library

A Signature Move is a special ability a character can learn that defines their unique style and approach to challenges. These moves often require spending Grit and represent a character's capacity to bend the rules through their exceptional MGT, AGI, WIT, or SPI.

MGT Signature Moves

- **Sundering Strike:** When you make a melee attack, you may spend 1 Grit before the roll. If the attack hits, you temporarily shatter your target's defenses. Reduce the target's Damage Reduction (DR) by an amount equal to your MGT modifier (minimum 1) for the remainder of the scene. This effect does not stack.
- **Unstoppable:** As your action, you can spend 2 Grit to become a force of nature. Move up to your full speed in a straight line, moving through the spaces of any Threats. Any Threat you move through takes 1d6 damage and must pass a MGT check or gain the **[Staggered]** Tag. You do not provoke reactions for this movement.
- **Deny the Reaper:** When damage would drop you to 0 HP or less, you can spend your Reaction and 1 Grit to ignore the effects of being **Broken**. You remain standing and can continue to act, even with a negative HP total. You must spend 1 Grit at the start of each of your subsequent turns to maintain this effect. If you cannot or choose not to spend the Grit, you immediately become **Broken** and roll on the Death's Door Table. Your negative HP total cannot exceed your MGT score.

AGI Signature Moves

- **Blinding Speed:** When you take your turn, you can spend 1 Grit to gain an extra Minor Action.
- **Acrobatic Dodge:** When you are hit by a physical attack, you can spend your Reaction and 1 Grit to turn the hit into a glancing blow. You take only half damage from the attack, and you may immediately move one distance band away from the attacker without provoking a reaction.
- **Opportunist:** When an ally's attack causes a Threat to gain a negative Tag (e.g., Staggered, Exposed), you can spend your Reaction and 2 Grit to make an immediate attack against that Threat.

WTT Signature Moves

- **Calculated Ricochet:** When you miss with a ranged attack, you can spend 1 Grit to have the attack hit a different target within the same distance band of the original, dealing half damage.
- **I've Read About This!:** When you encounter a new Threat, you may spend 1 Grit to declare, "I've read about this!" You then gain the **[Prepared]** Positive Tag against that specific type of Threat for the remainder of the scene. The **[Prepared]** Tag allows you to choose one of the following benefits each round as your Free Action:
- **Anticipate Dodge:** Impose an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum on the Threat's next defensive roll against you.
- **Exploit Weakness:** Your next attack against the Threat ignores 2 points of its Damage Reduction (DR).
- **Predict Trajectory:** Gain a Favorable Net Fulcrum on your next defensive roll against an attack from that Threat.
- **Tactical Repositioning:** When an ally you can see is targeted by an attack, you can spend your Reaction and 1 Grit to shout a tactical command. That ally can immediately use their own Reaction to move to any position within the same distance band OR gain the benefit of cover against the incoming attack.

SPI Signature Moves

- **Soulfire Bolt:** As an action, you can spend 1 Grit to unleash a bolt of raw spiritual energy. This is a magic attack that deals 1d12 + SPI in damage and ignores Damage Reduction. On a Full or Critical Success, the target also gains the **[Exposed]** Tag as the soulfire sears their defenses.
- **Aegis of Faith:** When an ally you can see is hit by an attack, you can spend your Reaction and 1 Grit to project a shield of pure will. Your ally gains temporary HP equal to half the result of a d12 roll (rounded up) + your SPI modifier. Any damage from the triggering attack is subtracted from this temporary HP first. Any remaining temporary HP lasts until the start of your next turn.
- **Force of Personality:** When you attempt a social check to persuade or intimidate, you may spend 2 Grit before the roll to make it a Favorable Net Fulcrum (take the better of 2d12).

Appendix B: Gambit Library

Aggressive Stance Gambits

- **Reckless Attack:** As your Major Action, gain the **[Focused]** Positive Tag for a single melee attack. If you do, you also gain the **[Exposed]** Negative Tag until your next turn.
- **All-Out Barrage:** Make a ranged attack as your Major Action. You cannot move this turn, but you do not suffer an Unfavorable Net Fulcrum for firing at a target in Close range.
- **Press the Advantage:** If you successfully damage an enemy, you can immediately move one distance band closer to them for free.

Defensive Stance Gambits

- **Hunker Down:** Forgo your Major Action. Roll a d12. Gain temporary DR equal to half the result (rounded down) until your next turn.
- **Shield Wall:** If you are using a shield, you can use your Major Action to provide half your shield's DR bonus to an adjacent ally until your next turn.
- **Set for Charge:** Forgo your Major Action. If an enemy moves into your Close band before your next turn, you may use your Reaction to make an immediate melee attack against them.

Balanced Stance Gambits

- **Feint:** Make an attack roll. If you hit, you may choose to deal no damage to give the target the **[Exposed]** Negative Tag.
- **Tactical Assessment:** Forgo your Major Action to analyze the battlefield. You or an ally of your choice gains the **[Focused]** Positive Tag.
- **Reposition:** After you take your Major Action, you may immediately move one distance band for free.

Appendix C: Relics Library

Common Relics

- **Sentinel's Charm (SPI):** (Attuned) Spend 2 Grit as a Minor action when hit to reduce incoming damage by 3. Synergy: Sentinel's Regalia.
- **Bloodstone Amulet (MGT):** (Attuned) (Passive) You may choose to suffer 1 damage to gain a +1 bonus on any MGT check before rolling.
- **Smokesight Goggles (WIT):** (Attuned) (Passive) You can see clearly through smoke, fog, or mist.

Uncommon Relics

- **Earth-Warden's Vambrace (MGT):** (Attuned) Spend 2 Grit as a Reaction to give an ally in Close range +2 DR against one incoming attack. Synergy: Sentinel's Regalia.
- **Ghostweave Cloak (AGI):** (Attuned) Spend 2 Grit as a Minor action to become invisible until you move or take a Major action.
- **The Inquisitor's Seal (SPI):** (Attuned) (Passive) You gain a Favorable Net Fulcrum on checks to discern if someone is lying.

Rare Relics

- **The Berserker's Heart (MGT):** (Attuned) When you are reduced to 0 HP, you may spend 3 Grit as a Reaction to drop to 1 HP instead and make a free melee attack with a Favorable Net Fulcrum.
- **Blink Dagger (AGI):** (Attuned) Spend 3 Grit as a Major action to teleport to any space you can see within the Far distance band.
- **Crown of Command (SPI):** (Attuned) Spend 3 Grit and make a SPI check vs TN 11 to issue a one-word command (e.g., "Flee," "Halt," "Sleep") to a target who can hear you.

Appendix D: Glossary

- **Action Economy:** Your set of actions on a turn: one Major Action, one Minor Action, and one Reaction per round.
- **Attribute:** The four core statistics: Might (MGT), Agility (AGI), Wits (WIT), and Spirit (SPI).
- **Avoidance Rating (AR):** The avoidance rating on certain armors.
- **Backlash:** A dangerous consequence from rolling a 1 on a Specialist Die.
- **Broken:** The state at 0 HP. You are incapacitated and cannot take actions.
- **Check:** The core mechanic: $1d12 + \text{Attribute}$ vs Target Number (TN).
- **Clocks:** A visual tool for tracking progress or tension.
- **Conditions:** Persistent negative effects (e.g., Wounded, Exposed, Staggered).
- **Damage Reduction (DR):** A value, from armor, that is subtracted from incoming physical damage.
- **Degrees of Success:** The five outcomes of a check: Critical Failure, Failure, Mixed Success, Full Success, Critical Success. Grit is ONLY gained on Critical Failure (+2), Failure (+1), and Mixed Success (+1). No Grit is generated from Full or Critical

successes (the success itself is the reward!) Monsters and NPCs do not generate Grit for themselves, and may never benefit from the Grit system—Grit is strictly a player-only resource.

- **Net Fulcrum:** The roll state determined by counting positive and negative Tags. If positives > negatives roll 2d12 and take the higher (Favorable). If negatives > positives roll 2d12 and take the lower (Unfavorable). If equal or none, roll a single d12 (Neutral).
- **Grit:** A resource spent to influence dice rolls or activate powerful abilities.
- **Health Points (HP):** A measure of physical durability.
- **Mixed Success:** An outcome where the result is TN to TN+2. You succeed, but with a minor cost or complication.
- **Mortal Wound:** A grievous, permanent injury from the Death's Door Table.
- **Relic:** An item of significant power that requires Attunement.
- **Specialist Die:** A special die (d10 or d12) used for Specialist abilities.
- **Stance:** A character's combat posture: Aggressive, Balanced, or Defensive.
- **Tags:** Temporary, situational descriptors that represent short-term narrative conditions (e.g., [Focused], [Exposed], [Noisy Footing]). Tags are used by the Net Fulcrum system to determine Favorable, Neutral, or Unfavorable roll states. See Chapter 2 for rules on duration, stacking, and examples.
- **Narrative Causality:** A design principle advising that mechanical effects should have a clear in-fiction cause and justification. See Chapter 10: Running the Game.
- **Target Number (TN):** The value a character must meet or beat to succeed on a check.
- **Throes System:** A framework that gives threats unique actions when a player achieves a Mixed Success against them.

Appendix Z: Design Lineage (Aknoweldgements)

System/Designer Influences

<u>System/Designer</u>	<u>Mechanic Inherited</u>	<u>How ZD12 Reframed It</u>
Blades in the Dark (John Harper)	Position/Effect, structured consequences	Transformed improvisational consequence into the Degrees of Success system—making stakes calculable rather than negotiated
Powered by the Apocalypse (Vincent & Meguey Baker)	Player-facing rolls, move structure	Adopted player agency through transparent odds, rejected move-based structures in favor of universal resolution
Torchbearer (Luke Crane, Thor Olavsrud)	Attrition economy, the Grind	Abstracted logistical scarcity into Resource Dice and the Grit circuit—tension without bookkeeping
Into the Odd / Cairn (Chris McDowall, Yochai Gal)	Minimalist chassis, inventory-as-choice	Inherited bounded math and anti-inflation philosophy; made inventory thematic rather than simulationist
Numenera (Monte Cook)	Mystical archaeology, Effort system	Abstracted "effort as resource" into Grit spending; mechanics-as-lore became a design principle
Symbaroum (Järnringen)	Corruption as mechanical decay	Inspired the idea that moral/thematic weight could live in how systems degrade, not just narrative description
Mothership (Sean McCoy)	Stress mechanics, forward momentum	The Grit economy exists because Mothership proved that mechanical tension needs a clock, not just stakes
OSR Movement (various)	Rulings over rules, lethality	Adopted emergent complexity through simple systems; rejected lethality-as-punishment in favor of lethality-as-consequence
Fate Core (Fred Hicks, Leonard Balsera)	Aspects, narrative permission	Took the "toolkit modularity" philosophy but applied it to epistemic openness rather than mechanical plug-and-play
D&D 5th Edition (Wizards of the Coast)	Advantage/Disadvantage	The Net Fulcrum descends directly from 5e's elegant solution to modifiers—refined to allow granular team-based advantages

Recommended Reading for Designers

The designers below shaped ZD12's procedural DNA and represent a tradition of framework-forward design—architects who understand that rigorous procedural systems don't compete with narrative, they generate it.

Kevin Crawford

Scarlet Heroes, Worlds Without Number, Stars Without Number, Cities Without Number

Crawford's procedural generation frameworks and solo-play architecture demonstrate that you can systematize GM responsibilities without sacrificing creative freedom. His work proves that tables, tags, and faction systems aren't crutches—they're narrative engines. ZD12's modular philosophy and transparent probability descend directly from Crawford's commitment to usable, hackable design.

Andrea Sfiligoi

Four Against Darkness series (Ganesha Games)

Sfiligoi's accessible solo mechanics show that you don't need complexity to create tension, and you don't need a GM to tell a compelling story. His design approach—tight procedural loops that generate surprising outcomes—influenced ZD12's commitment to emergence through elegant constraints. Also: his journey from passionate amateur to prolific designer is an inspiration to anyone who thinks they need industry credentials to contribute to the craft.

Erick N. Buchard

Systems engineering across multiple projects

Buchard's work masterfully quantifies narrative emergence—proving that you can give dramatic beats mathematical structure without making them feel mechanical. His influence on ZD12 lives in the belief that consequences can be calculated, drama can be systemic, and emergence can be designed for rather than hoped for.

Alex I

Blackoath Entertainment catalog (prolific solo/GM-less design)

Alex T's sheer output and experimental approach to solo gaming demonstrate that iteration itself is a design philosophy. Not every experiment needs to be revolutionary—sometimes the value is in trying things, in treating game design as an ongoing conversation with yourself and your players. ZD12's willingness to make bold mechanical choices (the d12 focus, the Grit circuit, the Throes system) exists because designers like Alex T proved that you can take risks in a traditionally conservative hobby.

On Narrative and Systems Engineering

These designers don't separate "story games" from "mechanical games"—they understand that thoughtful systems architecture is a storytelling technology. The stories their games tell emerge because the frameworks are elegant, not in spite of them. ZD12 aspires to that synthesis: mechanics that generate meaning, procedures that create drama, and systems that feel like they're telling you something true about the worlds they simulate.

Additional Foundations

While the designers above shaped ZD12's procedural DNA, the game also owes debts to broader design conversations: the OSR emphasis on rulings over rules, the PbtA tradition of player-facing mechanics, the indie scene's permission culture, and the mathematical elegance of advantage/disadvantage mechanics pioneered by D&D 5e. Every game is a synthesis. ZD12 just tries to be honest about which threads it's weaving together.

[^+]
A note on foundational debts: This book—and the thinking that made it possible—would not exist without Sir Terry Pratchett. His Discworld novels and the Science of Discworld series taught me that systems could be examined with rigor and love simultaneously, that footnotes could be architecture, that stories operate on their own physics. The concept of "narrativium" (the elemental substance of Story) shapes how I understand emergence, meaning-making, and the relationship between rules and play. I never met the man, but his work fundamentally rewired my cognitive lens. Every game designer who treats mechanics as narrative technology, who believes systems can teach philosophy, who understands that laughter and profundity are not opposites—we all owe him more than we can articulate. GNU Terry Pratchett. Rest in peaceful L-Space, Sir Terry. The turtles still carry the weight, and the stories still matter. We miss you very much.

This document is released under Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0. Take what's useful. Build what comes next. Honor the lineage by extending it.