

ZeFRS



Cimmerian Quickstart



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Introducing ZEFRS and Howard's antediluvian world

Introduction

Howard and ZEFRS

This game's setting is inspired from the works of Robert Ervin Howard (1906-1936), Texan writer of several heroic stories, including the adventures of some famous Cimmerian barbarian.

The ZeFRS rules system is inspired, with the blessing of its author Dave "Zeb" Cook¹, from a role-playing game of the 1980's already set in the same world.

This document briefly describes this setting and offers a shortened version of the game rules (page 4), some sample ready-to-play characters (page 10) and opponents (page 12), and a typical adventure in four acts (page 14) playable during a gaming evening.

Role-playing Games

A role-playing game is a tale shared by several players. One of them is the referee, who describes settings, events and opponents. The other players interpret the protagonists of this interactive story. The successes and setbacks of these characters are determined by their decisions, their numerical abilities and the randomness of dice-rolls.

The game can be limited to a single session and a single scenario; it may very well continue many years, tracing a very long quest or multiple adventures of a troop of characters.

The World

The antediluvian setting where the game unfolds is temporally located twelve thousand years before our era, but above all it is a fictional context where each geographical area embodies a style of adventure...

Humanity is at the heart of this world... The rare monsters are exceptional animals, sometimes almost-human ape-men, more rarely undead, demons or nightmarish aliens.

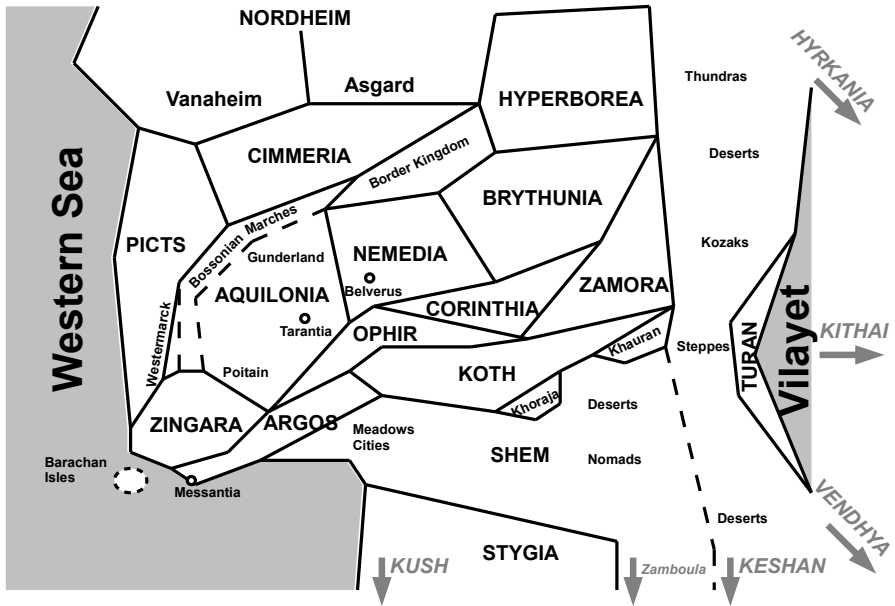
Hyborian Kingdoms

Aquilonia is a vast kingdom reminiscent of both the Roman Empire and medieval France. Its provinces are of varied cultures: **Poitain** evokes Occitania, the **Bossonian Marches** Wales, **Gunderland** a country of Germanic culture, etc. In its westernmost province, **Westermarck**, Aquilonian settlers are confronted with **Picts** inspired by Amerindian tribes.

Like Aquilonia, other countries share the same **Hyborian** culture inherited from ancient Nordic tribes, also venerating the noble and fatherly god **Mitra**: **Nemedia**, **Argos** (simili-Italy), **Ophir** (pseudo-Greece), **Corinthia**, **Brythunia**, **Border Kingdom**...

However, some of the Hyborian lands have diverged from their culture of origin: **Koth**, and the principalities **Khauran** and **Khoraja**, have acquired the Middle Eastern culture of **Shem** deserts, including worship of the goddess **Ishtar**; **Hyperborea** is a Nordic isolationist country, where the ancient hero **Bori** remains venerated.

¹Hence the system's name: ZEFRS for «ZEB'S FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING SYSTEM»



Other Countries

Zingara, Spain-inspired, is a great maritime nation that has to face the formidable pirates of the **Barachas** (or Barachan Isles), mainly from Argos. **Stygia** is an archaic Egypt ruled by evil priests of the god-serpent **Set**. To the south, the jungles of the **Black Kingdoms** are rich in mysteries.

Zamora is a mysterious land with a sulphurous reputation, where strange cults, wizards and thieves abound. **Turan** is a conquering empire founded by the **Hyrkanians**, fierce horsemen reminiscent of the Turks and Mongols. To the north live the **Nordheimr**, inspired by ancient Scandinavians, divided between blond **Æsir** and red-haired **Vanir**. **Cimmeria** is populated by tribes as wild and sullen as their country, evoking Ireland and Scotland.

Credits

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Game Rules

Creating a Character

A character is created by freely distributing **35 points** between a dozen talents; these are limited to a rating of 5 at creation, except perhaps one exceptional talent with agreement from the referee.

Players freely choose the name, origin and occupation of their characters, and define their equipment together with the referee; no need to note clothes, luggage and change...

Further, tables 1, 2 and 3 suggest sample armour and weapons.

Talents

It is recommended to put some points in **Damage resistance**, a reserve of points decreasing with each injury, as well as in **Movement**, and in at least one weapon talent: **Sword**, **Dirk**, **Bow...** **Brawling** and **Wrestling** are used for hand-to-hand combat, **Throwing** for throwing dirks and other objects.

The rules cite other useful talents: **Animal reflexes** and other prowess talents (**Acrobatics**, **Climbing** and **Swimming**), **Observation** or **Insight**², **Medicine** or **Herbalism**, and endurance talents: **Poison endurance**, **Stamina**, **Will...**

Other useful talents for the adventurer: **Arcane languages** to grasp the meaning of any written text, **Language** and **Reading/writing** talents, **Lore** to know ancient history, **Personal magnetism** or **Animal handling** to please men or beasts, **Navigation** or **Directional sense** for scientific or instinctive orientation, various types of crafts, etc.

²its «primitive» variant

d10: Result of a 10-sided die roll, zero indicates a «10»

d100: Result of a roll of the percentage die, one d10 representing the tens and the other the units; a double zero indicates «100»

Enemy: Minor NPC, of the kind to be massacred by the adventurers

Foe: NPC of equal importance to the PCs

PC: Player character, interpreted by a player

NPC: Non-player character, interpreted by the referee

Referee: Game master, who animates the game

Talents: Skills and other abilities of a character

Luck

Each PC begins each adventure with 1d10 **Luck** points, of which only the referee knows the quantity.

As long as their pool is not exhausted, a player may at any time request the expenditure of a Luck Point to re-roll dice, reduce injury by one level, or benefit from a minor coincidence.

The referee may award Luck points to a character who achieves improbable feats.

Character Progression

After each adventure, a character earns from 1 to 10 points to split between their existing talents.

It is also possible to acquire a new talent with a rating of 1, at a cost of 5 points.

Fame

The **Fame** talent is not acquired at the creation of a character but increases with their exploits.



A character earns one Fame point for each remarkable action; they may lose some in case of resounding failure.

Fame tests include giving orders to NPCs.

Protection	Armour	Movement
leather	1	-2
mail	2	-4
shield	1	-1

Table 1: Armour

Performing an Action

To see if a character succeeds in an action, it is necessary to take their rating in the most suitable talent (or 0 by default), and possibly subtract an opponent's talent rating.

The resulting number is used to locate the appropriate column on the resolution chart (table 5 page 9, or back cover); then roll **1d100** to determine the «colour» of success.

A **white** result is a failure (level 0), a **green** result a marginal success (level 1), a **yellow** result an acceptable success (level 2), a **red** result a total success (level 3), a **black** result a heroic success (level 4).

The referee may require a minimal colour in order to perform a difficult action.

Connor (Climbing 3) wants to climb a steep wall; the referee requires an acceptable success (yellow). As seen on column +3 of the resolution chart, it will be necessary to obtain a d100 roll inferior or equal to 39 to obtain a yellow, red or black result.

Combat

Conflicts are often at the heart of adventures, especially physical confrontations...

Weapon	Damage	Initiative
axe	+1	-1
brawling	-2	0
dirk	0	-1
lance	0	+3/-3*
sword	0	0
2-handed sword	+2	-3

* 1st number: 1st combat turn

Table 2: Melee Weapons

Surprise

When opponents suddenly meet face-to-face, everyone makes an **Animal reflexes** test.

Each point of difference between levels of success allows one attack against the surprised opponent, without them being able to reply.

Then, the fight continues in successive turns.

Combat turns

Initiative One **1d10** is rolled for each belligerent, to which one adds their **Movement**³ or their **Animal reflexes**, plus the initiative modifier of their weapon (table 2 or 3).

The characters act in descending order of their totals of initiative.

Connor (Movement 5) rushes into battle wielding his axe (Initiative -1) against a brigand (Movement 5) in leather armour (Movement -2) armed with a sword. Connor rolls 1d10 + 5-1 in initiative, that is 8 in total; the thief rolls 1d10 + 5-2, that is 6 in total. So Connor attacks first.

Attack Test An attack is a **weapon talent**⁴ test from which one subtracts the **Movement**⁵ of the opponent.

³possibly reduced by armour (table 1)

⁴or Brawling or Wrestling or Throwing

⁵possibly reduced by armour (table 1)

Weapon	Damage	Initiative
bow	0	0
dirk	0	0
sling	-1	0

Table 3: Missile Weapons

Connor hits the enemy brigand with his axe. He possesses an Axe talent of 5, his enemy a Movement of 3 (including armour penalty); the test column on the resolution chart is +2.

Damage inflicted In case of a successful attack, the result level, from 1 to 4, indicates basic damage; the damage modifier of the weapon (table 2 or 3) is added, and the defender's armour rating (table 1) is subtracted.

The total is deducted from the defender's Damage resistance.

Connor attacks on the +2 column and rolls 17 on the d100. This is a total (red) level 3 success. Connor's axe gives +1 damage, but his enemy is in leather armour which reduces damage by 1 point. Damage is therefore 3 + 1-1, ie 3 points; Connor's enemy loses 3 Damage resistance points.

Specific Injuries When their **Damage resistance** drops to zero, or they suffer a heroic (**black**) attack, an **enemy** NPC is immediately killed, or knocked out in case of **Brawling**.

Under these circumstances, a PC or **foe** NPC will test their current **Damage resistance**: they may continue to fight on a total (**red**) or heroic (**black**) success; they fall unconscious on a marginal (**green**) or acceptable (**yellow**) success; they die on a failure (**white**).



Intensity	Fall	Fire	Poison	Trap
0	1 level	torch	light	pit
5	2 levels	large fire	average	pit with spikes
10	3 levels	brazier	mortal	swinging blade

Table 4: Hazard Intensity

Hazards

A physical danger «attacks» its victim with an **Intensity** (table 4) functioning like a weapon talent, from which one subtracts the most adequate talent: Acrobatics, Poison endurance, Swimming, etc.

Connor misses his Climbing test when climbing a wall, he is then «attacked» by an intensity corresponding to the height of fall, that the referee estimates to two levels. Without an Acrobatics talent likely to dampen the fall, the attack test is done on the column +5 of the resolution chart.. The roll of d100 is 54, it is a marginal success (green) and Connor only loses one point of Damage resistance.

Healing

The characters recover one **Damage resistance** point per day.

By succeeding at a **Medicine** or **Herbalism** test, a character can heal a friend by one more point.

Miscellaneous Tests

Fear Resisting fear requires a **Will** test minus the possible **Fear** rating of the

creature or situation. A failure (**white**) imposes flight, a marginal success (**green**) causes a -1 penalty to any action, any other success (**yellow** to **black**) implies that the character resists fear.

Grappling A successful **Wrestling** attack permanently holds the defender. It may deal one point of damage, only on a total success (**red**) or heroic (**black**).

Stealth Sneaking past another character requires an **Observation** (or **Insight**) test from which the opponent's **Observation** (or **Insight**) is subtracted.

Complete rules

This document is enough to play many adventures, but the complete rules of ZeFRS offer many options, magic and advice!



Sample typical play session

Lucas (referee) You walk in the dark forest, towards Fort Tuscelan, when suddenly... Can you roll Observation minus 3?

Carol (playing Annikki, Hyperborean warrior) My rating of 3 minus 3, that's zero... I roll the dice on column zero, I get 53, it's a marginal success!

Blake (playing Hassan, Shemite archer) I have no observation talent, so it's zero minus 3, so I roll the dice on the -3 column, and I roll 12. Total success!

Lucas Congratulations Hassan! With such a success you notice three Pictish warriors⁶ about twenty yards in front of you, positioned along the path you follow, armed with tomahawks⁷, their faces painted with dark patterns...

Blake War paintings or hunt paintings? It does not matter... I discreetly explain the situation to Annikki, and suggest that she runs into melee while I snipe.

Carol Annikki⁸ approves, seize her weapons, and rushes to a Pict.

Lucas You get a free action⁹: Annikki, to join your opponent; Hassan, to shoot at a Movement 4 target.

Blake Inch'Ishtar! My shooting talent is 7, reduced to 3, I roll a 05 on the +3 column! I think my shot has hit him in the heart?

⁶ Lucas gives them 4 in combat-related talents, and 3 in hunt-related talents

⁷ hatchet equivalent to a dirk (page 6)

⁸ Carol plays her character in the third person, unlike Blake; two different styles, equally valid.

⁹ This is an arbitrary choice of Lucas, without using the formal rules for surprise (page 6)

Lucas Blake, it's your day! Your opponent collapses¹⁰ indeed, a red flower blooming on his chest. Now, initiative rolls!

Carol Contaaact! Initiative 7 + 5, that's 12.

Blake And me, 6 + 5, that's 11!

Lucas I launch a collective initiative for the two Pictish warriors, decidedly in disgrace today: 2 + 4, that's a 6.

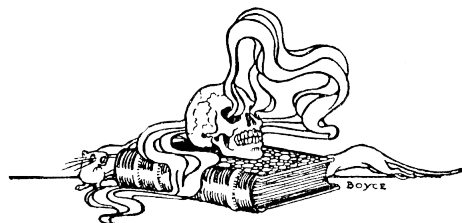
Carol Well, Movement 4 for our Pictish opponents, right? So, I attack on column +3 (7-4), with a 44. It is a marginal success, I inflict a 1-point injury.

Blake Darn, I fail with a roll of 87!

Lucas As for the Picts, one throws his tomahawk towards Hassan, and misses with a roll of 79. The other hits Annikki in contact, also with a tomahawk, acceptable success, but the 2 damage is absorbed by your shield and your mail.

Carol Well, in the next round Annikki tries to flatten her opponent to the ground with her shield¹¹, we'll have at least one prisoner!

... to be continued!



¹⁰ A heroic success kills an enemy (page 6)

¹¹ Lucas will decide the applicable rules

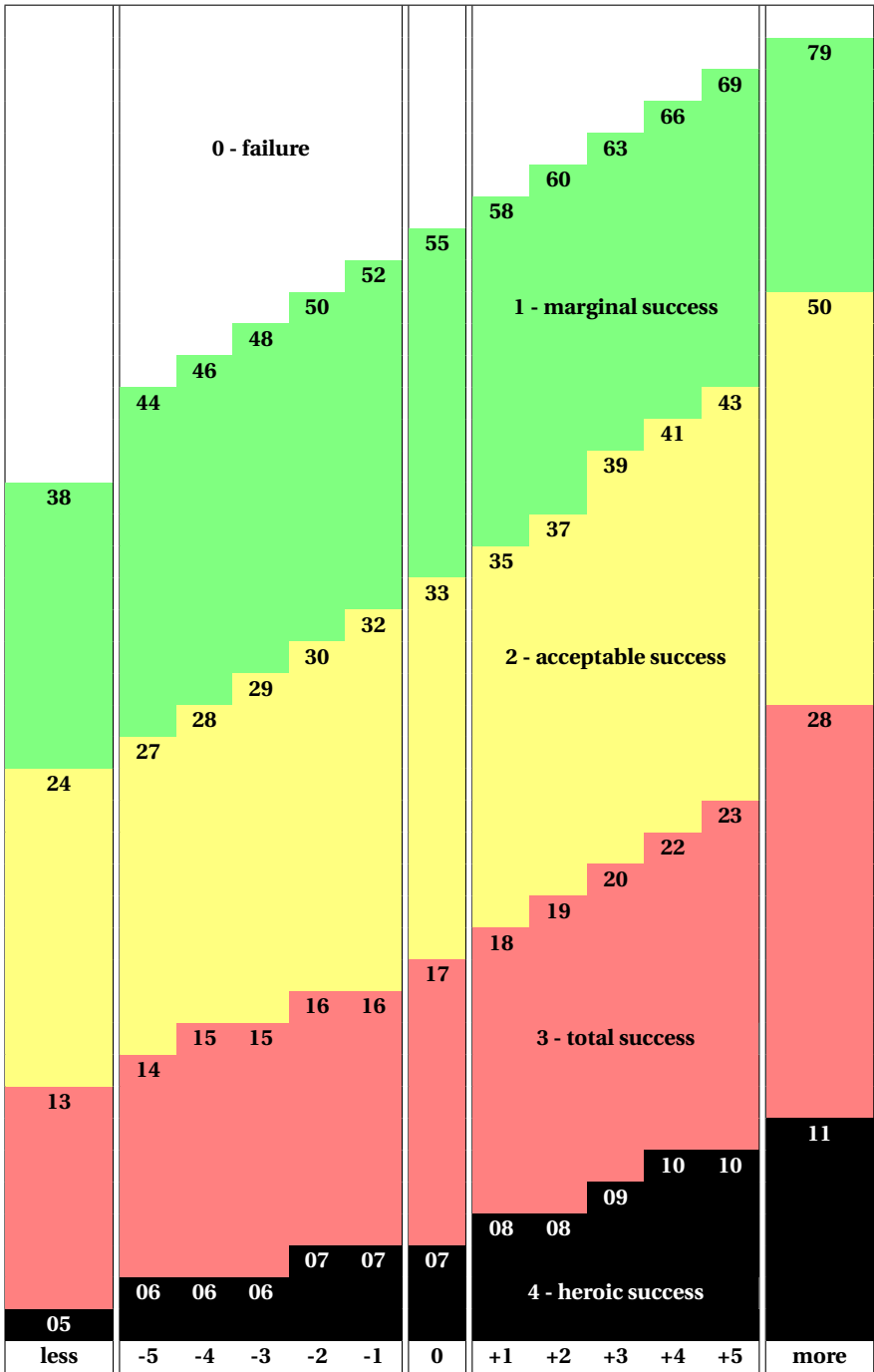


Table 5: Resolution Chart

Ready-to-play Characters

Technical reminders :

- The 2nd modifier of armour impacts Movement (but not Animal reflexes)
- The 2nd modifier of weapons impacts initiative
- Initiative = d10 + [(Mov. +/- mod. armour) or An. reflexes] +/- mod. weapon

Annikki		A warriors' daughter, Annikki has been warring since her teenage years and fought many battles across the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond. She willingly brawls to defend her honour and that of her nation.
Hyperborean warrior		
An. reflexes 5	Damage 5	
Brawling 5	Movement (5) 2	
Kothic 1	Equipment	
Observation 3	Sword (0, 0)	
Swimming 4	Leather (1, -2)	
Sword 7	Shield (1, -1)	
Initiative d10 + 5 (sword)		

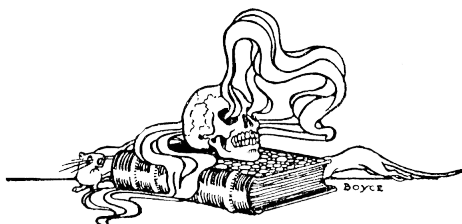
Caius		Heir to a long line of engineers and officers of the royal Kothian army, Caius worked on the inspection of border fortresses, before opting for a warrior career he hopes more lucrative.
Kothian mercenary		
Navigation 3	Damage 5	
Observation 4	Movement (8) 4	
R/W Kothic 2	Equipment	
Siege./Engin. 3	2h sword (+2, -3)	
2h sword 5	Mail (2, -4)	
Will 5		
Initiative d10 + 1 (e2m)		

Connor		Chased from his village for killing the man who raped his sister, Connor fled to the Pictish lands where he lived for a while, before becoming a scout in the Westermarck.
Cimmerian scout		
Axe 5	Damage 7	
Climbing 3	Movement 5	
Dir. sense 2	Equipment	
Dirk 4	Axe (+1, -1)	
Insight 2	Dirk (0, -1*)	
Kothic 2	* in melee	
Pictish 2		
Stamina 3		
Initiative d10 + 4 (axe)		

Hassan		Son of a potter in the city of Eruk, Hassan became an archer by chance to defend his city from a horde of looters, but he took a liking for the dangers and exaltation of combat and adventure.
Shemite archer		
Acrobatics 3	Damage 5	
An. handling 3	Movement 5	
Bow 7	Equipment	
Dirk 3	Bow (0,0)	
Kothic 2	Quiver, arrows	
Medicine 2	Dirk (0, -1*)	
Pottery 3	Mule	
R/W Shemite 2	* in melee	
Initiative d10 + 5 (bow)		

Lódur		All his life, Lódur worked hard to feed his family, but they were exterminated by a plague while he was away hunting the bison. So he went away for a new life, but continues to do what he does best: hunting.
Vanir hunter		
Bow 3	Damage 5	
Herbalism 3	Movement 5	
Kothic 1	Equipment	
Lance 4	Bow (0, 0)	
Poison end. 3	Quiver, arrows	
Survival (forest) 3	Lance (0, +3*/-3)	
Tracking 4	* first turn	
Trapping 4		
Initiative d10 + 5 (+3/-3)		

Šensa		Daughter of an acolyte of the temple of Yezud, Šensa chose to flee the maternal path that they wanted to impose on her, and she abandoned the cult of the Spider God to take Bel, god of thieves, as her model!
Zamoran thief		
Arcane lang. 3	Damage 4	
Dirk 2	Movement 6	
Kothic 3	Equipment	
Lore 3	Dirk (0, -1*)	
Observation 3	Sling (-1, 0)	
Per. magnetism 4	* in melee	
Pick. pockets 4		
Sling 3		
Initiative d10 + 6 (sling)		



Sample opponents



Brawler	
Brawling 2	Damage 3
Dirk 3	Movement 3
Observation 1	Equipment
	Dirk (0, -1*)
	* in melee
Initiative d10 + 2 (dirk)	

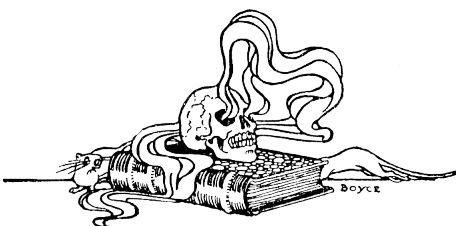
Brigand / Mercenary	
Acrobatics 3	Damage 5
Brawling 3	Movement (5) 3
Climbing 5	Equipment
Dir. sense 3	Dirk (0, -1*)
Dirk 3	Sword (0, 0)
Lockpicking 2	Leather (1, -2)
Observation 4	
Pick. pockets 3	* in melee
Poison end. 2	
Sword 4	
Initiative d10 + 3 (sword)	

Cultist	
An. handling 3	Damage 4
Dirk 4	Movement 4
Insight 2	Equipment
Magic end. 3	Dirk (0, -1*)
Observation 3	
<i>Profession</i> 2	
Strength 5	* in melee
Throwing 1	
Wrestling 4	
Initiative d10 + 3 (dirk)	

Guardsmen / Soldier	
Brawling 3	Damage 4
Observation 3	Movement (4) -1
Stamina 3	Equipment
Strength 4	Sword (0, 0)
Sword 5	Mail (2, -4)
Wrestling 2	Shield (1, -1)
Initiative d10 - 1	

Skeleton	
Fear 2	Damage 4
Sword 4	Movement 4
	Abilities
	Sword (0,0)
	Fearsome
	Mindless*
	Unliving*
Initiative d10 + 4	

Wolf	
Acrobatics 5	Damage 5
An. reflexes 5	Movement 5
Dir. sense 3	Abilities
Fangs 5	Fangs (0, 0)
Insight 5	Small*
Stamina 5	
Survival 8	* -2 to attacks for human-sized opponents
Swimming 5	
Tracking 15	
Initiative d10 + 5	





The Diadem, act 1: The Ruins

In media res Do not start the session on PC recruitment, salary negotiation, and other boring scenes; prefer immediate immersion into action!

Howard's hero often begins his adventures in full swing: pursued by the militia (QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST), swimming in the middle of the ocean (POOL OF THE BLACK ONES), wading through swamps to escape an enemy army (SHADOWS IN THE MOONLIGHT), hunted in the forest by several angry tribes (THE BLACK STRANGER), etc.

The mission

The PCs are in the savannah between Stygia and Darfar, at the edge of ancient ruins... They are there because they've accepted a mission from a Nemedian merchant living in Sukhmet, Franciscus Batavia: his friend Gaius disappeared on his way to explore these ruins, accompanied by assistants.

The mission of the characters is to enquire about the fate of the explorers, to recover their property, to give them a decent burial in the event of death ... and «incidentally» to recover the archaeological treasures sought by the explorers, including an elaborate diadem of a macabre aspect, of which Franciscus has entrusted the PCs with a very detailed drawing.

The approach

The PCs arrive at the ruins at the end of the day; it is a small mausoleum surrounded by shapeless heaps of stones...

The place is occupied by a small troop

N'rako (foe)	
Dirk 3	Damage 7
Insight 4	Movement 5
Lance 5	Equipment
Observation 4	Dirk (0, -1*)
Stygian 2	Lance (0, +3**/-3)
Throwing 5	* in melee
Will 4	** first turn
Wrestling 4	
Initiative d10 +5 (+3/-3)	

of Darfari warriors; they've lit a fire for the night, on which they're cooking human remains, those of Gaius and his assistants.

The clash

It is impossible to negotiate with the Darfari, even in the unlikely event that someone knows their language, and they will fight to the death.

The Darfari soldiers are as numerous as the PCs; they are cultists¹² with instinctive martial abilities.

Their boss N'rako, on the other hand, is a fierce experienced warrior, and follows the rules applicable to foe NPCs¹³. She proudly wears the diadem the characters are looking for.

All these Darfari warriors have a voluntarily frightening appearance: filed teeth, scarified skin, bristling hair seemingly soaked with blood¹⁴...

¹²described page 12

¹³"Specific Wounds" page 6

¹⁴in fact, it is a kind of coloured mud, but the effect is striking

Northern Black Kingdoms, west to east

South of Stygia are the vast black kingdoms of the Amazons, the Kushites, the Atlaians and the hybrid empire of Zembabwei.

THE HYBORIAN AGE, Robert Ervin Howard

Kush is located south-west of Stygia, at the edge of the Western Sea where the port of Zabhela welcomes numerous foreign ships. It is a rich country, welcoming, but traditionally allied with the dark Stygians.

Darfari terrifies all its neighbours by its warlike savagery and revolting morals; its tutelary deity, Yog, notably professes ritual anthropophagy.

Keshan is a kingdom shared between a purely local populace, and an aristocracy partially of Shemite origin. Keshia, its current capital, has replaced Alkmeenon, now a ghost town at the heart of a jungle.

The Punt is extremely rich, thanks in particular to the gold nuggets carried by its rivers.

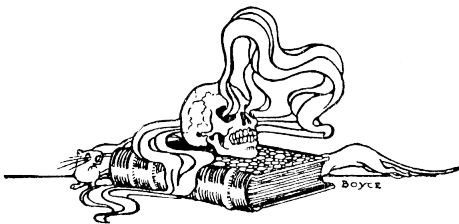
The Zembabwei is the easternmost of the Northern Black Kingdoms.

The treasure

The PCs will be able to explore the accessible part of the ruins. It is an old Stygian tomb, several centuries old.

Local tribes avoid the place, deemed accursed and haunted; objects are still to be found there, valuable or interesting for scholars ... and followers of witchcraft.

In this case, Gaius and his henchmen have looted jewellery from sarcophagi in a small room in the basement. The sarcophagi themselves, in wood, have been reduced to planks by the Darfari to maintain their fire...



Beyond the clichés In Howard's works, only the Darfari people are described as universally evil. Even Stygians, extreme xenophobes and adepts of human sacrifice, include heroic characters, such as Thutmekri, the adventurer rival to the Cimmerian barbarian in *JEWELS OF GWAHLUR*.

However, do not reduce the Darfari to brutal cannibals; the Stygians are terrified of them to the point of tolerating foreign mercenaries to keep their southern frontier; they infiltrate and corrupt the fringes of civilization, as read in *SHADOWS OF ZAMBOULA...*

Strategy of terror, possible internal dissensions... It is possible to develop the Darfari and the cult of Yog beyond the role of bogeymen they have in the works of Howard! (or this scenario)

The Diadem, act 2: The Villa

Adapt the scenario This part of the adventure assumes that the PCs will let themselves be «manipulated» in the manner desired by Isortse: that they agree to hand over the diadem to Franciscus, and be ambushed the next day. But your players may be too suspicious?

Regardless, the really essential elements of the scenario are the disappearance of the diadem and the skirmish against Isortse and his henchmen.

For example, if the characters refuse to hand over the diadem, then Isortse's henchmen will steal it; if they refuse to go to Franciscus, then they will be attacked at their place of residence. Always adapt to the decisions of your players, do not hesitate to change your scenarios on the fly!

Back to Sukhmet

On their return from the ruins, the PCs get in touch with Franciscus Batavia. The latter picks up the diadem, pays them a quantity of silver corresponding to half the agreed wage¹⁵, and gives them an appointment the next day at his villa to give them the rest of the money, pretending to have to go to the bank in the meantime.

In fact, this last rendezvous is a trap... The assassination of the characters is part of the plan of the true sponsor of Franciscus, the Zamoran sorcerer Yzokras Salocin. A band of mercenaries led by the grim Isortse, perpetuates this massacre in order to save some coins, and especially to eliminate the maximum of witnesses of this search for instruments of sorcery.

Isortse (foe)	
Dirk* 6	Damage 5
Fame 10	Movement 5
Observation 3	Equipment
Per. magnetism 5	Dirk (0, -1**)
Poison end. 3	Sword (0, 0)
Sword* 6	* 2 attacks/turn!
2-weapon* 6	** in melee
Will 3	
Initiative d10 + 4 (2 weapons)	

A disappointing welcome

The PCs are welcomed by two guards¹⁶ that frame the front door, strong taciturn Kushite warriors.

They invite the characters to enter, stay outside, and close the double entrance door...

Inside, after a few minutes of discussion with Isortse, Franciscus' «bodyguard», he will signal to his henchmen to execute the PCs.

General melee!

The battle begins... Each PC faces a mercenary¹⁷; Isortse himself will attack the character he deems most dangerous.

The villa is of a rather sober architecture: it is mainly a large atrium, a kind of large dining room with a fountain in its centre and comfortable benches. A table is garnished with luxurious crockery and mouth-watering fruits.

¹⁶page 12, but equipped with spears, in addition to swords

¹⁷described page 12

¹⁵For example, 100 pieces of silver per person: the price for a set of mail armour or a beautiful pearl



At the end of the atrium are three bedrooms, accessible by a staircase and a landing; under the bedrooms are a kitchen, a storeroom and latrines.

After the clash

While exploring the villa, the PCs will discover the corpse of Franciscus Batavia in his bedroom, also sacrificed to leave no trace. He was only a screen of «respectability» for the henchmen of Yzokras.

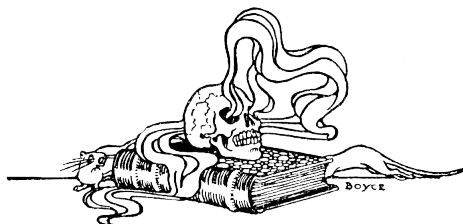
Of course, the characters will not find the gold that was promised to them, nor the objects they recovered in the ruins and entrusted to Franciscus. The day before, they left by commercial caravan in the desert of Shem, towards Zamora...

The adventure may end there, but the PCs are probably drunk with revenge, or at least eager to understand the ins and outs of this story...

Sukhmet is a garrison town, cosmopolitan and lively. In this, it contrasts with the rest of Stygia, dominated by the austere and tyrannical clergy of Set.

... the border town of Sukhmet amidst the level grasslands, where desperate adventurers of many races guard the Stygian frontier against the raids that come up like a red wave from Darfar.

RED NAILS, Robert Ervin Howard



The Diadem, act 3: The Enquiry

When the PCs have defeated the team of killers, they will certainly want to know more...

You do not have to detail their investigation day by day; to tell the truth, this part is only a non-violent interlude in an adventure full of clashes ... which shall not prevent your characters from distributing a few slaps to make the recalcitrant witnesses speak!

Who, how, why?

We do not detail the investigation, and you may summarize it quickly, but here are the different information the characters can find.

The diadem belonged to Neferhotep, a legendary Stygian wizard who died more than three centuries ago. The PCs can learn this from ancient manuscripts, scholars, or a total or heroic success at a Lore test.

Franciscus Batavia was not a rich merchant, but a talented crook. An investigation into the Sukhmet shallows will let the characters learn he was known as a dealer in ancient artefacts, and that Gaius the tomb robber was his accomplice (and probably his lover).

The villa was rented by Franciscus a month ago to a local Stygian family, otherwise totally foreign to this story.

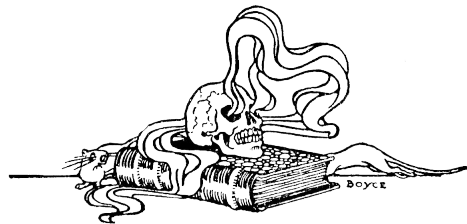
Isortse is a Zamoran mercenary who arrived there six weeks ago. He consulted many local scholars to learn about the Stygian ruins of the region.

The sponsor (Yzokras Salocin) arrived in the company of Isortse, and departed two days later by the same boat. The PCs can learn the identity of this lugubrious and tall Zamoran:

- in the event that they have captured Isortse alive
- by accidentally crossing¹⁸ a friend of Isortse, who would know the identity of Yzokras
- finding *the Flamboyant*, the Shemite ship that landed the duo, and questioning her crew
- investigating smugglers or scholars about Neferhotep's diadem

The mercenaries were recruited by Isortse in the camps around Sukhmet. They do not ask themselves too much about the motives of their employer.

The guards of the villa were enlisted by Franciscus; they do not know anything about the gang's schemes.



¹⁸one Luck point (page 4)

The Diadem, act 4: The Sorcerer

Finish without epiloguing This part of the adventure can be played in a few minutes, the time to kill Yzokras... There is nothing worrying about that, and it is quite adequate with Howard's stories often ending up abruptly. The most famous film inspired by these stories ends similarly in a concise, brutal, yet epic way!

After various investigations and travels, the PCs will eventually find Yzokras Salocin, having become a terrifying necromancer spreading terror in a region of Zamora near Yezud.

The diadem is an essential instrument in his magic practice¹⁹ of Necromancy and Information magic. The latter allowed him to prophesy the approaching arrival of the characters, whom he watches from the top of his small fortress...

A reinforced team

Before this climax, and since this quest has probably lasted several months, it is time to allow the PCs to get additional talent points, more or less 5 points according to their bravery, their interpretation and their inventiveness until then.

The final confrontation

As soon as the PCs have cleared the wall of his fortress, Yzokras will launch a spell from his balcony that will raise a small army of

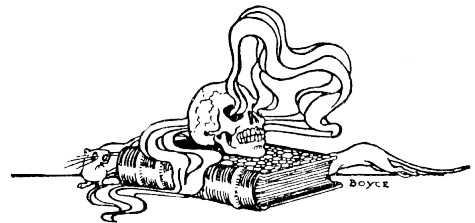
¹⁹This document does not detail rules for magic, but Yzokras knows no spell directly useful in combat

Yzokras Salocin (foe)	
Arcane lang. 5	Damage 3
Dirk 3	Movement 5
Fame 5	Equipment
Information 3	Neferhotep's Diadem
Lore 5	Dirk (0, -1*)
Necromancy 5	* in melee
Observation 3	
Poison end. 3	
Will 5	
Initiative d10 + 5	

skeleton warriors²⁰ from the ground up, three times as numerous as the characters.

The PCs are circled²¹. After a fear test²², they will have to fight against the gruesome assailants, and of course get rid of Yzokras. Heroic breakthrough or well-targeted arrow, it is the time to spend Luck points²³!

A victory over Yzokras puts an end to the adventure²⁴, the characters will be able to recover some gold at home, some grimoires and other trinkets to resell...



²⁰described page 12

²¹Grouped, everyone will face a single opponent.

²²«Fear» page 7

²³«Luck» page 4

²⁴The animated skeletons fall to dust...

Already available...

For ZeFRS, in English

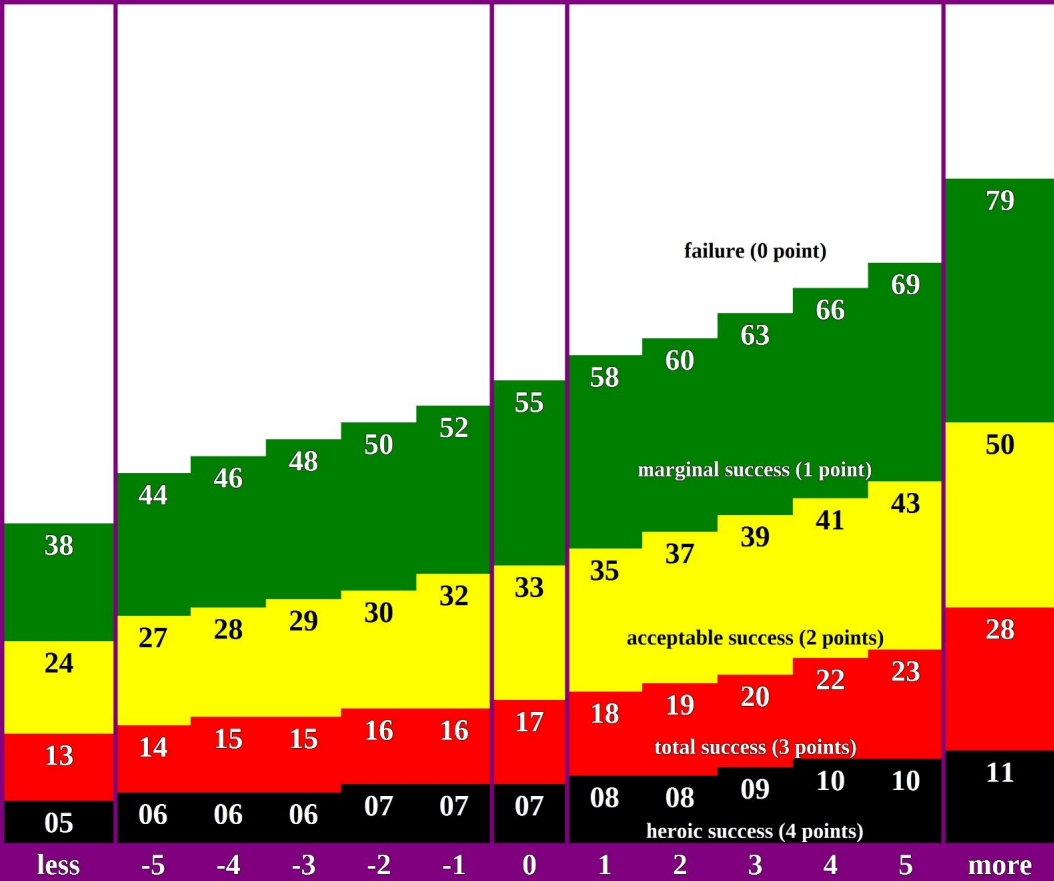


From us, in French





ZeFRS



« I saw myself in a panther-skin loin-clout, throwing my spear at the mountain beasts. I was a mercenary swordsman again, a hetman of the kozaki who dwell along the Zaporoska River, a corsair looting the coasts of Kush, a pirate of the Barachan Isles, a chief of the Himelian hillmen... »

Specific Wound

Death
KO
KO
OK
OK

Fear

Flight
-1
OK
OK
OK

HOUR OF THE DRAGON
Robert Ervin Howard

Electronic
version