

# GRIM FIDINGS



A TTRPG by Arcticnerd

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# 1 *Introduction*

Grim Tidings is a collaborative storytelling game about powerful heroes able to complete amazing feats. It's a game of wondrous adventures and great trials. It's a game of struggle and hardship where the will of the heroes is tested to their limits. Do they have the determination and fortitude to return home victorious or will fall under the mighty weight of their task?

The stories told in Grim Tidings don't focus on the minutiae of any one event but rather on the story as a whole. The question is never if the heroes will be victorious in a battle but rather what the battle cost them. Did they spend too much effort on a flashy victory, will they now find themselves depleted at a crucial moment?

Grim Tidings is a narrative focused game that should push the heroes to their limits. During the course of an adventure they should find themselves depleted and desperate, struggling not just to continue but to survive. They should feel elated when they find a moment of respite and dread when they realize they must continue.

## *The World of Grim Tidings*

Isles on a dark sea. The world of Grim Tidings is one of isolation and desperation. The old kingdoms are long gone, whether it was war, corruption or something darker all that remains of them are ruins they left behind. Like bones protruding from the low tide sand they stand as a reminder of what was until they are swallowed by the gloom of time and

swept away.

The kingdoms may be gone but the people endured. Banding together they scratch out a living in communities that dot the lands, beacons guiding those foolish enough to wander the winding paths to safety. Most never leave their homes, the stories of what becomes of those who lose their way are bleak. Still they know they are not completely safe. They watch for the next storm and whisper silent prayers that it will pass them by.

## *The Denizens*

Leaving behind their burrows, warrens and hollows the denizens of Grim Tidings are no longer simple people of the woods. Though they bear a strong resemblance to their archaic ancestors, badgers, rabbits, otters, mice, they are much larger (3-6 feet tall, 120 to 260 pounds) and stand upright. They possess dexterous hands which allows them to easily manipulate items and perform fine tasks as well as an aptitude toward speech which has grown into a myriad of languages and dialects.

These advantages have allowed them to hone wood to make their homes, work metal into tools, plow fields and plant crops to keep their bellies full and develop small communities into a vibrant culture. They have set aside the animosity their woodland cousins still seem to possess and now live in inclusive settlements where any races can be found living together. Each with their own quarks

and traits.

## *Badgers*

Large and heavy set the Badger folk strike an imposing figure among the other denizens. One of the few folk who wander the paths between settlements, they are often used as messengers or postmen. The badger folk are seen as forthright and contemplative by the other races as they always take their time to respond and speak directly. However once they have made up their mind it's rare for them to change it and they often prefer their own company over that of a busy settlement.

## *Rabbit*

First to speak their minds and first to volunteer the Rabbits are confident and courageous. They often find themselves in leadership positions within the settlements, mayors and guard captains, as the other denizens are drawn to bravado. They are often seen bounding through the villages jumping in on every task but completing very little. This can make them feel impulsive and unfocused by the other folk.

## *Otters*

Never ones to pass over a spot of fun or rush through a good meal the Otter folk can always be found at the heart of a settlement. They can often be found chatting up a storm in a tavern or bustling away preparing for the next festival. They are much loved for their antics and the laughter that always seems to follow them. The only time they can't be found is when it's time for the hard work. Instead they might be found grooming their coats or sneaking some delectable snack.

## *Mice Folk*

Small in stature and timid in nature the Mice folk are the most numerous occupants of nearly every settlement. Always ones to place family first the Mice live in communal groups that often includes several generations and even multiple families. They are fiercely loyal to their community and wary of outsiders often avoiding strangers altogether. The Mice folk are hard working and industrious typically finding work as craftsmen, carpenters, and farmers.

# 2

## Gameplay

### *What you need to play*

Grim Tiding is a tabletop role playing game for two to six players. One person takes on the role of the Game Master. It's their job to set up the game, laying out the world the game will take place in and the adventures that will be had, as well as understand the rules of the game and facilitate play. Everyone else will take on the role of Characters in the game. They play the heroes who go on daring adventures and complete impossible tasks. Together the Game Master and Characters work together to tell the story of their adventure.

Beyond friends to play with the group will need one character sheet for each character, some note cards (or another way to keep notes that everyone can see), a handful of 6 sided dice (15 to 20 per player) in two different colors and something to write with.

When playing it's best to have a play space large enough to allow the players to keep notes and place dice in front of them that everyone else can see. If you are playing in-person a medium size table that gives enough space for each player to keep and organize their dice in front of them but not such a big table that the other players can't see everyone else's dice results. For games held online it's best to use a service that allows for the dice results to be noted and kept organized where all players can easily reference them.

### *How to play*

When the game starts the first thing the Characters will do is roll their dice. The number of dice to be rolled is defined on a character's sheet and they come from a number of different sources, action pool, equipment, and traits all can indicate a number of dice to be rolled.

Write the name of the source on a notecard large enough so other people can see it and place it on the table. Then roll the indicated dice and place them on the notecard. Continue until every player has rolled all their dice for each of their sources. Be careful not to bump the dice. The values rolled are important and need to be kept track of. These dice will be used during the game to allow Characters to take actions and advance through the story.

Once all the dice have been rolled the game can begin. The Game Master will introduce the adventure, setting the stage and tone of the game to come. It's their job to lead the Characters through the story explaining what is going on and how they fit into the world. The Characters aren't passive during the game. It's their job to explain how they react to what's going on and make decisions about what they will do.

### *Dice Sources*

A Character's dice represent their ability to act. Dice that come from their physical

traits represent their strength, will or intellect. Dice that come from their equipment represent the quality and usefulness of the gear they carry.

Each source will indicate a number of dice to be rolled, 2d6 means roll 2 six sided dice, 5d6 would mean roll 5 six sided dice. They will also dictate if the dice are permanent or temporary. Make sure to use different colored dice to denote which dice are permanent and which are temporary.

## Action Pool

A Character's Action Pool represents their will and ability to act. It's a character's largest pool of dice but all of them are temporary. Every time a character has to use dice at least one must come from this pool, meaning they will be depleted over the course of an adventure. When they run out the Character is worn down or world weary and unable to live up to their heroic potential.

## Equipment Dice

The equipment carried by a Character will aid them in their adventures. Typically a Character will have between 1 and 4 important pieces of equipment. Each one will state a number of dice to be rolled at the beginning of an adventure and if those dice are temporary or permanent. Equipment that adds 1 die is poor where equipment that adds 3 dice is exceptional.

Most equipment dice are permanent. A sword is a sturdy weapon and won't fail once used. Equipment with a limited number of uses such as bombs, arrows or javelins will grant temporary dice. These dice can be recovered by acquiring more of the equipment.

## Environmental Dice

Not all dice come from the characters or the equipment they use. Some dice come from the situations they are in or what is around them. The glaring sun, a patch of heavy brush, and even the slippery ground can all

be sources of dice. The Game Master decides what is significant or not in a scene and decides what to include.

When something is deemed significant the Game Master decides how many dice to roll and if they are permanent or temporary. These dice are rolled and added to a card by the Game Master, they can then be used by any character to make sets.

## Example of Play

*Anabel has just set out on an adventure. She is fresh and ready to take on the world. Before the game begins her player looks over her character sheet and finds that Anabel has an Action Pool of 8d6, a pair of daggers for 1d6, a crude lockpick set for 1d6 and a heavy cloak for 2d6. Anabel's player writes Action Pool on one of her note cards and then rolls her 8d6, Action Pool dice are temporary so the player uses red dice. They get 1,2,3,4,4,5,5,6 on their roll. These dice are placed on that Action Pool notecard. Next Anabel's player writes out note cards for each piece of equipment, the knives, lock picks and cloak. All of Anabel's equipment dice are permanent so blue dice are used. For the knives they roll a 3, for the lockpicks they roll a 2 and for the cloak they get 6,6. Each die is placed on the appropriate notecard. Anabel is now ready for the adventure.*

*During the introduction the Game Master describes the night as dark and cloudy. The GM decides that this is a major environmental factor for this scene and so they write out a notecard for the Dark and Cloudy night and decide to give it two permanent dice rolling a 3,6. Now Anabel or any of her allies can use this when taking actions.*

## Actions

When the story comes to a moment of uncertainty the Game Master will call for any Characters involved to take an action. These aren't simple tasks but rather pivotal moments in the story where the outcome could make a difference on the future of the Char-

acter.

An action doesn't have a set length. In the same adventure the Game Master could call on the players to take an Action to see how they fare on a long journey and later have them take an Action to compete in an arm wrestling match. What matters is that it's important to the story.

## Resolving Actions

Once the Game Master has called for an Action each Character involved must decide how they will use their dice to resolve it. To do this they must build sets with the dice they have, a set is two or more dice with the same number. A set could be a pair of 3's or four 5's. A Character can use dice from any source to make their set. The only restriction is that at least one die must come from the Character's action pool.

Once a character has chosen which dice they wish to use in their set they remove them from their cards and place them together to show the full set. After all sets have been made the Characters complete that action. If a Character is trying to pick a lock it doesn't matter if they are using two 1's or three 6's, they are able to pick the lock, if they are in a fight they win that fight, if they are trying to haggle down a price they successfully haggle.

When the Action has been resolved all permanent dice are returned to their source and all temporary dice are removed from play.

Characters that are acting at the same time can use dice from the same pools but they can't use the same dice. No die can be used by more than one Character at a time. This will mostly happen with environmental dice.

## Example of Play

*Anabel wants to sneak into city hall and steal some deeds from the archive. Outside she can see a guard lazally leaning on his spear and*

*inside she can see a few lights lit. It is late but the building is guarded and clearly not empty.*

*The Game Master calls for Anabel to take an Action to sneak in. Looking over her dice Anabel decides to use the 3 in her Action Pool along with the 3 from the Dark and Cloudy night environmental factor giving her a pair of 3's. Anabel is expertly able to sneak into the building and past the guards within. She is able to slip past the people within and find her way to the archive all with the single sneak Action. The Game Master and Anabels player work together to describe exactly how she accomplishes this.*

*With the Action completed Anabel looks over the dice she used. The die from her Action Pool is temporary so it is removed from play but the die from the Dark and Cloudy night is permanent so it returns to its pool.*

## Action Difficulty

Not every action is consequence free. A Character might win a fight but come away with an injury or they might open a door but be spotted by a guard. The Game Master decides which actions have consequences before any sets are made. The Game Master must then select a Value and Height for the action.

## Action Width

The Width is the number of dice that are needed to pass an action without consequences and it represents the amount of effect put into the action. This could be a set of 2 dice or many more.

## Action Height

The Hight is the face value of the set. This represents the kind of action used by the character. Lower values like 1,2 or 3 are subtle, discreet, or scrappy approach to the action where values like 4,5 and 6 are flashy, overt, or impressive approaches.

## Consequences

Grim Tidings is a fail forward game. This mean that even when the Characters run into a particularly difficult task they can usually get past it at a cost, we call this cost a Consequence. Once the Game Master determines a task will have a Consequence and sets an Action Width and Height if the Characters set misses either one they may take a Consequence.

There are two main kinds of Consequences, Twists and Conditions. The Game Master will chose which the Characters will take. Be careful with the Consequences you hand out as they can make the game much more difficult. Try to get a feel for how your Characters are doing and be mindful of the challenges that lie ahead.

## Example of Play

*When Anabel reaches her contact to sell the deeds he tries to give her less money then they agreed to. Her player decides that they want to haggle over the price.*

*The Game Master decides that this action will have a consequence and decides to use a twist. Winning the check will get the full asking price, going below the difficulty will get a reduced price and not using dice at all will have her accept the lowest price. The Game Master decides her contact is an able salesman and sets the difficulty for the check at a Width of 3 with no Height limits making the check moderately difficult.*

*Looking over her dice Anabel's player decides to use the pair of 4's from her action pool. This gives her a Width of 2 and a Height of 4. She is able to haggle with her contact for a higher price but it isn't what they agreed to. As both the dice Anabel used were from her action pool they are temporary and are both removed after the action.*

## Conditions

Conditions are afflictions that a character takes on during play. They can be physical or emotional and affect how a character acts during the game. Like a Twist, Conditions are introduced by the Game Master when a Character takes an Action and doesn't exceed the difficulty or is called on to take an Action and either chooses to, or can't make a set.

Conditions are strong negative effects that will hamper a character's ability to act during a game. They should be given out with some thought. It is also best to give out conditions that make sense for the action. Giving out the injured condition for haggling with a merchant doesn't make sense, but anger does.

The Game Master decides which condition to give a character and each condition can only be taken once. While not permanent conditions do stick around for a while, however if a character picks up three negative conditions they must retire from the adventure. Either they have died succumbing to their injuries or are simply to frustrated and upset to continue. The Player and Game Master can work together to come up with the fate of the character.

Some characters have traits that make them physically or mentally tougher. They can receive more conditions before being taken out of action.

## Fresh

The only positive condition. All characters start out fresh at the beginning of an adventure and lose this condition once they pick up another condition. The fresh condition increases a character's action dice limit by 2 and lets them roll two additional dice at the beginning of the adventure.

The Fresh condition can only be restored under special circumstances. It can be restored after an exceedingly long period of rest where the character is able to tend to



their physical and mental condition. This might be a few month break between adventures where the character spends his time following idle pleasures in a city. The Fresh condition can also be restored by magical means but only if the character has no other conditions.

Losing the Fresh condition reduces the max number of dice allowed in an action pool but doesn't actually reduce the number of dice.

## *Hungry Thirsty*

The mildest of conditions, hungry / thirsty doesn't have any negative impacts on a character but it must be removed before any other condition.

This is an easy condition for a game master to give out. It can be applied to almost any situation and doesn't hamper a character directly. However, it can make it hard for characters to recover from other conditions.

## *Sick*

Sick characters might have come down with an illness, been afflicted with poison or could be so distressed they simply feel unwell. Whatever the cause they are in a bad way and won't be feeling better anytime soon. Characters with the sick condition restore one fewer dice when taking the Rest recovery action.

The Sick condition doesn't seem that harmful at first but if it isn't addressed early it will significantly slow a character down over the course of an adventure.

## *Exhausted*

Sapped of strength either emotionally or physically characters with this condition feel drained. When afflicted with the Exhausted condition the character must discard an extra die from their action pool when making a set. If they can't then the game master can add an additional twist or condition to

the character after the action.

An Exhausted character will use up a lot more dice and if given to an already depleted character it can quickly prevent them from acting. It's a good condition to hand out early but can be deadly if given to a character toward the end of the adventure.

## *Angry*

Angry characters are seething. They could be lashing out at those around them or brooding over the cause of their anger. Angry characters are simply unpleasant to be around and as a result they are not allowed to work with other characters.

This is a very thematic condition to hand out and one that can be fun for characters to play into. While characters have lots of dice in their action pools it won't slow them down much but once depleted they will be struggling to complete actions.

## *Frustrated*

Adventures are difficult work, the danger and pressure to succeed can get at even the most seasoned warrior. Characters with the frustrated condition can't seem to get anything to go their way and can't focus on the task at hand. While they have this condition they can't use their skills.

One the milder conditions, Frustration is fun for the characters to act out but it is also relatively easy to deal with. Preventing characters from using their skills doesn't stop them from completing actions but it does make it harder for them to make sets toward the end of the adventure when they are becoming depleted.

## *Injured*

A condition many warriors are far too familiar with. The injured condition represents all manner of serious wounds from broken bones to seeping cuts. Characters with the injured condition are in a bad way and while

they have this condition they can't make sets with more than two dice. It also reduces the characters max action pool by one, this lasts until the character gains the Fresh condition again.

Each character can only receive the Injured condition once and while it will make achieving a high score on an action check difficult it doesn't stop the character from completing an action. It also limits future potential for the character.

## *Working together*

Adventures are dangerous and can rarely be done alone. It's only through hard work and cooperation that they can be overcome. In Grim Tidings any and all characters can work together to overcome tasks. When making a set Characters can match dice with each other, however each character must still use at least one die from their action pool.

Every character who contributed dice to the Action assists in some way to accomplishing it. They are all subject to any Twists or Conditions that come from the action. The Game Master doesn't have to use the same twist or condition on every character involved. They can mix them up as they see fit.

## *No Action*

During the course of an adventure a character might find themselves depleted of dice and unable to make a set when the Game Master calls for an Action. Normally this would mean that they would take a back seat and let other characters decide what to do. There are times when this isn't an option as Action is thrust upon them. Perhaps they find themselves in a chaotic fight with nowhere to hide or their ship is set ablaze and they must escape it.

A character still must do something, they can't just sit idle. In these situations the character can still act, either performing something that doesn't require an action such as running away or by jumping into the

action knowing they are going to fail.

These situations will normally end with the Game Master introducing a twist of imposing a condition on the character. The main rule of thumb here is to keep the game moving forward and keep all the players involved.

## *Recovering Dice*

Adventures aren't all pain and suffering, they can have moments of peace respite. A lay-over at a hot springs or a well deserved nights sleep can reinvigorate a character and heal them of their ills. In most games of Grim Tidings they are absolutely required if the heroes want to survive their adventure.

Characters don't necessarily recover every night, instead the Game Master will decide how often they get a chance to recover. However it should make sense for what's happening in the story. If the characters are acting every day then they should be recovering every night. If the pacing of the game is slower, say for a long journey, and they are making a check once a week then they should get recovery dice less often.

A good rule of thumb for having down time when characters can recover is to space them out so that characters use about 2-5 actions before each rest period. You don't want the players to be afraid to take actions but you do want to make it feel like the adventure is taking a toll on them. It's also important to keep the spacing consistent. The players shouldn't be guessing how long it's going to be before the next rest, they should have a good idea. Game Masters can and should change the pacing as needed during a game and they can have scenes where the players don't know when their next rest will be but in general they should be consistent.

When resting Characters typically get between 1 and 3 Downtime Actions. The more relaxing the activity the more actions they get to spend. Any relaxing typically

gives one Downtime Action but things like a well cooked meal, comfortable accommodations and a full night's sleep can grant them more actions.

Downtime Actions can't be saved for later, they must be spent during the downtime activities. Each action can be taken multiple times during a rest unless otherwise specified.

While Downtime Actions can only be spent at specific times Characters can take actions in between rests to increase the number of Downtime Actions they get to spend. A day spent in prayer at a local temple or an extended rest at an inn could give them crucial actions. This should be a significant period of time. The character should not be acting between Down-times in order to gain these extra actions during the next downtime.

## *Recuperate*

Removing conditions is an important part of Grim Tidings, each time a character takes this action they can remove one of their conditions. They tend to their wounds, restore their mental state, eat a hearty meal or take a nap.

## *Repair*

It's not just characters that need restoring. Sometimes gear becomes damaged and needs

adjustments. The Repair rest action allows the character to reroll upto 2 of their equipment dice.

## *Recover*

Recover isn't a Downtime Action but instead something that happens at the end of a Downtime. This has the character sleeping, meditating, reading, or playing games. Anything that would be relaxing and fits the situation at hand. This helps the character recover and allows them to roll to add to the characters action pool (up to their Action Pool max).

The number of dice rolled depends on the level of comfort the characters find themselves in when resting. Usually characters get a number of dice equal to the number of downtime actions they can take.

## *Extra Recovery*

Sometimes characters will be completely depleted and unable to help the rest of the party, or they will simply wish to rest and recover more than usual. Game Masters can allow characters to sit out parts of the adventure in order to recover more dice. Typically they will have to participate in some kind of down time activity and will immediately recover 1 die but can not be involved in any actions or consequences.